

'Governorates Marathon' to raise awareness on sports and races

His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Tuesday issued a decision forming the main committee of a first-of-its-kind "Governorates Marathon" (district marathon) covering all parts of the Sultanate. The issuance of this decision comes within the context of HH Sayyid Theyazin's attention and keenness to encourage society to practise various types of sports and espouse them as a healthy lifestyle. **DETAILS ON P2**



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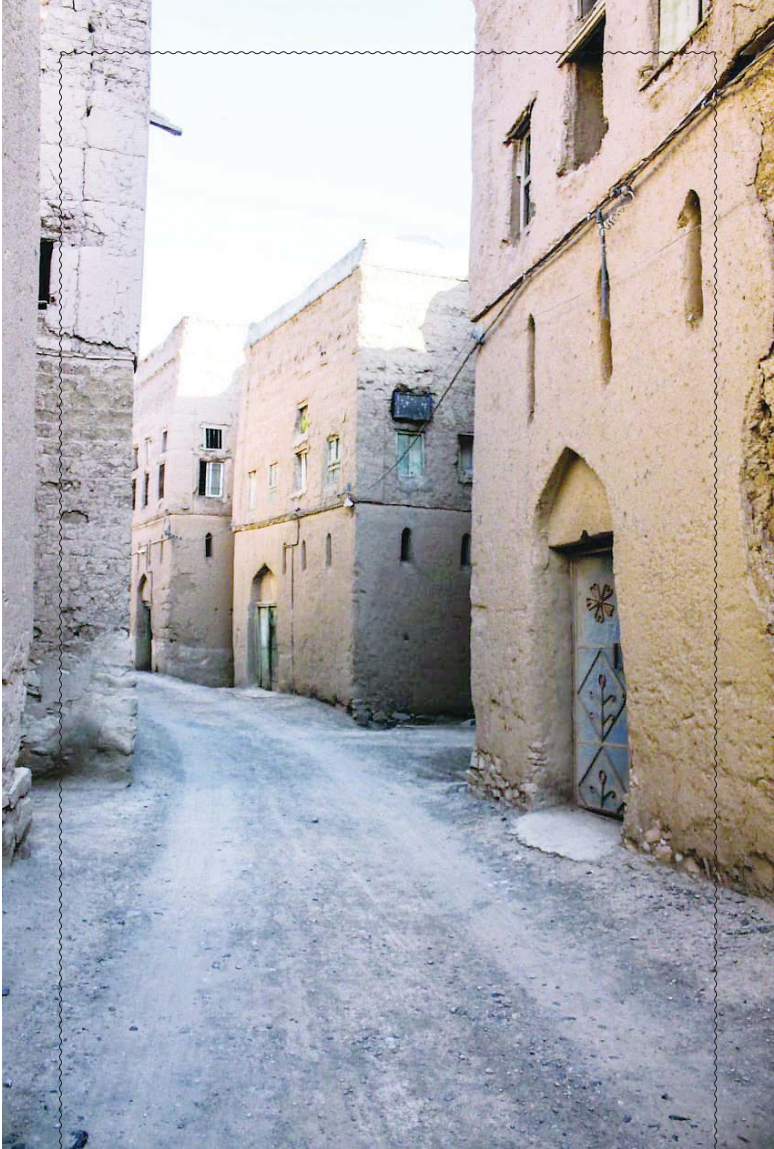
Royal Decree appoints non-resident ambassadors

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued a Royal Decree No 46/2021 on appointing non-resident ambassadors.

Article (1) appoints Ibrahim bin Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mu'aini, Oman's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the Sultanate's extraordinary and plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan.

Article 2 appoints Ali bin Sulaiman bin Said al Darmaki, Oman's Ambassador to the Republic of Sudan, as the Sultanate's extraordinary and plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of South Sudan.

Article 3 says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA



SHOWING THE HIDDEN POTENTIAL OF OMAN

The relationship between the daughter and her father is one of the most heart-warming and intense bonds, when a father is involved and dedicated to his daughter and treats his little princess with love and delicacy". This is how the artist Intisar al Ghanbousi described her relationship with her father, which inspired her to produce her work "Don't leave my hands", dedicated to her father. **DETAILS ON P20**

TARGET TO VACCINATE 30% OF THE POPULATION BEFORE JULY

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate continues to lose precious lives to the virus as the Ministry of Health on Tuesday reported 41 deaths and 2,037 new cases of Covid-19.

It has also reported 209 new inpatients in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 1,517, including 443 in intensive care units (ICUs).

As per the trends monitored by the *Observer*, daily death figures translate to around 10 per cent of the patients in the ICUs.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has reached 252,609, including 2,782 deaths.

The recovery rate has dropped to 87.6 per cent with 28,577 patients of sick of Covid-19.

Of the deaths reported on Tuesday, 19 of them are from Muscat and six from North Al Batinah. Most cases are from Muscat (1,021), North Al Batinah (342) and South Al Batinah (203). As per the GCC statistics, only Saudi Arabia has recorded more deaths (7,691) than the Sultanate.

The Ministry of Health has said that the percentage of people vaccinated against Covid-19 in the Sultanate has increased to 18 per cent of the total target population.

The number of people who

SULTANATE REPORTS 41 DEATHS, 2,037 CASES



have received vaccination stood at 3,70,000, of which 71 per cent received one dose and 29 per cent got two doses.

Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of the Department of Infectious

Diseases Control at the Ministry of Health, said that taking vaccinations will become a condition for entering educational and government institutions in the future.

TURN TO P2

MUSCAT

HM GREET'S GRAND DUKE OF LUXEMBOURG

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Duke Henri of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to Duke Henri. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the friendly people of Luxembourg further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

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Over 1,300 cases of child abuse in 2019

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Muscat Governorate had a maximum number of cases at 534, followed by North Al Batinah 273

The Muscat Governorate had a maximum number of cases (534), followed by North Al Batinah (273).

The ministry has a child protection line (1100), a toll-free phone line, which works round the clock and provides its services to children by receiving calls from the child himself or others, stating that the child has been exposed to violence, abuse or danger.

The line adheres to the principle of confidentiality and privacy in dealing with incoming communications and respects the caller's desire to preserve his identity.

TURN TO P2

Arabian Leopard spotted in Dhofar Governorate

SALALAH: Field surveys conducted over the course of this year by Environment Conservation Office at the Diwan of the Royal Court, represented by the Environmental Affairs Department in Salalah, have once again recorded the presence of the Arabian Leopard in the mountainous area of Najd located north of Salalah in Dhofar Governorate.

The recent documentation comes in complementation of continued efforts to preserve the Arabian Leopard in addition to the earlier sighting of the endangered animal in



other areas of the Najd region.

The Sultanate seeks to preserve the Arabian Leopard on its territories in cooperation with the relevant authorities and the local community.

The part of Najd region stretching

between Wadi Jazout and Wadi Ashouq Al Mugsail, is considered the most notable area for the crossing of the Arabian Leopards that inhabit the southern range of Al Qara mountains and those that live in the north of Qardait area and Jabal Al Qamar.

The outcome of the study can help the work team of the Arabian Leopard Conservation Project at the Diwan of the Royal Court, to reinforce their methods of protecting the area inhabited by many wild animals such as the Nubian Ibex and the Arabian Gazelle. — ONA

RO 1.5 billion investments on offer to Saudis

RAHMA AL KALBANIYAH
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

An official Omani delegation currently visiting Saudi Arabia rolled out around 150 investment opportunities worth an estimated RO 1.5 billion now available in the Sultanate in real estate development, industry, tourism, fisheries, petrochemical and renewable energy.

This was announced when the Omani delegation visited the Federation of Saudi Chambers and met with businessmen and members of the Omani Saudi Business Council, on Tuesday.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, stressed the importance of integrated efforts between the Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman's Vision 2040, pointing out to the many intersections between them including the economic diversification and the Sultanate's efforts. to support the economy by forming strong corporations and economic entities.

TURN TO P2



Sultanate offers RO 1.5 bn investment opportunities to Saudi investors

FROM PAGE 1

Al Samsamiyah called for forming work teams comprising all the promising sectors especially in the tourist, maritime transport and manufacturing sectors.

The visit is aimed at achieving short- and long-term gains, Al Samsamiyah said, affirming the Sultanate's determination to overcome the challenges facing Saudi the investments in Oman.

Khaled al Yahya, Secretary-General of the Council

of Saudi Chambers, said that this meeting comes within the context of enhancing and activating economic relations between the two brotherly countries particularly between the Omani and the Saudi private sector.

Al Yahya said that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries has not yet reached the ambitions of both countries despite the presence of excellent investment potentials and opportunities. Trade exchange with the Sultanate declined by 5.56 per cent in 2021 compared to the previous year.

Over 1,300 cases of child abuse in 2019

FROM PAGE 1

"Child Protection Committees were established to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation in all governorates of the Sultanate," the ministry confirmed. The ministry has also appointed child protection representatives. Their most important functions is to receive complaints and reports of violations of children's rights and cases of children being subjected to violence, abuse, or exploitation, to take the necessary measures to protect children by intervening and taking them from the place where

they are subjected to abuse, to prepare a practical intervention plan that suits the situation of the victim child, in order to protect, rehabilitate and integrate him into society, in coordination with specialists, and follow up on cases of children subjected to abuse and submit case reports to the Child Protection Committee.

The representatives are officials who are appointed by the minister and work as judicial officers in implementing the provisions of the Child Law. The number of them in all the governorates of the Sultanate reached 16.

'Governorates Marathon' to raise awareness

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The issuance of this decision comes within the context of HH Sayyid Theyazin's attention and

keenness to encourage society to practice various types of sports and espouse them as a healthy lifestyle. A statement issued by the ministry observes that "Collective sports cement social ties, with professional performers engaging with members of society in a national epic of communication."

The ministry will organise the marathon in cooperation with Oman Athletic Association.

The marathon will capture the concept of social partnership. It seeks to build awareness about types of sports and races, open up opportunities for owners of related projects and businesses, and enable sportsmen and sportswomen to expand their scopes of practice as they master this sport and contest races in general.

— ONA

ASMED signs pact with ODB to manage loan portfolio



MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) on Tuesday signed an agreement with Oman Development Bank (ODB) to manage the loan portfolio of entrepreneurs affiliated to ASMED to help them establish and expand their businesses so that they could play an active role in stimulating the economy.

The agreement enables the ASMED to devise and implement funding applicants' preparedness programme designed to assess their abilities and develop their skills. The ASMED will eventually provide marketing and technical support to the funded projects.

Once the applications are finalised in coordination with the ASMED, the ODB will receive,

study and endorse them and later follow up the funded projects directly by conducting regular field visits to the business sites. The funding programmes will be unveiled in the near future. The agreement was signed by Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of ASMED, and Abduladheem bin Abbas al Bahrani, Chairman of ODB Board. — ONA

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البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

41 deaths, 2,037 cases reported

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the ministry will complete immunising 30 per cent of the Sultanate's population before July at the current pace of vaccine supply.

SINGLE DOSE

The Ministry of Health said those who have been infected with the coronavirus are advised to take only one dose of vaccine if he/she hasn't completed six months since the infection.

After finishing six months since the infection, one can take both doses, the ministry said in a statement.

If someone wants to travel before completing six months since the infection, two doses can be administered to him if he is able to provide a request of the travel destination.

If someone took the first dose of the vaccine then he got the infection, can he take the second dose after six weeks of recovering from the disease.

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IDP IELTS Oman 2021 test dates

June	July	August	September
Sat 05	Thu 01	Sat 07	Sat 04
Sat 12	Sat 10	Thu 12	Sat 11
Thu 17	Sat 17	Sat 21	Thu 16
Sat 19	Sat 24	Sat 28	Sat 25

October	November	December
Sat 09	Sat 06	Thu 02
Thu 14	Thu 11	Sat 04
Sat 23	Sat 20	Sat 11
Sat 30	Sat 27	Sat 18

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MoH urges people to get vaccinated

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has urged all citizens and residents to get vaccinated against the coronavirus and participate in the national immunisation programme.

However, it made clear that vaccination is not compulsory and not imposed on anyone. The ministerial committee on immunisation against Covid-19 has said that the number of vaccinated people will reach 1.5 million by the end of June, including new target groups.

"We hope that everyone, irrespective of their nationalities or any other, gets vaccinated and take part in the national immunisation programme against the pandemic," a senior official at the ministry told the *Observer*.

"While mass vaccination centre provides jabs for citizens above the age of 45 upon online registration, private hospitals are allowed to vaccinate expatriates with Pfizer or AstraZeneca for a payment," he added.

Expatriates need to either register for the jab or walk in with their identity proof to get vaccinated. Health workers are getting vaccinated with either of these or Sputnik for free.

"Ministry is yet to announce how people with no identity documents can get their dose," he



added.

However, embassies of different countries stated that a strategy would be chalked to vaccinate people from their respective countries in due course of time.

Although vaccination is not mandatory for all, experts say vaccination proof is a must in the future for various purposes, including travel and provision of some services as corporates can opt to welcome only those who are vaccinated.

"In my opinion, the vaccine passports will help the travel and tourism industry in Oman along with the international travel sector to get back in shape," says Abeer



Although vaccination is not mandatory for all, experts say vaccination proof is a must in the future for various purposes, including travel and provision of some services as corporates can opt to welcome only those who are vaccinated

al Balushi, Assistant Manager — Corporate Communications, Governance Risk Management and Compliance at Oman Air, adding that talks with the IATA for a digital passport that will help travellers move more easily in the age of coronavirus and after the pandemic are in progress.

"Vaccine proof will serve a great purpose post-pandemic while passport serves travel purpose," says Sunil D'Souza, CEO, Travel City Group.

"Having vaccination proof is clinically right in order to accept passengers after having two jabs completed," an airline official said. Meanwhile, Oman reported 41 deaths on Tuesday, making the total number of fatalities touch 2,782. There's been an increase in the number of new cases and 2,037 cases were registered while 1,079 patients left hospitals after recovering from the infection.

Omanisation of activities at Seeb Central Market

MUSCAT: As part of the Omanisation programme of the government to replace expatriate workers with trained Omani personnel, Muscat Municipality has announced the following decision.

The engagement of business activities in Al Seeb Central Market (belonging to Muscat Municipality) will be limited to Omanis only from January 1, 2022.

All holders of contracts with Muscat Municipality must correct their situation as of the date hereof.

Muscat Municipality and the Ministry of Labour call on everyone to cooperate fully to support Omani cadres by implementing this decision.

Business activities in Al Seeb Central Market will be limited to Omanis only from January 1, 2022

Adapt to the new normal to survive Covid shock

DR ALI REHMAN

In the last twenty-four months, the coronavirus pandemic has changed the world like never before. Many of the industries and companies are closed and obliged to operate either from home or not to operate at all.

Probable output losses associated with this emergency and its related containment measures triggered the global financial crisis. Obviously, we have to adopt the new normal which will be the outcome once the market and industries open again.

Under current circumstances, there is a very different role of corporate governance and policymakers. In normal crises, the Board of directors (BOD) tries to encourage economic activity by stimulating aggregate demand as quickly as possible. However, according to the IMF report, "this time the crisis is to a large extent and making stimulating activity more challenging and, at least for the most affected sectors, undesirable".

All organisations must operate in a manner that can guarantee their survival and assist the revival of their business. BOD and senior management is required to update their strategic plans and develop business continuity plans. It is not recommended to totally scratch away the existing strategy but to assess and amend by considering the following 8 questions.

8 Questions BOD should answer for updating their strategic plan

1. How do the organisation's current plans address natural disasters, pandemics, or other potential disruptors that could impact facility, employees, system backups, suppliers and customers?

Impact is required to be assessed in terms of the facilities they have, employees and its related retention of key employees or freezing the hiring process, system backup and impact on suppliers and customers. The impact on the customer is to be

measured with more precaution. Organisations might consider changing their mode of operations or can opt to provide lucrative offers such as increased credit period or more discounts.

2. What is the impact of contracts that could affect planning such as collaboration with other organisations or any other outside projects?

Organisations need to access their capability to continue their collaboration with vendors or third parties. Many of the organisation's sustainability is dependent upon the availability of these collaborations.

3. Impact of contracts with vendors that could affect our planning such as ERP providers or any other vendor who is providing the services or goods outside the home country.

Impact is required to be noted for the contracts with vendors who are outside the home country. Many ERP providers provide remote support but their physical presence is required in many instances. In the current situation where a travel ban is in place, organisations should assess their situation and dependability on such suppliers of services or goods.

4. How are vendors, emergency responders, regulators, insurance agencies, and other critical stakeholders notified of point of contact changes?

It is one of the important factors which need BOD's consideration. All-important stakeholders are to be notified and information is to be communicated to them for the non-interrupted and smooth business operation.

5. How capable is an organisation to perform manual versions of business-critical automated activities? Are the needed forms and procedure manuals available? Are we appropriately staffed to do so?

The capability of the staff is needed to be assessed who can perform in the absence of automated activities. CIO or CTO plays a major role in such critical times along with CFO. BOD should

evaluate how much of business activities are required to perform manually while maintaining a similar standard and quality.

6. What business objectives would be hindered or restricted?

Organisational vision can be achieved via the development and implementation of business objectives. BOD is required to assess what are the organisational objectives which are obstructed and restricted and how workarounds can be formed to overcome these obstructions.

7. What training employees and business associates received on what to do in the event of a natural disaster or a pandemic?

The majority of the organisations do not provide such training to all employees; however, this can be part of future strategies. In the current situation, such services can be out-sourced or co-sourced.

8. What business-critical processes or activities would not be transferable to an alternate location? Which have regulatory implications based on the timing or duration of the event?

Among these assessments, there are many other legal considerations required to be made. Although this pandemic was not forecasted for which laws or regulations were available; however, organisations should work within the available laws and regulations unless some special regulatory orders are issued. This is also applicable for obtaining the loans towards working capital. Many organisations can opt for transfer pricing or bridge loans.

Asking these questions and amending the organisational objectives can create a sustainable environment. Organisations are required to be resilient and BOD plays a major role in it. BOD has to think globally but act locally. This is the high time that BOD and senior management work together for business continuity for which amending strategies is one and foremost important factor.

(The author is Internal Audit Director of Al Sharqiyah University. Email: ccp9147@yahoo.com)



Tender announcement

Al Zahra College for Women announces the following tenders

إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلمن كلية الزهراء للبنات عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

رقم المناقصة Tender number	عنوان المناقصة Tender title	قيمة المستندات بالريال العماني (لا ترد) Document cost in OMR (nonrefundable)	آخر موعد لتسليم العطاءات Deadline of Tender submission
1	صيانة مصاعد الكلية Maintenance of college lifts	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
2	صيانة التكييف المركزي Maintenance of central A/C	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
3	التأمين الصحي على العاملين بالكلية Medical insurance for employers	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/07/2021
4	مكافحة الحشرات والذوايح والقوارض Past control and controlling reptiles and rodents	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
5	شفط مياه الصرف الصحي Sewage suction	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
6	ممرضة لعيادة الكلية nurse for clinic	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
7	تأجير وتشغيل الكافتيريا Leasing and operating of cafeteria	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
8	صيانة نظام مكافحة الحرائق واجهزة الانذار Maintenance of firefighting system and alarms	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
9	تأجير المكتبة الشرائية Abookshope for Rent	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
10	صيانة كاميرات المراقبة Maintenance of CCTV	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	01/07/2021
11	تأمين الممتلكات - تأمين مبني الكلية - تأمين ضد السرقة - تأمين ضد الحريق - تأمين الأموال المنقولة Assets Insurance ➢ College Building ➢ Fidelity guarantee ➢ Money Insurance	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	10/10/2021

- Companies and institutions can obtain the conditions and specifications from the Department of Services and Supplies College building in the city of Alarfan as of the date of publication of the announcement (working hours: 8:00 am to 1.00 pm Sunday to Thursday)
- Offers will be presented in envelopes sealed and stamped with red wax, named in the name of the head of services and supplies and security. Bids shall be placed in the tender box and the tender number shall be written on it only. The offers must be valid for at least 6 months.
- Deadline for submission of bids as shown
- The College is not bound to accepting the lowest tender or any other one.
- The deadline for submitting tenders is as indicated in the announcement.

- يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المختصة الحصول على الشروط والمواصفات من قسم الخدمات واللوازم بمبنى الكلية في مدينة العرفان (إعتباراً من تاريخ نشر الإعلان (ساعات العمل : ٨:٠٠ ص إلى ١:٠٠ م من الأحد إلى الخميس)
- يتم تقديم العروض في مظاريف مغلقة ومختومة بالشمع الأحمر معنونة بإسم رئيس قسم الخدمات واللوازم والأمن وتوضع العروض في صندوق العطاءات ويكتب عليه رقم المناقصة فقط . على أن تكون العروض سارية لمدة ٦ شهور على الأقل .
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Tel: (0968)24512827, 24512845,24512823

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN DIAGNOSING AND TREATING A HEALTH CONDITION AND LONG-TERM HEALTHCARE, INCLUDING CHRONIC CONDITIONS LIKE DIABETES

He added, “Oman has a good network of primary healthcare workers in the public sector, but in the private sector, there has been a decline of family doctors, which meant all patients are now approaching hospitals. While hospitals are well-equipped, it is important the pandemics as these are handled at

The objective is that by 2030, all countries will have done this and that their population will be reaping the benefits of effective and resilient primary healthcare services.

Local products add freshness to Mawaleh central market



SEEB: Since the start of summer, the Central Fruits and Vegetable Market in Mawaleh began to receive different varieties of home-grown fruits and vegetables from all governorates of the Sultanate.

The market is also inundated with large quantities of imported fruits and vegetables that enter the Sultanate through the air, land and seaports from many countries.

The Central Fruit and Vegetable Market, established by Muscat Municipality more than 20 years ago, is the only market in the Sultanate that receives thousands of tonnes of fruits and vegetables from inside and outside the Sultanate. It has administrative and services offices for Muscat Municipality, the Customs Department of Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Issa bin Khalfan al Riyami, Director of the Central Fruits and Vegetable Market, said the market's administration has



benefited from the period of work suspension. During that period, the market saw comprehensive improvements in all the market's facilities.

Mahfoudh bin Saif al Akhazami, a vendor at the central market

expressed his satisfaction over the developments carried out by the municipality by organising entry and exit of trucks and shoppers' vehicles to the market and was reflected positively in the buying and selling activities. — ONA

‘World through the eyes of children’

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Sultanate of Oman is the venue this week for a special art exhibition, organised by the ‘Ayalagan Alakan’ Public Charitable Foundation of Kazakhstan, features more than forty paintings by pupils of specialist boarding schools for the hearing and speech impaired, from the Western Kazakhstan region. Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, Najmedin Muhametali, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Oman, stressed the importance of such cultural exchanges and their role in Kazakhstani-Omani cooperation, naming both countries as highly cultured. The ambassador also spoke of the 30th Anniversary of Kazakhstan's Independence, presenting the achievements of the country, and its cultural development during that time. “Attendance will be limited,” advised First Secretary Daniyar Tastybayev, “due to Covid-19 requirements, with gathering protocols, masking, distancing, sanitization, and hygiene requirements as per the Supreme Committee's current guidance, between 10 am and 3 pm, until June 24th.”



PROVIDING SUPPORT TO VACCINATION CENTRES

MUSCAT: As many as 450 scouts and girl guides from the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides are assigned in different vaccination centres across the Sultanate. Their task is to receive the visitors and check their personal information to determine whether or not they are eligible for the vaccine, check the e-registration for vaccination and organise entry to the vaccination centre.



TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING LOCAL TENDERS:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	DCRP Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
29/MZEC/2021	CONSTRUCTION OF 33kV DOUBLE CIRCUIT TOWER LINES FROM IZKI GRID TO AL JABAL AL AKHDHER PRIMARY SUBSTATION	29/06/2021	27/07/2021	B	LOCAL	2,165
	THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 08/07/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN NIZWA OFFICE					
Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Board Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
30/MZEC/2021	UNITE RATE CONTRACT TO TOP-UP SMS CREDIT TO MZEC SMS GATEWAY	29/06/2021	27/07/2021	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	90

- Specialized companies registered with the DCRP and the Tender Board and their valid registration can subscribe and obtain technical specifications and tender conditions by submitting an application with all company documents attached via e-mail: scm.tenders@mzec.co.om during working hours. The official time is from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. In return for paying the amount specified above for one copy (non-refundable) via bank deposit to the company's account.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, offers will be submitted by sending offers to the e-mail: mzec-offerssubmission@MZEC.co.om and that the offers are valid for a period of not less than (90) days from the date of bid submission.
- Bids must be sent before (10:00 am) from the date specified as the last day for bid submission.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications will be on 20/07/2021.
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices do not include VAT 5% and it will be charged if purchase invoice issued.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

Tenders & Contracts Section : (+968) 72722787 / 97292777 / 92858543

Taliban launch major offensives in northern Afghanistan

KABUL: Taliban insurgents have conducted a wave of offensives in Afghanistan's north in recent days, moving beyond their southern strongholds as international forces withdraw.

The United Nations' envoy for Afghanistan said the Taliban had taken more than 50 of 370 districts and was positioned to take control of provincial capitals.

Fierce fighting between the Taliban and Afghan government forces has taken place on the outskirts of three provincial capitals in the northern provinces of Faryab, Balkh and Kunduz provinces in recent days, officials said.

Since the United States announced plans in April to withdraw its troops with no conditions by September 11 after nearly 20 years of conflict, violence has escalated throughout the country as the Taliban seeks more territory.

Peace talks in Doha have largely stalled, officials say, though there have been meetings in recent days and the Taliban say they are committed to talks.

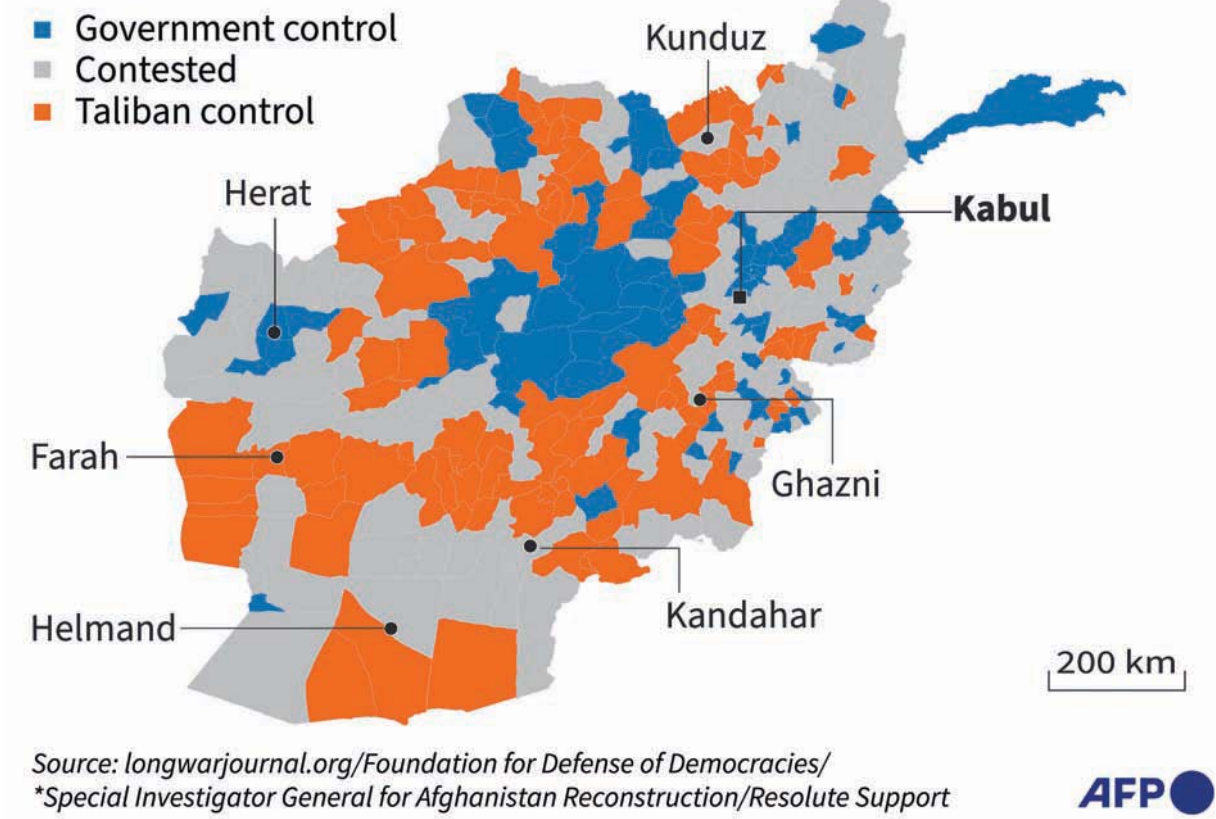
The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons urged the Security Council to do

Contested Afghanistan

Zones of control by district

As of June 2021

Data from SIGAR* and NATO, analysed by Long War Journal



all it could to push the parties back to the negotiating table.

"Increased conflict in

Afghanistan means increased insecurity for many other countries, near and far", she said.

The latest surge in the north is outside the Taliban's traditional strongholds in southern districts

such as Helmand and Kandahar where major fighting had previously taken place.

"The Taliban's strategy is to make inroads and have a strong presence in the northern region of the country that long resisted the insurgent group", said a senior Afghan security official on condition of anonymity.

"They would face less resistance in other parts of the country where they have more influence and presence."

Local officials in Kunduz said the Taliban on Tuesday seized Shir Khan port, a commercial local town situated on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Ghulam Rabbani, a provincial council member, said fighting was also ongoing outside Kunduz's provincial capital and people were fleeing the city. The defence ministry said Afghan forces had recaptured key districts from the Taliban in Kunduz and operations were ongoing.

Local officials and Taliban members said the Taliban had reached the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh's capital, on Monday evening before retreating.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the group's leadership had asked fighters

to return after they reached the entrance of Mazar-i-Sharif as their top leadership did not want to seize provinces until all US forces had left.

The United States began withdrawing troops on May 1 and has handed some bases over to the Afghan government, which has since given up some areas to the Taliban without a fight.

The government admits the Taliban have captured a number of districts and security forces have made "tactical retreats".

The crumbling morale of Afghan forces has raised fears of a Taliban military take over once the withdrawal of foreign forces is complete.

The security official said the government was not abandoning areas to the Taliban, but was retreating from some districts temporarily for tactical reasons as they sought to preserve stretched resources.

"Fighting has fiercely increased in recent weeks and now our main focus is to hold strategic areas and not to further stretch our forces", he said. (Reporting by Kabul bureau; additional reporting by Michelle Nichols in New York, Berlin bureau and Pakistan newsroom. — Reuters

Russians' return after two months boosts Turkish tourism prospects

ISTANBUL: Thousands of Russian tourists began arriving in Turkey on Tuesday, boosting hopes for its tourism sector after a two-month suspension in flights imposed by Moscow due to concerns about a surge in Covid-19 cases in April.

Turkey's tourism prospects have been revived by a sharp fall in daily coronavirus cases to around 5,000 from a peak of more than 60,000 two months ago, as well as an acceleration in vaccinations to more than 1 million a day.

The first plane arrived in Antalya from Moscow around dawn, carrying 132 passengers. Some 12,000 Russians were expected to arrive on 44 planes in the Mediterranean tourist hub of Antalya on Tuesday, state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

"In the last two weeks we are seeing better figures and better trend in daily reservations. Russian tourists are very keen to come to Turkey", TUI Fun&Sun Hotels CEO Volkan Simsek told an online tourism meeting on Monday evening.



Covid-19 restrictions on restaurants and cafes are eased in Istanbul. — Reuters

"Similarly daily reservations that we are getting from the German market are encouraging. The Russian market is going well, the German market is going well", he said, with Germans expected to arrive from the start of July.

Some 2.13 million Russians visited Turkey last year, the highest level of any country but down from 7 million in 2019. The

number of German visitors fell to 1.1 million last year, from more than 5 million in 2019.

Russia halted most flights to Turkey on April 15 and said last week they would resume on June 22.

Tourism revenues dived two-thirds to \$12 billion last year and made a weak start in 2021 as Covid-19 hit an industry which

accounts usually for up to 12pc of the economy and is key to curbing the current account deficit.

Simsek forecast that the market for British tourists would open after mid-July and that the tourism season was expected to be extended to the end of November, but that a full recovery would take longer.

"I don't think it will be possible to make up for the losses of the last two years in the next six months. It will only be possible to do so when everything returns to normal in 2023."

Due to the expectations, the amount of hotels open this year was seen around 90pc by July, compared with 50pc opened last year.

"For the month of July, we are planning 75 additional flights. We're very happy with the developments as a company", said SunExpress CEO Max Kownatzki.

Fraport TAV Antalya Airport General Manager Bilgihan Yilmaz said its passenger traffic will double and may triple this year compared to 2020. — Reuters

DUBAI: Iranian police have seized 7,000 computer miners at an illegal cryptocurrency farm, their largest haul to date of the energy-guzzling machines that have exacerbated power outages in Iran, state media reported on Tuesday.

In late May, Iran banned the mining of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin for nearly four months as part of efforts to reduce the incidence of power blackouts blamed by officials on surging electricity demand during the searingly hot and dry summer.

Tehran police chief General Hossein Rahimi said the 7,000 computer miners were seized in an abandoned factory in the west of the capital, the state news agency IRNA reported.

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are created through a process known as mining, where powerful computers compete with each other to solve complex mathematical problems. The process is highly energy-intensive, often relying on



electricity generated by fossil fuels, which are abundant in Iran.

According to blockchain analytics firm Elliptic, around 4.5 per cent of all bitcoin mining takes place in Iran, giving it hundreds of million dollars in revenue from cryptocurrencies that can be used to lessen the impact of US sanctions.

Iran's economy has been hit hard since 2018, when then-President Donald Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six powers and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

US President Joe Biden's administration and other global powers are pursuing talks with Iran to revive the deal. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Abu Dhabi opens up free vaccines to tourists

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, is offering tourists free Covid-19 vaccinations that were previously restricted to UAE citizens and residency visa holders.

There is no indication that the change applies to Dubai, the most populous emirate, or the other five emirates that make up the UAE.

Visitors with visas issued by Abu Dhabi and passport holders eligible for tourist visas when they arrive in the UAE through Abu



Dhabi can book free vaccines, according to information provided by the Abu Dhabi Health Services Company (SEHA), which operates the emirate's public health infrastructure.

TEHRAN

Iran says US election criticism is meddling

Iran accused the United States on Tuesday of interference for saying its election was neither free nor fair as political factions traded blame for the record low turnout and high number of invalid ballots.

Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline judge who is under US sanctions, secured victory as expected on Saturday in an election marked by voter apathy over economic hardships and political restrictions.

A US State Department



spokesman said on Monday the United States viewed the process that made Raisi Iran's president-elect as "pretty manufactured", reiterating the US view that the election was neither free nor fair.

CAIRO

Egypt arrests TikTok influencer

Egyptian police arrested TikTok influencer Haneen Hossam on Tuesday two days after she failed to appear in court for her sentencing to 10 years on "human trafficking" charges, a security official said.

Hossam, 19, was caught in a Cairo suburb and will be transferred to the Public Prosecution, the official said.

Another social media influencer, Mowada al Adham, was also sentenced on Sunday with three other people to six years in



jail by the Cairo Criminal Court for "corrupting family values, inciting debauchery and encouraging young women to practise sexual relations", her lawyer Sabar Sokkar told AFP on Monday.

In brief

■ MANILA



BAGS OF RICE TO BOOST VACCINE DRIVE

A community in the Philippines has been raffling off huge sacks of rice in exchange for getting vaccinated against Covid-19, after finding it hard to persuade people to get their shots.

Twenty weekly winners who get their shots in Sucat on the outskirts of the capital Manila have been taking home a 25 kg (55 pound) sack of rice each.

Local official Jeramel Mendoza said the initiative was targeting mainly poorer residents, who were not so keen on vaccinations.

“Initially, when we conducted our vaccination drive, there were very few people signing up. So we asked ourselves why?” he said.

■ KATHMANDU



RECORD BREAKER STRANDED IN NEPAL

Hong Kong resident Tsang Yin-Hung, who made the fastest ascent of Mount Everest by any woman, and dozens of other mountaineers from China are unable to get out of Nepal because of Covid-19 restrictions imposed by Beijing, they said.

Nepal has had a surge of infections including at the base camp of Everest, prompting several countries to block travel from there. The daily positive rate of infections in Nepal stands at more than 24 per cent, among the highest in the world at this time.

The travel restriction was imposed after the climbing season began and there were fresh outbreaks in Nepal.

■ NICOSIA



CYPRUS CHANGES HEALTH, JUSTICE MINISTERS

Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades reshuffled his cabinet on Tuesday, replacing his health minister who wanted to bow out, and his justice minister who resigned last week.

Anastasiades, whose second five-year term ends in early 2023, replaced Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou who signalled he wished to step down, and Justice Minister Emily Yioltis, who quit on June 17.

Ioannou led a team widely credited for effectively managing the coronavirus pandemic by introducing early lockdowns and widespread testing. He is replaced by Michalis Hadjipantelas, a chartered accountant.

Australia angry over Unesco warning on Great Barrier Reef

CANBERRA: The Great Barrier Reef should be added to a list of World Heritage Sites that are “in danger”, a United Nations panel said on Tuesday, drawing an angry response from Australia, which called the recommendation politically motivated.

Australia has lobbied furiously for years to stay off the endangered list as it could lead to the world’s biggest coral reef ecosystem losing the UN heritage status, taking some of the shine off its attraction for tourists. Making its recommendation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) committee said action was needed to counter the effects of climate change as the prospects of the reef retaining that cherished status had deteriorated.

At Australia’s invitations, Unesco delegates visited an unspoilt stretch of the reef in 2015, but scientists say it has suffered three major coral bleaching events since, caused by severe marine heatwaves.

Defending Australia’s efforts to protect the reef, Environment Minister Sussan Ley said Canberra would challenge the recommendation, saying some hidden agenda had influenced its



The Great Barrier Reef has held World Heritage status since 1981

findings.

“This decision was flawed. Clearly there were politics behind it,” Leys said, adding that Australia had conveyed its concerns to Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay. China chairs the Unesco committee, but when queried in parliament, Ley declined to say if she was pointing the finger at Beijing.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a government

official said that China had been responsible for the committee’s stance.

“We will appeal, but China is in control,” the source said.

China rejected the assertion that it was behind the move, however.

“What you mentioned is a groundless smear against China,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, told a daily briefing in Beijing, adding that the accusation

was similar to others made against China, regarding its “ulterior political motives”.

China’s embassy in Canberra did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Relations with China, the biggest customer for Australia’s exports, have deteriorated in recent years to hit a low after Prime Minister Scott Morrison sought an independent inquiry over the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. — **Reuters**

Turkmenistan capital tops Hong Kong as costliest city

PARIS: Turkmenistan’s capital Ashgabat has overtaken Hong Kong as the world’s most expensive city for foreign workers, a survey showed on Tuesday.

Beirut jumped to third place in the 2021 Mercer survey from 45th a year earlier owing to a “severe and extensive economic depression” resulting from multiple crises, including the country’s financial trouble, Covid-19 and a deadly blast in the Lebanese port.

Ashgabat rose from second in the previous survey to the first spot due to “high local inflation”, Mercer France global mobility practice leader Jean-Philippe Sarra told AFP.

Turkmenistan is almost wholly dependent on natural gas exports



and has struggled to recover from the global energy price slump in 2014 that battered the local manat currency and plunged many citizens into poverty.

Despite the long-running economic crisis, authorities broke ground on a major expansion of Ashgabat in May, with autocrat leader Gurbanguly

Berdymukhamedov pledging to turn it into “one of the most prosperous cities in the world”.

While Hong Kong, with its notoriously expensive housing, dropped to second place, Tokyo also fell one spot to fourth.

Zurich dropped to fifth and is among three Swiss cities in the top 10 along with Geneva (8) and Bern (10). Two other Chinese cities are among the most expensive in the world for expatriates: Shanghai climbed one spot to number six while Beijing rose to ninth.

Singapore took seventh place.

US cities fell in this year’s ranking mostly because of currency fluctuations, and despite rising inflation, according to Mercer. — **AFP**

Indian firm tests drones to deliver Covid vaccines

BANGALORE: An aviation firm has carried out the first tests in India of longer-range drone deliveries, as hopes grow that they could deliver medicines as well as Covid-19 vaccines to remote areas.

Greater use of drones could be a game-changer for medical services in the South Asian nation’s hard-to-reach rural areas where healthcare is limited and roads often poor, experts say.

Throttle Aerospace Systems is among 20 organisations granted permits by the government since May to conduct experimental flights beyond the current limit of 450 metres (1,475 feet).

Two drones — one that can carry up to one kilogramme (2.2 pounds) for 20 kilometres (12 miles) or nearly an hour, and another that can lift two kilos for 15 kilometres — were tested on Monday in the southern state of Karnataka.

“Medicines was the payload

here and... 2.5 kilometres were covered in seven minutes and it delivered the medicines at the designated point and the drone returned,” Throttle’s co-founder, Sebastian Anto, told AFP at the test site in Karnataka.

The government this month also invited bids from drone operators to help set up a pilot project for the delivering of medical supplies as it seeks to bolster its faltering coronavirus vaccination drive.

The closing date for expressions of interest was Tuesday, although the government has yet to announce when such projects would become operational.

The epidemiology chief of the Indian Council of Medical Research, Samiran Panda, told The Hindu daily newspaper that the technology could help vaccinate priority groups in hard-to-reach places.

“We need smart vaccination



Technicians flies a drone to deliver life-saving medical supplies during a flight testing at Gauribidanur near Bangalore on Monday. — **AFP**

instead of mass vaccination to stem an epidemic,” Panda told the newspaper last week.

India lags behind many other

nations when it comes to drones — or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles — both in terms of their uses and the regulatory framework.

Under current regulations, they have to be flown in full view, or within 450 metres, of their operators on the ground. — **AFP**

Singaporean gets 30-year jail term for killing maid

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean woman who starved, assaulted and ultimately killed her domestic worker was sentenced to 30 years in prison on Tuesday, with the judge describing the case as “among the worst types of culpable homicide”. The affluent city-state is home to about 250,000 domestic workers who mostly come from poorer Asian countries, and stories of mistreatment are common.

But the abuse inflicted on Myanmar national Piang Ngaih Don, 24, was particularly awful and captured on CCTV installed in the family’s home. The domestic worker was stamped on, strangled, choked, battered with brooms and burnt with an iron, according to court documents.

The domestic worker died in July 2016, after her employer, Gaiyathiri Murugayan, repeatedly assaulted her for several hours.

Gaiyathiri, 41, pleaded guilty in February to 28 charges including culpable homicide. Another 87 charges were taken into account in sentencing.

She appeared in court on Tuesday wearing glasses and a black mask, and sat silently with her eyes closed and head bowed as the judge read his decision.

After hearing an additional plea of mitigation submitted by Gaiyathiri in a bid to avoid the life sentence sought by the prosecution, Justice See Kee Oon sentenced her to 30 years in prison starting from the date of her arrest in 2016.

See cited the “abject cruelty of the accused’s appalling conduct” in his sentencing, which he added must signal “societal outrage and abhorrence” at the crime.

But taking into account the defendant’s obsessive-compulsive disorder and the depression she developed around the time she gave birth, See said he did not think that life imprisonment was “fair and appropriate”. — **AFP**

Gabon paid for protecting forests, in African first



Gabon's rainforest is home to a huge number of species including forest elephants.

LIBREVILLE: Gabon has become the first African nation to receive a financial reward for protecting its forests as part of international efforts to fight climate change, the government announced on Tuesday.

Gabon has received \$17 million in recompense for successfully cutting its carbon emissions by reducing deforestation and forest degradation, the environment ministry said in a statement.

The payment came "after independent experts verified Gabon's results" showing that the country's carbon emissions in 2016-17 had dropped compared with the annual figures for 2006-15.

The funds were delivered by the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), an organisation launched in 2015 by the United Nations and backed by international

donors.

The scheme provides financial incentives to Central African governments to pursue economic growth without harming the vast forests that cover much of the region.

The world's rainforests are seen as a vital weapon in the fight against climate change by sucking out carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Gabon, where forests cover 90 per cent of the territory, is home to some 18 per cent of the Congo Basin forest, known as "the second lung of the planet" after the Amazon.

Under a 10-year deal signed with CAFI in 2019, Gabon is set to receive a total of \$150 million if it meets its carbon-cutting targets.

The small tropical country has pledged to cut its carbon emissions in half by 2025 from 2005 levels. — AFP

US to share millions of Covid shots with LatAm, Africa, Asia

WASHINGTON: The White House laid out a plan on Monday to share 55 million US Covid-19 vaccine doses globally, with roughly 75 per cent of the doses allocated to Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Africa through the COVAX international vaccine-sharing program.

The plan fulfils President Joe Biden's commitment to share 80 million US-made vaccines with countries around the world. The president sketched out his priorities for the first 25 million doses from that pledge earlier this month.

The United States has come under pressure to share more of its vaccine supply with countries that are still struggling with the deadly virus and its variants. With more and more Americans getting the shots, the White House increasingly has turned its attention to getting vaccine out internationally.

Of the 55 million remaining



A health worker administers a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at Bang Sue Central Railway Station in Bangkok on Tuesday. — AFP

doses, some 41 million will be shared through COVAX, the White House said, with approximately 14 million going to Latin America and the Caribbean, some 16 million to Asia, and roughly 10 million to Africa.

The other 25 per cent, or

roughly 14 million doses, will be shared with "regional priorities," including Colombia, Argentina, Iraq, Ukraine, the West Bank and Gaza.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the United States had faced logistical issues getting

vaccine to other nations.

"We have plenty of doses to share with the world, but this is a Herculean logistical challenge," she told reporters, noting safety and regulatory information had to be shared, proper storage temperatures for the vaccines had to be ensured, and language barriers at times had to be overcome.

"We have announced today where these doses are going. We will continue to announce as they land on the ground and as they are being shipped, and we're looking forward to doing that as quickly as possible," she said.

The 55 million doses will be taken from the US supply of Pfizer Inc, Moderna Inc, and Johnson & Johnson shots, though if AstraZeneca's vaccine gets a green light from the Food and Drug Administration, it would likely be added to the mix as well. — AFP

Belarus slams new coordinated western sanctions

MOSCOW: Belarus on Tuesday denounced coordinated sanctions against the ex-Soviet country by the EU, US, Britain and Canada, imposed after the forced landing of a Ryanair flight to arrest a regime critic.

The sanctions follow global outrage over the forced landing of a passenger flight in Minsk where authorities detained opposition activist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend who were travelling on board.

They were the latest in a series of penalties against President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus for nearly three decades and has clamped down on the opposition after mass protests erupted following disputed presidential elections last year.

"We have repeatedly stated that sanctions negatively affect the interests of citizens, they are counterproductive and vicious," the Belarusian foreign ministry

said in a statement.

"But deliberate, destructive actions against the population are being continued in order to 'drain the regime financially' so to speak."

The ministry described the sanctions as "hostile actions" and said Western countries were using "pressure on a sovereign state".

"Against this backdrop, the statement of the leadership of the European Union looks like an outright mockery, a mockery

of logic and common sense," the ministry said.

It added that Belarus "is able and will do everything possible to protect its citizens and business entities" and the restrictions "will not have the desired effect".

The European Union and the United States both targeted dozens of individuals and entities over a brutal crackdown on the opposition after Lukashenko claimed a landslide re-election for a sixth term last August. — AFP

Ballooning spiders leave Australian region covered in webs

SYDNEY: An arachnid invasion left swathes of Australia's Gippsland region covered in webs as the spiders sought higher ground to escape flooding.

A sea of silk engulfed an area in Australia's southeast hit by flooding earlier in June, caused by sheet web spiders that normally live on the ground looking for shelter according to ecologist Dieter Hochuli.

"When we get these types of very heavy rains and flooding, these animals who spend their lives cryptically on the ground can't live there anymore, and do exactly what we try to do — they move to the higher ground," Hochuli, from the University of Sydney, told local broadcaster Channel 7.

Spiders are known to release



Spiders' gossamer near wetlands in Gippsland, Australia. — Reuters

webs to create makeshift parachutes and ride the wind to change location, a phenomenon known as ballooning.

At least two people died when the storms hit Victoria earlier this month, with authorities finding both bodies in separate partially submerged vehicles. Thousands of people in the hardest-hit areas were also left without power for weeks, with some homes yet to be reconnected to electricity.

Australians living in regional and rural areas have struck by a series of disasters in recent years.

A prolonged drought was followed by months of devastating bushfires in late 2019 to early 2020 before welcome rains brought damaging floods in several regions. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MEXICO CITY

Mexico, Argentina recall envoys from Nicaragua

Mexico and Argentina have recalled their ambassadors to Nicaragua for consultations in response to President Daniel Ortega's mounting crackdown on the opposition, a joint statement said on Monday.

The two countries voiced concern about "the worrying political-legal actions carried out by the Nicaraguan government in recent days that have put the integrity and freedom of various opposition figures at risk."



Argentina and Mexico will continue to press for "the full respect and promotion of human rights" as well as civil and political liberties, the statement said.

NEW YORK

Over 8,500 kids used as soldiers in 2020

More than 8,500 children were used as soldiers last year in various conflicts across the world and nearly 2,700 others were killed, the United Nations said on Monday.

UN chief Antonio Guterres' annual report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict covers the killing, maiming and sexual abuse of children, abduction or recruitment, denial of aid access and targeting of schools and hospitals.

The report verified that viola-



tions had been committed against 19,379 children in 21 conflicts. The most violations in 2020 were committed in Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.

DUBLIN

Unionist party gets third leader in a month

Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) on Tuesday named its third leader in under a month, the latest twist in a Brexit-soaked drama that has left the region's leadership in turmoil.

Jeffrey Donaldson, who sits in the UK parliament in London, was the only member to register his candidacy to head the hard-line pro-UK party, which has been riven by infighting over post-Brexit trading arrangements for the province.



The 58-year-old politician will replace Edwin Poots, who took over from his predecessor Arlene Foster in a brutal putsch fuelled by perceptions that her opposition to the deal was too soft.

Only time can heal the trauma...

Since its abrupt outbreak in the beginning of last year, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed everything upside down. It has not only separated us from our routine life but has also changed nearly every aspect of our life. It has taken lives and livelihoods. It seems impossible that our life might never be the same again.

Over the past several months we have been in the midst of lockdowns, closures and financial interruptions. We have adopted new habits, learned to work from home through virtual interactions, made social distancing an everyday habit and masks part of our body just like mobiles. Our children are, even though at a low pace, becoming used to remote learning.

Many of us have struggled with feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety during this pandemic. Maybe we never thought about our mental health before, or reflected on our feelings, but this pandemic has moved many of us to care for ourselves more deeply.

Now coming to the losses that have compounded mental health issues of



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

MANY OF US HAVE STRUGGLED WITH FEELINGS OF LONELINESS, DEPRESSION, AND ANXIETY DURING THIS PANDEMIC... BUT THIS PANDEMIC HAS MOVED MANY OF US TO CARE FOR OURSELVES MORE DEEPLY

people, the trauma caused by illness and death have excruciating nuances. Even there has been a noticeable change in our perception towards grief and anguish.

Most of us are experiencing some level of anxiety with the increasing infection rates and deaths due to the pandemic. Although fears of contracting the disease along with constant apprehensions about health and safety, our stress spirals when our loved ones are infected and separated from us especially during hospital admissions. It leaves many of us unprepared to cope with it.

Relatives of the infected become more vulnerable to anguish as they do not have access or any effective communication with their loved ones. They become more anxious and depressed.

Even after reaching home after my journey to recovery in hospital, those days still remain nightmares among my family members. My separation from them has left them scared and depressed. While I lay on the ventilator in a delirious condition with

no knowledge of what was happening around me, my wife and children were the worst hit with no clear knowledge about my fate. This communication gulf has taken a toll on my family.

They have not yet recovered from the mental anguish left by the virus. Tears flow when they talk about the pain and strain that they underwent during those dark days of my stay in the hospital. Even though Dr Ravi Perumal at Badr al Samaa Hospital who steered my recovery arranged a video call with my wife and children, I just gazed at the glowing phone screen. I had no idea what was going on.

My son still says, “the nightmares just won’t stop. I wake up every night shaking with intense fear. I wake up drenched in sweat”. It has come to a level that any mundane discussion remotely related to the virus sets off a series of alarming responses among them.

It could take months or even years for them to come out of the stress even as I am on the path to steady physical recovery!

A RISKY GAMBLE

What next as Spain pardons jailed Catalan separatists?

ROSA SULLEIRO

In pardoning the Catalan separatists jailed over a failed 2017 independence bid, Spain’s government is making a risky gamble which may calm tensions but won’t solve the crisis, analysts said. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced the pardon on Monday in Barcelona, with his government set to formally approve the move at Tuesday’s cabinet meeting.

“The pardons will help ease tensions between the Catalan government and Madrid and facilitate negotiations, but it’s difficult to see that leading to an agreement between the sides”, said Lluís Orriols, a political scientist at Madrid’s Carlos III University. “That’s still a long way off”

In October 2017, Catalonia’s separatist regional leadership staged a referendum on independence despite a ban by Madrid, which was marred by police violence.

A few weeks later, they made a short-lived declaration of independence, sparking Spain’s worst political crisis in decades.

That prompted then Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont to flee abroad while others who stayed in Spain were arrested and tried.

Nine were sent to prison for between nine and 13 years. “The pardons are symbolic in essence”, says Cristina Monge, a political scientist at the University of Zaragoza.

“It’s a way of being able to return to the negotiating table with a proof of goodwill, and also to reposition the conflict within the political sphere”

CRISTINA MONGE
A Political Scientist

Since Sanchez’s minority left-wing coalition came to power in January 2020, it has relied in part on the support of ERC, a leftist Catalan separatist party, which in return demanded talks on resolving the separatist conflict. However, the sides only met once before the talks were suspended by the pandemic.

But they are set to resume quickly after a meeting later this month between Sanchez and new Catalan leader Pere Aragonés, an ERC moderate who is far more open to negotiating than his predecessor, Quim Torra, from the hardline JxCat.

The independence movement in the northeastern region is unlikely to give up on its main aims — to obtain an amnesty for all those involved in the 2017 independence bid, and to hold a referendum on self-determination, this time with Madrid’s approval. Both options have been firmly ruled out by the Spanish government.

But the pardons offer the chance to shake things up in Catalonia where support for independence has grown over the past decade, said Oriol Bartomeus, a political scientist at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

“The moment you take the prisoners out of the equation” — thereby removing a factor used by separatists to galvanise their supporters into action — “you force the independence movement to rethink”, he said. And even if they publicly stick to their lines, “a new chapter will open behind the scenes”. — AFP

SCIENCE UNDER SCRUTINY

Covid crisis throws spotlight on scientific research across the planet

JULIE CHARPENTRAT

In the feverish rush to study the coronavirus as it scorched its way across the planet, the unprecedented demand for information has put any mistakes under the glare of world attention and tested public trust in science, experts say.

Although serious problems are rare, in a health emergency even small errors can ripple through scientific research and onto the Internet, magnifying people’s uncertainty. “I think the combination of a pandemic with social media and people deliberately putting out misinformation, that gets a lot of people thinking that all science is fraudulent, which it is not”, scientific integrity consultant Elizabeth Bik said.

Bik has dedicated her career to ensuring mistakes — or worse — do not slip through the net.

The microbiologist scours the finer details of scientific papers, looking for faulty methodology, suspicious repetitions, incoherent data or unreported conflicts of interest.

She publishes her discoveries on Twitter, on her blog and in comments on the scientific platform PubPeer, then lets the authors or the editors of scientific journals respond or take action. It has not always made her popular — she has faced an online backlash and even legal action — but she is adamant that the pressure to publish quickly heightens the risk of mistakes.

One high-profile example came last year when the *Lancet* medical journal withdrew a study that found hydroxychloroquine — touted as a treatment by the then-US President Donald Trump among others — was ineffective against Covid-19, and even dangerous.

The paper came under scrutiny from fellow scientists, whose concerns



Scientists look at test tubes containing stem cells at the GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) research centre in Stevenage, Britain. — Reuters file photo

THE MICROBIOLOGIST SCOURS THE FINER DETAILS OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS, LOOKING FOR FAULTY METHODOLOGY, SUSPICIOUS REPETITIONS, INCOHERENT DATA OR UNREPORTED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

over the reliability of the underlying data highlighted serious problems with the research.

Ultimately hydroxychloroquine was found by other reputable studies not to work against the coronavirus, but the retraction spread confusion.

Bik said that the incident made many people worry that “all science papers cannot be trusted”.

With research funding and even job security often linked to how many articles an individual or institution publishes, scientists have long complained of incentives to hurry through study papers. Catherine Paradeise, a sociologist and professor emeritus at the University of Marne-la-Vallée in France said that the

pressures can have adverse effects. She points to a tendency to put quantity ahead of quality or “fiddle a little bit with the conditions of a study” to save time.

Her concern was echoed in a March report commissioned by a committee of the French senate.

Investigators said they found “a systematic problem inherent to the world of research” that could lead to unethical practices due to “the race to publish and pressure to produce positive results”. One of the investigating senators said that Covid had served to “amplify the difficulties of scientific integrity” and to degrade “confidence between society and the world of science”. — AFP

SPORT

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Austria's midfielder Christoph Baumgartner (R) shoots and scores the opening goal. – AFP

BAUMGARTNER LOOKS TO ITALY AFTER SENDING AUSTRIA INTO LAST 16



Austria's midfielder Christoph Baumgartner celebrates after scoring the opening goal. – AFP



Netherlands' midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum (L) vies with North Macedonia's midfielder Ferhan Hasani. – AFP

BUCHAREST: Christoph Baumgartner is looking forward to a "special" meeting with Italy in the last 16 after his goal in a 1-0 win over Ukraine handed his side second place in Group C and a first ever appearance in the European Championship knockout stages.

Austria were worthy winners in a poor game, but the result leaves Ukraine sweating on what looks a slim chance they will be among the four best third-placed teams and also earn their spot in the next round.

Baumgartner turned in David Alaba's corner midway through the first half, and was then forced off after a blow to the head, as Austria profited from a lacklustre display from Ukraine, who battled to find fluidity when it seemingly

mattered most in the tournament.

The Netherlands, who beat North Macedonia 3-0 in their final game, top the group with a full haul of nine points from their three games, while Austria are second on six points and Ukraine have three, and a negative goal difference.

Austria may not be celebrating for long, though, as they face the in-form Italians in the last 16 in London on Saturday, coming up against Roberto Mancini's team that are unbeaten in their last 30 internationals and who have not conceded in 11 games.

"I still cannot believe it," Baumgartner told reporters. "And on top of that my head hurts. I'm happy for all of Austria and I hope everyone enjoyed it. We have had a tough time with the coronavirus, so enjoy this now."

CHRISTOPH BAUMGARTNER
Austrian striker

I still cannot believe it. And on top of that my head hurts. I'm happy for all of Austria and I hope everyone enjoyed it. We have had a tough time with the coronavirus, so enjoy this now

so enjoy this now.

"The round of 16 game against Italy will be something special. We

Standings

Group C



Netherlands



Austria



North Macedonia



Ukraine

Standings	Pts	P	W	D	L	f	a	D
1 Neth.*	9	3	3	0	0	8	2	6
2 Austria*	6	3	2	0	1	4	3	1
3 Ukraine	3	3	1	0	2	4	5	-1
4 N.Macedonia	0	3	0	0	3	2	8	-6

Matches: Played - Won - Drawn - Lost

Goals: for - against - Difference

Source: UEFA *Qualified for last 16



made history today, but it is still not over."

POOR UKRAINE

Ukraine coach Andriy Shevchenko will be bewildered

with the limp showing of his side — they did, after all, finish top of their qualifying pool, picking up 20 points from their eight games — three more than holders Portugal. But they showed none of that tenacity against their workmanlike opponents.

"I'm so disappointed. I don't even know what to say," Ukraine midfielder Olexandr Zinchenko told EURO2020.com. "Our performance in the first half was unacceptable. The way we behaved on the pitch was unacceptable.

Wijnaldum double spurs Netherlands

Georginio Wijnaldum scored twice and hailed his "special connection" with Memphis Depay as the Netherlands completed a perfect group stage at Euro 2020

by comfortably beating North Macedonia 3-0 in Amsterdam on Monday.

The Dutch captain, who signed for Paris Saint-Germain from Liverpool just before the tournament, scored twice in the second half at the Johan Cruyff Arena after Depay had put them ahead.

Depay, fresh from sealing a transfer of his own to Barcelona, could claim assists for both of Wijnaldum's goals as Frank de Boer's side made it nine points out of nine in Group C.

"Memphis and I played together for PSV and have played together for a long time for the national team so we have a special connection," said Wijnaldum.

— AFP

In brief

■ LAHORE



YOUNIS QUILTS AS PAKISTAN BATTING COACH

Former captain Younis Khan has stepped down as Pakistan's batting coach before their coming tours of England and the West Indies, the country's cricket board said on Tuesday. His departure leaves Pakistan without a batting coach for their limited-overs matches in England in July, but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said it would bring in a replacement for the matches in the West Indies in July and August.

Younis was appointed last November on a two-year contract that ran until the T20 World Cup in Australia next year.

"It is sad to lose an expert of the stature and experience of Younis Khan," PCB chief executive Wasim Khan said.

■ MONTREAL



SHAPOVALOV PULLS OUT OF OLYMPICS

Canada's Denis Shapovalov has decided not to compete at the Tokyo Olympics due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, world number 12 said on Monday.

The 22-year-old Shapovalov is the latest player to opt-out of the Olympics as Spaniard Rafael Nadal and Austria's Dominic Thiem both announced last week they would not compete in the July 24-August 1 men's tennis tournament in Tokyo.

"Representing Canada means the world to me, but due to the current situation my team and I have decided this is the best decision for everyone's safety," Shapovalov wrote on Twitter. "I can't wait to represent Canada at future Olympic games."

■ SOUTHAMPTON



COOK 'FEELS SORRY' FOR ROOT OVER ROTATION POLICY

Alastair Cook has expressed sympathy for Joe Root, his successor as England's Test captain, over a rotation policy he believes has left the current side "chasing their tail".

Several key players have been deliberately omitted from the eight Tests that England have played so far this year, meaning Root has repeatedly been denied his strongest XI.

The England and Wales Cricket Board have defended the system as a sensible response to the peculiar pressures of prolonged periods in the bio-secure bubbles needed for the international game to continue amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Maharaj hat-trick powers SA to series win

WINDIES SLUMP TO 158-RUN DEFEAT IN SECOND TEST AT HOME

GROS-ISLET, Saint Lucia: Keshav Maharaj completed just the second hat-trick by a South African in Test history as the Proteas completed a 158-run victory over the West Indies on the fourth day of the second Test of the two-match series at the Daren Sammy Cricket Ground in St Lucia on Monday.

In the penultimate over before lunch, the left-arm spinner removed Kieran Powell, Jason Holder and Joshua da Silva in successive deliveries to join fast bowler Geoff Griffen, who achieved the feat at Lord's in 1960, in the record books.

Maharaj then followed up with two of the last three to fall in the afternoon to finish with figures of five for 36 as the West Indies were dismissed for 165.

Following comprehensive innings and 63-run victory inside three days in the first Test a week earlier at the same venue, the result gave South Africa the series 2-0, their first away series triumph since 2017 in New Zealand.

"This is huge for us because we haven't won on the road for quite some time," said South African captain Dean Elgar. "There will be teething years as captain but this is a good, important step on the way forward."

The home side began the day on 15 without loss looking at a victory target of 324. It was unlikely but given they had chased down 395 to beat Bangladesh in February, the West Indies were not without hope.

At least not until the 13th over by which stage Shai Hope had joined skipper Kraigg Brathwaite back in the pavilion, both dismissed by pace bowler Kagiso Rabada, who then persuaded Kyle Mayers into an



Keshav Maharaj of South Africa celebrates the dismissal of Jason Holder of West Indies. — AFP

ugly hoick which spliced to Dean Elgar.

MAHARAJ SHOW

Maharaj then stole the headlines with his hat-trick to extinguish any fading West Indian hopes of an unlikely victory.

First, opening batsman Powell, who had looked composed and assured through most of his innings of 51, lost his head completely, hoisting Maharaj to deep midwicket where Anrich Nortje barely had to move in taking the catch just metres off the boundary rope.

Holder prodded at his first delivery for Keegan Petersen to take the sharp catch at short-leg and then Wiaan Mulder pulled off a superb snare low to his right at leg-slip when wicketkeeper-batsman da Silva attempted a

leg-side glance to the hat-trick ball.

"I just decided to bowl normally and it was a brilliant catch by Wiaan," said Maharaj.

"I really didn't know what to do after that because the excitement of the occasion overtook all of us."

Until the Maharaj intervention, South Africa had relied on the excellence of Rabada, who bowled beautifully to remove Brathwaite, caught at slip by Elgar, and Hope who fended at a spiteful delivery angled into his body, a faint touch off his left glove carrying through to wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock.

"My job is to bowl, but whenever we need some lower-order runs I try to contribute," said Rabada, who also chipped in with 61

Shami strikes as India rock NZ



India's Rohit Sharma celebrates taking a catch to dismiss New Zealand's Henry Nicholls off the bowling of Ishant Sharma. — Reuters

SOUTHAMPTON: Mohammed Shami led the way as India's pacemen reduced New Zealand to 135-5 as they revived the rain-marred World Test Championship final at Southampton as a contest on Tuesday.

Shami removed Ross Taylor (11) and BJ Watling (one), either side of Ishant Sharma dismissing Henry Nicholls (seven), to leave New Zealand still 82 runs behind India's first innings 217 at lunch on the fifth day.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, one of the world's best batsmen, had taken 112 balls for his 19 not out — proof of just how tough it was to face a high-quality attack in overcast conditions.

Shami, meanwhile, had fine figures of 2-31 in 18 overs.

Yet given a standard men's Test lasts a maximum of five days this match, which has seen

both Friday's opening day and all of Monday's play washed out without a ball bowled, would normally be heading towards a draw.

But match referee Chris Broad and the umpires can take the game into Wednesday's specially allocated reserve day in the hope a two-year process to crown Test cricket's first official world champion might end with a winner in a match where the total prize money on offer is \$2.4 million.

With yet more rain delaying Tuesday's start by an hour, New Zealand resumed on 101-2.

Williamson and Taylor, New Zealand's two most-experienced batsmen, added just 16 runs in Tuesday's first 13 overs, although Williamson did cover-drive Shami for a textbook four a ball after being beaten on the outside edge. — AFP

Kempinski Hotel to support Ironman challenge

MUSCAT: Two residents of Oman were pleased to agree to support with the Kempinski Hotel this week, for their attempt to run a full ironman distance triathlon event in the summer heat in Oman.

Nic Cartwright, Managing Director of Sabco Sports, and Peter Laing, Director with Driver Trett, have been planning to run a challenge event for the past two summers, but have been frustrated over those 2 years by the impact of the Covid pandemic. They had entered the Ironman Austria event in 2020, which was postponed to this summer and again to later in the year.

But their love of the training and their determination to complete a race had meant they had decided to run the event overnight in the heat of an Omani summer.

When the new curfew was announced this week, the two triathletes were left facing further frustration as running the race in the daytime sun would be potentially dangerous. However, they reached out to the Kempinski Hotel at the Almouj to ask if they would be able to undertake the event using the great facilities at the hotel.

Now, with the full support of the staff at the Kempinski Hotel, Nic and Peter will undertake the full ironman distance triathlon.



They will swim just under 4km in one of the pools at the hotel, then cycle (on indoor trainers) 180km and run a full marathon in the Kempinski gym on one of the top-end treadmills featured in the hotel's fully equipped gym.

The full effort will take 12 hours and more, but Nic and Peter both agree that exercise is a great way to cope with the tough times of Covid. "We really enjoy exercising, and Oman has so many great assets — with wonderful geography and climate. We need to take extra care in the hotter months, but exercise has been a great way for us both to cope with all that Covid has thrown at us."

"We have seen a lot more people out exercising in 2021 —

runs in this Test which contributed to him earning him the Player of the Match award.

Rabada was the most successful bowler in the series on either side with 11 wickets.

West Indies held up for some time when play resumed after lunch but it was only a matter of time before Maharaj removed Kemar Roach and Jayden Seales to seal the win.

Roston Chase, hampered by a thigh strain sustained in the field on the third afternoon, did not bat.

"As a batting unit we let ourselves down but I must really commend the effort of the bowlers," said a dejected Brathwaite. "We were going well but didn't carry on. That hurt us. We know where we went wrong, including some technical stuff, so we have to work on that before the next series." — AFP

SCOREBOARD

South Africa 1st Innings.....	298
West Indies 1st Innings	149
South Africa 2nd Innings	174
West Indies 2nd Innings	
K Brathwaite c Elgar b Rabada	6
K Powell c Nortje b Maharaj	51
S Hope c Markram b Rabada	6
K Mayers c Elgar b Rabada	34
J Blackwood c de Kock b Ngidi	25
J Holder c Petersen b Maharaj	0
J da Silva c Mulder b Maharaj	0
K Roach c Ngidi b Maharaj	27
J Seales c Nortje b Maharaj	7
S Gabriel not out	2
R Chase absent hurt	
Extras (b-4, lb-3, nb-2, w-2)	11
Total (58.3 overs, 9 wkts)	165
Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-26, 3-90, 4-107, 5-107, 6-107, 7-147, 8-158, 9-165	
Bowling: K Rabada 16-3-44-3, L Ngidi 10-2-29-1, K Maharaj 17.3-7-36-5, A Nortje 11-3-35-0, W Mulder 4-0-14-0	

ARGENTINA QUALIFY FOR COPA QUARTERS WITH WIN OVER PARAGUAY



Argentina's footballers react at the end of the match. – AFP

BRASILIA: Argentina ensured their place in the quarterfinals of the Copa America on Monday when they beat Paraguay 1-0 in a game notable for Lionel Messi's record-equalling 147th appearance for the national side.

The victory in Brasilia was Argentina's second 1-0 win in a row in this tournament and their 16th match without defeat since losing in the Copa America semifinal in 2019.

It gives them seven points from three games and leaves them top of Group A, two points ahead of Chile, four ahead of Paraguay and six ahead of Uruguay.

Bolivia are bottom with

no points from two matches so with four of the five teams qualifying for the last eight, Argentina are sure of progressing.

"We're through but we have to keep improving", said defender German Pezzella.

"We had a great first half, our intensity wasn't the same in the second but they didn't have very many chances at goal."

UNBEATEN

Paraguay had never beaten Argentina over 90 minutes in the Copa America, a run that covers 25 matches, and they were up against it as early as the 10th minute when Argentina went ahead.



Paraguay's Miguel Almiron (L) and Argentina's Nahuel Molina vie for the ball. – AFP

Alejandro Gomez took a delightful pass from Angel Di Maria and dinked the ball over the diving keeper.

"Angel's pass was great", said Gomez. "I just had to get my foot under it and put it away."

Argentina thought they had a second when Junior Alonso deflected a cross into his own net on the stroke of half time but the goal was chalked off by the Video Assistant Referee (VAR).

Paraguay came out more positive in a changed second half, with Newcastle United's Miguel Almiron always dangerous on the left wing.

However, although they enjoyed the bulk of the

possession they could not turn it into chances and now face two tricky games against Chile and Uruguay.

For Argentina, Sergio Aguero made his first international start since November 2019 but was anonymous up front and it was Di Maria and Lionel Messi who stood out.

On the night he equalled Javier Mascherano's record of 147 games in the blue and white shirt, Messi was a busy presence in the Paraguayan half. Both he and Di Maria drew fouls from their opponents who ended up committing 23 fouls to Argentina's 11. — Reuters

Vidal own goal breaks Uruguay drought

CUIABA, Brazil: An own goal from Chile's Arturo Vidal midway through the second half gave Uruguay their first goal in five games and granted them a point in a gripping 1-1 Copa America encounter on Monday.

Between them, Chile and Uruguay have won three of the last four Copa America tournaments, but both sides have failed to set this tournament alight. Uruguay did not get a shot on target in their opening 1-0 loss to Argentina, while Chile scraped a draw with Argentina then laboured to beat Bolivia 1-0.

Both teams, thankfully,

showed a bit more verve on a hot and humid night in central Brazil.

Chile started the better side and went ahead after 26 minutes thanks to Eduardo Vargas. Vargas worked a nice one-two with Ben Brereton before lashing an unstoppable shot past goalkeeper Fernando Muslera.

It was Vargas' 14th goal in the tournament, making him the joint fifth-top goal scorer, only three goals behind the leaders on 17.

Uruguay had not scored in their last four games before tonight but they grew as the game went on and got a deserved



Chile's Arturo Vidal in action with Uruguay's Giorgian de Arrascaeta. – Reuters

equaliser midway through the second half.

Matias Vecino nodded a corner into the six-yard box and as Luis Suarez grappled with Vidal the ball was knocked into the roof of the net.

The goal was first given to Suarez but then classed as an own goal and Vidal was replaced moments later after complaining he had been fouled by his former team-mate at Barcelona. There had been some controversy ahead of the game, with Chile admitting some of their players — Vidal was later named as one — breaking the bubble set up to prevent the

spread of Covid-19.

Uruguay got more on top as the game went on and pushed forward in search of a winner, with Suarez and Edinson Cavani both coming close.

But neither side could get a decisive goal and so Chile move into top spot in Group A with five points from three games, one ahead of Argentina, who play Paraguay later on Monday.

Paraguay have three points from one game, while Uruguay have one and Bolivia are pointless after two. The top four from each five-team group qualify for the quarterfinals.

— Reuters

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BP pledges to enhance worker welfare



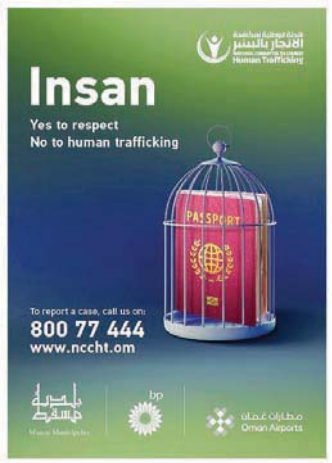
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

As part of a wider focus on labour rights and worker welfare, BP has met with its contractors in an open forum to seek alignment on how to support Oman in being a fair and safe country for all workers.

As well as raising awareness of labour rights and worker welfare policies, BP used the forum to share best practice both from its operations in Oman and globally. The event builds on some important work BP has carried out with contractor companies to improve the quality of their worker welfare policies.

A recent example includes BP's work with local contractor Sarooj Construction which has now adopted enhanced worker welfare policies across all of its operations in Oman; not only within bp contracts.

BP is the strategic partner of Oman's 'Insan' campaign, which aims to raise awareness of human trafficking at a national level, in partnership with the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.



BP President Yousuf al Ojaili commented: "BP's purpose is to reimagine energy for our people and planet. Our sustainability frame, which underpins this purpose and our wider strategy, includes the aim to support a just energy transition that advances human rights and education." "At BP, we believe all humans deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. This forum and the Insan campaign raise awareness of a topic that is not widely discussed in society. It is incredibly important that we start these conversations as they can help protect the well-being of vulnerable people that are prone to being trafficked."

SOHAR a promising hub for clean energy-based industry: Report

SUSTAINABILITY: 'Sohar Port and Freezone is looking to take advantage of excellent resources and its track record of attracting FDI to develop a hub around hydrogen electrolysis': IEA

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Oman's fledging initiatives in support of the country's energy transition goals have been cited by the International Energy Agency (IEA) as illustrative of efforts that emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) must embrace as part of their commitments to mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The Paris-headquartered body, whose mandate is to support countries around the world achieve their secure and sustainable energy goals, has urged emerging and developing economies to accelerate their energy transition to help achieve global climate change abatement objectives.

"If energy transitions and clean energy investment do not quickly pick up speed in emerging and developing economies, the world will face a major fault line in efforts to address climate change and reach other sustainable development goals. This is because the bulk of the growth in global emissions in the coming decades is set to come from emerging and developing economies as they grow, industrialise and urbanise", the Agency warned in its newly published special report on World Energy Investment 2021.

The report, titled 'Financing Clean Energy Transitions in Emerging and Developing Economies', references a number of initiatives that will contribute to the achievement of Oman's energy transition goals.

It noted in particular the planned development of a low-carbon based economy in and around Sohar



Economic zones and port authorities, such as Sohar Port in Oman, are facilitating clean energy planning around industrial hubs, supporting investments in efficiency and potentially low-emissions fuels

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY

Port and Freezone and the nearby industrial city.

"Economic zones and port authorities, such as Sohar Port in Oman, are facilitating clean energy planning around industrial hubs, supporting investments in efficiency and potentially low-emissions fuels", said the report.

It explained: "A potential emerging economy example of an industrial

cluster around clean energy is provided by Oman, where the Sohar Port and Freezone is looking to take advantage of excellent resources and its track record of attracting FDI to develop a hub around hydrogen electrolysis.

"The project is based on joint ownership with an international partner, the Port of Rotterdam — which is also collaborating with Chile on hydrogen projects — as well as technology from a German hydrogen developer and joint development of solar PV with an international oil major.

The project would benefit from some of the sustainability measures that SOHAR has put in place in recent years, including efficiency standards for port buildings and the ongoing establishment of a new LNG liquefaction and bunkering facility, as well as offering discounted port tariffs to ships outperforming international emissions standards", it stated.

Earlier this year, Oman Shell announced the formal launch of its 25-MW Qabas solar plant at Sohar Port and Freezone, demonstrating the commercial benefits of solar power

for industrial purposes. The plant is located on a 50-hectare site within Sohar Freezone and consists of over 88,000 solar modules. The renewable electricity output from Qabas is supplied to a large ferrochrome production facility.

Separately, TotalEnergies plans to set up a 1 million tonnes per annum LNG liquefaction plant at Sohar Port to produce LNG as a low-carbon marine bunker for shipping.

Additionally, the Sultanate has some "good examples" of the use of renewables to power upstream operations in the Oil & Gas sector, according to the IEA report.

Reference is made here to the 1 GW Miraah solar thermal energy project that enables majority state-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to harness the sun's energy to generate superheated steam that produce oil from the Amal West field. Economic zones and port authorities, such as Sohar Port in Oman, are also facilitating clean energy planning around industrial hubs, supporting investments in efficiency and potentially low-emissions fuels, the report added.

Pact signed to supply bunker fuel to Asyad Group ships

EXPANDING FOOTPRINT: Oman Oil Marketing builds greenfield bunker facility at Duqm Port

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed a Memorandum of Strategic Collaboration (MSC) with Asyad Group through its Ship Management arm for the provision of bunker fuels. The agreement, under which OOMCO will supply the OSMC with different grades of marine fuels in all ports of Oman, marks a long-term strategic business collaboration

that seeks to cement the Sultanate's position as a global logistic hub. Hussain bin Jamaa Bait Ishaq, Oman Oil Marketing Company's Acting CEO, said, "OOMCO is already active in bunker supply in all major ports of Oman and this collaboration, with the major player of the country's marine transportation sector, marks another critical milestone in our journey towards creating long-term relationship and develop a sustainable maritime business in Oman. Through it, we will be able to provide high quality fuel to vessels calling at all Oman ports, while contributing to the strategic growth of the bunker business in Oman and



in particular in Duqm Port." Dr Ibrahim bin Bakhit al Nudhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping

& Drydock, added, "It is our aim to place Oman as an effective player in the global maritime industry,

OOMCO provides a complete range of bunker fuel supply and services in all major ports of Oman, including in the Port of Duqm. OOMCO is currently constructing a greenfield bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm to support in providing competitive bunker fuel for all customers calling Duqm Port

contribute to the logistics sector by strengthening the connectivity between Omani ports and global ports. Through this important collaboration, we are creating a strategic platform which will encourage ship owners to call Omani ports, as well as maximising the returns of the shipping sector in the national economy." OOMCO provides a complete range of bunker fuel supply and services in all major ports of Oman, including in the Port of Duqm. OOMCO is currently constructing a greenfield bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm to support in providing competitive bunker fuel for all customers calling Duqm Port.

UK tech needs to address gender gap and invest in women

The pandemic has revealed the fundamental role of technology in society, with entrepreneurs working to find solutions to the greatest challenges. But it has also highlighted the huge inequities across every aspect of society that one can no longer knowingly support or allow. Britain's tech industry needs to address gender gap and invest in women.

UK-based tech companies received record levels of venture capital investment in 2020, securing £10.7bn in an unprecedented year. There has been a strong start to 2021 with a number of highly anticipated tech listings and the London Stock Exchange announcing its best first quarter for IPOs since 2007. But the huge majority of this investment

remains directed to men. Access to funding is fundamental for a company's success and female-led businesses in the UK are missing out. Managing director at Merian Ventures, Alexis de Raadt St. James and Check Warner, partner at Ada Venture, points out that London's all-female led businesses received just £22m, less than 0.5 per cent, of the total £5.3bn VC invested into London's tech firms in the first four months of this year, while 13 per cent went to mixed-gender teams and 87 per cent to all-male founded companies. Extend Ventures' latest report shows Black and Multi-Ethnic entrepreneurs are at an even greater disadvantage, with 0.02 per cent of total VC invested from 2009-2019 going to Black female founders. There is progress, however, with the government committing to increase the number of female



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THERE HAS BEEN A STRONG START TO 2021 WITH A NUMBER OF HIGHLY ANTICIPATED TECH LISTINGS AND THE LONDON STOCK EXCHANGE ANNOUNCING ITS BEST FIRST QUARTER FOR IPOs SINCE 2007. BUT THE HUGE MAJORITY OF THIS INVESTMENT REMAINS DIRECTED TO MEN

entrepreneurs by 50 per cent by 2030 and the UK tech industry working on a host of initiatives and commitments. Like the impressive female founder support programmes Alma Angels, WE-Innovate and AccelerateHER and the important work being done by organisations like Diversity in Tech, YSYS and Colorintech. Yet female entrepreneurs largely remain a missed opportunity for investors and access to VC continues to evade minority founders. Even though women-led firms are shown to perform better over time, female entrepreneurs continue to face barriers accessing funding, particularly at the later stages of VC funding when financing rounds are larger and critical for growth. According to Warner and de Raadt St James, last year, 77 per cent of VC funding rounds into

London-based all-female teams were at seed stage or earlier, while 19 per cent were Series A and only one round was Series B, or late-stage funding. To accelerate the UK's economic recovery and growth, the need is for the brightest minds from all backgrounds to contribute. As such, Ada Ventures and Merian Ventures are partnering with London & Partners, London's business growth agency, to launch Beyond Horizons, a 12-month programme designed specifically to target the funding gap in the UK investment ecosystem. Beyond Horizons will support female founders who are actively seeking Series A funding to secure their next raise, helping them grow their business in the UK, US and beyond. It will help women tap into London's extensive network of investors through a combination of entrepreneurial education, start-

up business support and targeted networking opportunities. Warner and de Raadt St. James report that in London, founders have access to more venture capital and more VC firms than anywhere else in Europe. Yet thousands of the UK's most innovative and talented female founders struggle to find targeted support and financing for their companies. Through transparent commitments from VC firms to create an industry free from bias, like the Diversity VC Standard, Investing in Women Code and Newton Venture Programme, combined with initiatives like Beyond Horizons, the measurable impact can be achieved. This will ensure female entrepreneurs from all backgrounds can access the funding they need consistently. (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Lulu Hypermarket launches vaccination drive for staff

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment towards the safety and well-being of the customers and staff, Lulu Hypermarket has rolled out the Covid-19 vaccination drive to cover all its employees across all hypermarkets in Oman. As the Sultanate of Oman takes significant steps to contain the virus, Lulu has also stepped forward to do its part by launching the vaccination drive. The mass vaccination drive will administer Pfizer vaccines to all its employees. Commenting on the vaccination drive, Nasr Mubarak Salim al Maawali, General Manager - HR stated "Vaccination for everyone is the best way to win this war against Covid-19, and our first and foremost priority is to get all our staff vaccinated at the earliest. Lulu attaches utmost attention to the health and safety of not only its employees but also the society



at large. We have organised this vaccination drive to ensure 100% employee vaccination." "The safety and health of our customers, staff and the community at large is our prime concern. We understand the importance of creating an environment where everyone can feel safe and protected. We express our gratitude to the Ministry of Health and everyone in the first line of defence, including doctors and nursing staff, for their strenuous efforts to combat the pandemic," he added.

Mazoon Electricity launches vaccination drive

MUSCAT: In line with its endeavour to ensure the health and wellbeing of its employees, Mazoon Electricity launched a Covid-19 vaccination campaign for all its employees. The drive aims to reinforce the objectives of Oman government's national vaccination campaign launched to contain the spread of the virus. The company is running a Covid-19 vaccination campaign for its employees in direct coordination with Nama Group and cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The initiative is in line with Mazoon Electricity's ongoing efforts to get all the employees of the company vaccinated and ensure their safety from the pandemic. Eng Saleem Nasser Saleem al Mahrouqi, Senior Manager QHSE of Mazoon Electricity said, "We are conducting the vaccination drive in accordance with the government's guidance so that the chain of virus transmission



can be broken. The health and safety of our employees is our topmost priority at Mazoon Electricity. The key to curbing the infection is to get as many people vaccinated as early as possible. We strongly encourage all to receive the vaccination to minimise the risk of infectious disease in the workplace. By choosing to

be vaccinated, they protect not only themselves and their family but the community as well." He added, "We keep on monitoring the latest updates about the Covid-19 pandemic and take necessary actions to safeguard the health of our employees, customers and the larger community."

MBPS concludes 2nd drilling fluids graduates programme

MUSCAT: Mohammed Al Barwani Petroleum Services (MBPS) concluded recently its 2nd drilling fluids graduate training programme with the graduation of 15 engineers specialised in drilling fluids. The programme is the second of its kind after the launch of the 1st edition in 2015 to train and develop 25 Omani drilling fluids engineers. The 2nd edition began in October 2019 to develop 15 drilling fluids engineers for a period of 18 months in over 13



subjects, including Hydraulic Calculation, Chemistry, and HSE, in addition to a number of theoretical and practical subjects to be implemented at drilling

locations. Salim al Harthy, the CEO of MBPS said: "The programme has proven its exceptional success in allowing the graduates to work independently on site. It has led to the localisation and Omanisation of over 40 highly skilled jobs in the past five years. I am pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate all our graduates who completed the programme." Ahmed al Khadhouri, Drilling Fluids Manager at MBPS, added: "We thank our client PDO for supporting upskilling

Omani talents and providing them with highly skilled work opportunities. This programme is unique in its structure, where it allows candidates to gain real work experience and become independent during their training. We also appreciate the efforts from the Ministry of Labor in supporting such programmes across the Sultanate, and we are ready to coordinate with oil and gas companies to train and develop Omani drilling fluid engineers and empower them at their respective worksites."

BankDhofar ranks among Forbes' 'Top 50 Banks in the ME'



MUSCAT: In recognition of its prominent role in the growth and development of the Omani banking sector and national economy, BankDhofar — the second largest bank in Oman by assets and market share — ranked among *Forbes*' 'Top 50 Banks in the Middle East' list featuring Middle East & North Africa (MENA) banking giants that drive the region's economy. To construct the list, *Forbes* gathered data from listed stock exchanges across the Arab world and ranked companies based on sales, profits, assets and market value. "Time and again BankDhofar stands out and proves to be one of the best banks in the region - not only in customer experience but also in operations and business growth," said Abdul Hakeem al Ojaili (pictured), Chief Executive Officer of BankDhofar. "We have been working constantly to reinforce BankDhofar's role as a key player in the Omani private sector and as a major contributor in driving the development and growth of the national economy."

Majid Al Futtaim unveils upcoming Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail, and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and Mall of Oman held a virtual event that brought over 200 retailers together. The event — held online for everyone's safety — gave future tenants the opportunity to explore a transformational development for the future of retail in Muscat. Husam al Mandhari - Director of the shopping malls at Majid Al Futtaim Properties in Oman, discussed the much-anticipated arrival of the Mall of Oman in September 2021,

welcomed the latest partners, and updated the tenants on the latest developments. For the first time, Majid Al Futtaim showcased the exterior and interior of the mall so that tenants could explore it for themselves — virtually at least. Tenants were also given additional information about how they will be supported by the Retail Design and Delivery team to deliver best in class store fit-outs. Mall of Oman will become Majid Al Futtaim's fifth and largest shopping and entertainment destination in Oman, with an impressive 140,000



sqm of retail space. Comprising over 350 retail outlets including 55 dining options (from restaurants to cafes), the

mall will house a range of unique entertainment and leisure offerings for all ages. These include, Oman's largest VOX Cinemas with 15 screens, the first GOLD experience in Oman, a 3D cinema, KIDS and IMAX experiences; the largest indoor snow park in the Sultanate spanning over 14,000 sqm; and the largest Magic Planet in the country, which features award-winning rides, games and attractions for the whole family. As a premier shopping destination, the mall will feature world-class brands from leading regional retail

companies such as Max Fashion and Centrepont from the Landmark group; Hollister from Majid Al Futtaim; Marks & Spencer from Al Futtaim Group; LC Waikiki, R&B, and SMYK from the Apparel group; and brands by the Al Shamsi group. In addition, Mall of Oman will include famous outlets like Homes R Us, Matalan, Sharaf DG, and a 12,200 sqm Carrefour Hypermarket, as well as new and exclusive concepts such as Dior Boutique, Under Armour, Decathlon, 2XL Furniture, Lefties, L'Occitane en Provence, New Yorker and more.



In brief

■ LONDON

UK MANUFACTURING
ORDERS RISE MOST
SINCE 1988, SURVEY SAYS

British manufacturers reported the strongest growth in new orders since 1988, the latest Industrial Trends Survey results from the Confederation of British Industry showed on Tuesday.

The order book balance rose to 19 per cent in June from 17 per cent in May.

In three months to June, manufacturing output volumes increased at the fastest pace on record.

The balance indicating output volume, surged to 37 per cent from 18 per cent in May. Growth was driven by the motor vehicles and transport equipment and food, drink and tobacco sub-sectors. — **dpa**

■ LUXEMBURG

YOUTUBE WINS USER
COPYRIGHT FIGHT IN
TOP EU COURT RULING

Google's YouTube has scored a win in its latest copyright-infringement challenge after Europe's top court said online platforms are not liable for users uploading unauthorised works unless the platforms failed to take quick action to remove or block access to the content.

The case marks the latest development in a long-running battle between Europe's \$1 trillion creative industry and online platforms, with the former seeking redress for unauthorised works that are uploaded.

"As currently stands, operators of online platforms do not, in principle, themselves make a communication to the public of copyright-protected content illegally posted online by users of those platforms," the EU Court of Justice said.

— **Reuters**

■ MADRID

SPAIN TO RAISE \$9.5BN
FROM NEW 10-YEAR
BOND

Spain will raise 8 billion euros from a new 10-year bond on the back of over 74 billion euros of investor demand, according to a memo from two lead managers.

The bond, due on October 31, 2031, will price at a spread of 8 basis points above Spain's outstanding bond due in April 2031 later on Tuesday, an earlier memo said, down from around 10 basis points when the sale started earlier in the day.

Demand is higher than the 55 billion euros Spain received for another 10-year debt sale in January. — **Reuters**

G20 to endorse deal on
global corporate tax

'Family Photo' for the annual G20 Summit World Leaders is projected onto Salwa Palace in At-Turaif in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia, in this file photo. — **Reuters**

BRUSSELS: The world's financial leaders will endorse on July 9-10 a deal setting a global minimum corporate tax and call for technical work to be finished so they can approve the framework for implementation in October, their draft communique showed.

"After many years of discussions and building on the progress made last year, we have achieved an historical agreement on a new, fair and stable international tax architecture," the draft said. It made no mention of a specific rate for a global minimum corporate tax nor other key

details, which remain to be agreed by nearly 140 countries known as the Inclusive Framework meeting online next week in talks hosted by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Details agreed at that meeting will then be sent to finance ministers and central bank governors from the world's 20 biggest economies (G20) for approval at the July 9-10 meeting in Venice.

"We endorse the core elements of the two pillars on the profit reallocation of

multinational enterprises and the global minimum tax as set out in the statement released by the G20/OECD Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)," the G20 draft said in anticipation of the talks next week.

The first "pillar" of the OECD agreement is to ensure that international companies, especially digital giants like Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple or Microsoft, pay taxes in countries where they make profits, rather than in low-tax jurisdictions chosen to minimise tax payments. — **Reuters**

Funding hydrogen's rapid evolution?



BADAR CHAUDHRY

How do investors feel about a hydrogen market that is expected to be valued at \$300bn by 2027, according to Global Market Insights? In short, mixed — but sentiment is certainly strengthening.

As the world recovers from what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called the worst economic depression in nearly 100 years, and big oil faces soaring environmental pressure, the allure of hydrogen has intensified.

This is especially true for green and blue hydrogen, which both support climate goals to varying degrees, and the appetite is only expected to continue. Hydrogen use overall is expected to climb seven-fold by 2050, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Bullish push

Against this backdrop, there is understandable interest among investors, both private and public. This is especially true in regions, like the Middle East, which want to capture a first-mover advantage in becoming a hydrogen hub.

Examples this year in the Middle East alone include the start of the Abu Dhabi Hydrogen Alliance by ADNOC, Mubadala, and ADQ; the alliance aims to spur the Emirate's role as a leader in green and blue hydrogen.

In Saudi Arabia, Air Products,



ACWA Power and NEOM signed a \$5bn deal for a world-scale green hydrogen-based ammonia production facility powered by renewable energy.

And Oman's OQ, with its partners, will produce 25GW of renewable solar and wind energy to generate millions of tonnes of green hydrogen per year.

Sitting on the fence

What is equally understandable, however, is other investors' hesitation. For some, it is a case of too much change too soon. Many are just getting to grips with renewable markets amid the energy transition and adding another market to the list is a step too far, especially amid a pandemic.

This certainly applies to many investors who have long specialised outside energy markets or in big oil for decades and now find they face a steep, green learning curve.

Plus, the cost of building a hydrogen economy tends to be higher than other sources of low-carbon energy, such as solar and wind. And hydrogen is generally a riskier bet right now than other greener energy markets, with both green and blue hydrogen largely untested as sizeable and scalable

projects. And of course, these in turn often demand bigger, longer-term financial commitments too.

Security in track records?

The narrative of hesitation among investors that hovers over hydrogen is not a new one. It echoes the initial to-and-fro that surrounded the development of the renewables market — an even harder sell in what was then a world of \$100/bbl of oil.

Eventually, after more than a decade of stagnated moves, the push by climate activists and pioneering investors has truly paid off. Solar power prices have fallen by more than 90 per cent over the last decade, according to Bloomberg Green. This marks a dramatic turnaround for a niche market that only the most adventurous of investors deemed worthy.

Today, renewable power is increasingly cheaper than any new electricity capacity based on fossil fuels. Not even the most optimistic climate activist or the most reluctant investor could have imagined this new dynamic ten years ago. There is no reason the same push will not pay off for the development of green and blue hydrogen markets.

Oil prices fall slightly
on profit taking

WASHINGTON: Oil prices fell slightly on Tuesday amid profit taking after rallying the previous day on hopes for a quick recovery in demand in the US and Europe.

Brent crude futures for August settlement dropped 47 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$74.43 per barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures for July delivery were down 50 cents, or 0.7 per cent, at \$72.62 a barrel.

Brent jumped 1.9 per cent and WTI climbed 2.8 per cent in the previous session.

Both benchmarks have risen for the past four weeks on hopes of economic revival and expected pick-up in summer travel on the back

of increasing vaccination coverage.

Meanwhile, expectations for an early return of Iranian crude faded after Ebrahim Rais emerged as the winner of June 18 elections. He's due to take over from Rouhani in mid-August.

BofA Global Research raised its Brent crude price forecasts for this year and next, saying the global oil market will continue to be under supplied.

Goldman Sachs is expecting firmer oil prices moving forward. The American Petroleum Institute is due to release its latest estimates of US crude oil supply data later in the day. — **dpa**



A car attendant refuels a car at a gas station in Beijing. — **Reuters**

Opec+ discusses
further easing
of oil cuts from
August

A 3D-printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo in this illustration picture. — **Reuters**

DUBAI: Opec+ is discussing a further easing of oil output cuts from August as oil prices rise on demand recovery, but no decision had been taken yet on the exact volume to bring back to the market, two Opec+ sources said on Tuesday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as Opec+, is returning 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) to the market from May through July as part of a plan to gradually unwind last year's record oil output curbs.

Opec+ meets next on July 1. "It is highly possible to increase gradually from August," said one of the sources, adding that no final decision had been made and the exact volumes are yet to be agreed on.

The talks mean that Opec and Russia are likely to find common ground again on oil production policy. Moscow has been insisting on raising output further to avoid prices spiking, while key Opec producers, such as Saudi Arabia, have given no signals on the next step until now. — **Reuters**

Guiding beacons

Equally, proactive steps must be made to help investors quickly feel more comfortable, notably when it comes to regulatory goalposts. For example, Europe's comprehensive Hydrogen Strategy defines clear goals within relatively short timelines, giving investors more clarity and tangibility.

As the world grapples with the economic and social impact of the pandemic, such markers from governments and regulatory bodies are invaluable. Plus, policy schemes, such as contract for differences (CFDs) or regulated asset-based models, can be used to help provide greater certainty to investors across various parts of the hydrogen supply chain, Deloitte said.

The same applies to stimulating innovation and research to help integrate different energy systems and to provide a system-wide view of hydrogen's role.

Clearly, there is still a long way to go. For one, the cost of producing hydrogen from renewables will need to fall by more than 50 per cent to \$2-\$2.5/kg by 2030 to make hydrogen a viable alternative to conventional fuels, detailed S&P Global Ratings. This is achievable with solar or wind production costs of \$20-\$30/MWh and a 30-50 per cent cut in the cost of electrolyzers.

This ambitious target is certainly doable, but not without more investors taking a seat at the hydrogen table. The sooner those seats are filled, the sooner costs will fall and a market that many are calling the oil of the 21st century can truly flourish.

[Badar Chaudhry is Senior Vice President, Sector Head – Energy, Mashreq Bank]

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features

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Showing the hidden potentials of Oman through painting, photography and recycling

Multi-skilled artist Intisar al Ghanbousi has perfectly captured the bond between a child and her father through her artwork she called 'Don't Let Go of My Hand', which she proudly dedicated to her father. But other than being a sculpture, she's also a gifted painter and photographer who champions recycling. Check out her story... **P20**

COMMUNITY UPDATE

READ

THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER
BY BILL CLINTON AND JAMES PATTERSON

Matthew Keating, a past president and former Navy SEAL, goes on his own to find his abducted teenage daughter.

Model traffic school educating children on traffic safety

THE TRAFFIC SAFETY School in the Wilayat of Saham in North Al Batinah Governorate is working to teach children and schoolstudents traffic rules that contribute to achieving safety and precautionary measures. The school is part of the projects of the Traffic Safety Committee in the Wilayat of Saham under the supervision of the office of the Wali of Saham and with funding from the private sector, within the

yard of the Al Israa School for Basic Education. The committee recently handed it over to the General Directorate of Education in the North Al Batinah Governorate to manage and operate it. Shaikh Awadh bin Abdullah al Mandhari, Wali of Saham, Chairman of the Traffic Safety Committee, said, "This model school has begun to achieve its goals for which it was established, which is to educate children and train them on traffic

rules that achieve safety through programmes implemented by the General Directorate of Education, including all students in Saham and neighbouring wilayats. Zainab al Maamari, the school supervisor, said: Coordination has been made with other schools through the General Directorate of Education to send students from different educational levels according to a specific schedule organising the mechanism for their reception while taking all preventive precautions to limit the spread of the Coronavirus. We are preparing a special training programme for each stage separately, where students start from the classroom and then practical application on cars in the school's



traffic roads, and we conclude it with educational cultural competitions on traffic safety laws and rules. "It is a fun and engaging space for children of different ages to develop important road safety skills and gain confidence on their bicycle and mini-cars. The school is considered an educational con-

struct purely made for planting the seeds of correct traffic mentalities in children. The school is a miniature city filled with roads, intersections, roundabouts, and all sorts of service buildings. Within this, young Omanis are taught all about traffic signs and how to properly obey them."



Al Belaida in Ibri tells deeply rooted history

Ibri is the capital of the northern Al Dhahirah Governorate. A sprawling town with a major highway, linking it to the border town of Buraimi in the northwest and Nizwa in the southeast. It has some sights to keep a visitor busy – including some impressive forts and specifically, Al Belaida village, 65 km far from the centre of the wilayat.

Al Belaida is known for its palm trees, lush shady trees, the gush of running water, and wadis flowing between the mountains and rocks. Tourist can reach it through the Miqniat-Bilad Al Shuhoum road in Ibri

The village is located among the high mountains, where the picturesque nature, beautiful scenery, greenness, an abundance of water, and its lane tell a heritage deeply rooted in history. Its people still maintain the inherent Omani customs.

The village brings together houses that tell of building arts, Omani architecture, and modernity in construction engineering. Many developmental services in the road network, electricity and telephone, water networks have covered the area. It is also visited by many tourists and families because of its unique elements of tourist attractions throughout the year.

The people of the village are still practising their inherited crafts, which they are proud to share with their generations. These crafts cover all the agriculture and various handicraft industries. During special occasions and like other wilayat of Oman, people express their happiness with some Omani folklore songs and dances



CHANGING WORLD

Grande dame of Paris emporiums reopens after 16-year facelift



Parisians will once again be able to stroll the gilded aisles of the Samaritaine department store starting Wednesday, after 16 years of painstaking work to restore the Art Deco and Art Nouveau landmark to its former glory.

Luxury conglomerate LVMH shut the 151-year-old emporium overlooking the Seine river in 2005 when safety inspectors discovered widespread risks including antiquated wiring.

Once a retail anchor for the historic core of the capital between the Louvre and Notre Dame, by then it was losing money and customers no longer interested in its pitch: “You can find everything at La Samaritaine.”

“It was dying,” the store’s chief Jean-Jacques Guiony told journalists on Monday when President Emmanuel Macron visited for the restored site’s inauguration.

Macron, touring alongside Bernard Arnault, LVMH’s chief and one of the world’s richest people, called it “a stunning French cultural treasure.”

For the revamp, LVMH shrank the floor space in the flagship building, a classified monument, by a third and took its offerings firmly upmarket — applying the formula at Le Bon Marche, LVMH’s other temple of luxe in Paris.

Gone is the hunting gear, housewares, tools and toys, despite the historic signs still on the facade.

Instead, think designer fashion labels, an entire floor dedicated to swank watches, two concept stores and a vast beauty and cosmetics department in the basement.

Restaurants, bars and food offerings like Street Caviar by Prunier are spread throughout, while a Cheval Blanc hotel opening in September will offer Seine views and a restaurant with Michelin-starred Arnaud Donckele at the helm.

Rooms start at 1,150 euros (nearly \$1,400) a night, and the two-storey rooftop penthouse will have its own pool, spa and cinema and a private elevator direct to the street. Price upon request.

“You’ll no longer find everything at La Samaritaine, but you will find all of Paris at La Samaritaine,” said Eleonore de Boysson, Europe director at LVMH’s DFS retailing arm.

COMPLICATED

Opened in 1870 by Ernest Cognac, a travelling salesman, and expanded with his wife Louise Jay, the four Samaritaine stores became a fixture of Paris culminating in a 1930s golden age.

He named it La Samaritaine after a pump on the nearby Pont Neuf bridge that depicted the Gospel story of the woman of Samaria offering water to Jesus.

It’s the bridge Matt Damon’s character spies on from the Samaritaine’s roof in the 2002 thriller “The Bourne Identity” -- though the huge lettered sign he stands behind won’t be replaced.

The work was originally expected to last three to six years, but delays emerged as LVMH sought out hundreds of artisans across France capable of restoring mosaics and other artworks.

They also discovered that an elegant, golden-hued peacock fresco, an Art Nouveau masterpiece extending along the walls under the glass atrium roof, had been covered in white paint in the 1990s.

A court battle with residential and heritage groups angry over a new undulating glass facade on one section, designed by the Pritzker-winning Japanese firm Sanaa, also went to France’s top court before LVMH was allowed to proceed.

Press reports say the budget climbed to 750 million euros, an amount executives have not officially confirmed but quietly concede is in the ballpark.

“Renovating is much more complicated to do than just rebuild,” Guiony said.

IT’S A REBIRTH

As part of the project negotiated with City Hall, much of the store was converted into office space as well as 97 low-income housing units and a child daycare centre.

One building will be rented to Japanese fast-fashion specialist Uniqlo and other shops.

LVMH also carved out an esplanade complete with fountains where cars used to whiz past, making it easier to marvel at the ornate facades and hopefully drawing more Parisians as well as tourists.

The store and hotel alone will create 2,100 jobs, further revitalising a district that has seen a spate of recent projects, including the new Bourse de Commerce art museum by Arnault’s luxury rival Francois Pinault.

But only a handful of the nearly 750 employees abruptly dismissed 16 years ago have been rehired -- dozens were interviewed but LVMH requires sales staff to speak at least three languages.

“It’s a rebirth,” said Mourad Khati, 53, a manager once again on site. “I first started when I was 21, having just arrived from Kabylia” in Algeria.

“In those days it was more working-class,” he said. “Today it’s very high-end.” —AFP



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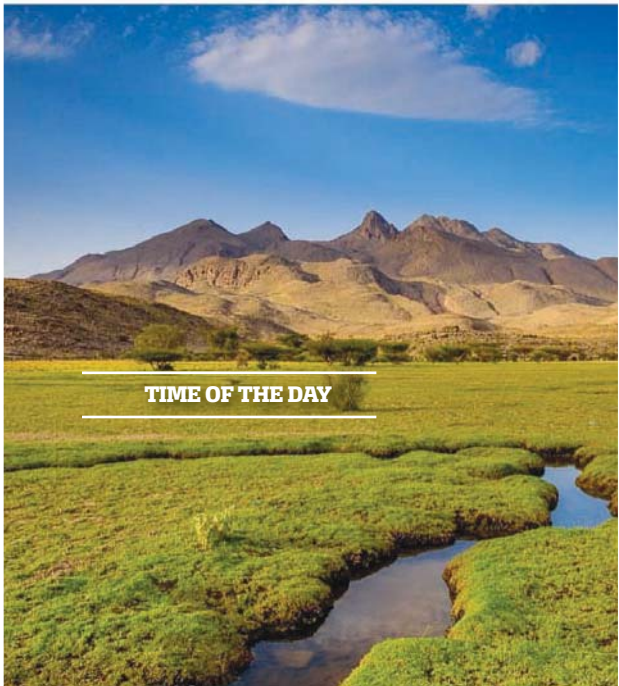
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ENTERTAINMENT



Blockbusters are back: New 'Fast & Furious' aims to jolt US movie-going

HOLLYWOOD IS FINALLY revving up the summer blockbuster engines for the first time since Covid-19 idled the movie business.

"F9," the ninth instalment in the popular "Fast & Furious" saga, hits US and Canadian cinemas on Thursday night. The movie is the first big-budget action spectacle being released exclusively in theatres this year.

Cinema operators hope "F9" will kick-start domestic ticket sales to help them recover from extended closures and restricted reopening with few new movies to show.

Comcast Corp's Universal Pictures postponed the May 2020 release to give fans the chance to safely watch "F9" on a big screen in a crowd, director Justin Lin said.

"When we make these movies, it's about connection," Lin said in an interview. "It's about people going to the cinemas with their friends and family, to be able to hopefully cheer together and laugh together with strangers."

The "Fast" saga started as a story about illegal street racing and evolved into the tale of a close-knit team involved in heists and espionage. It is one of Hollywood's most successful franchises, collecting more than \$5 billion worldwide since the first film in 2001.

In the latest chapter, Dom (Vin Diesel) and Letty (Michelle Rodriguez) are living a quiet life with a young son when they are asked to help thwart a dangerous plot. The movie offers the seat-rattling car chases the franchise is famous for, and ups the drama when a rocket propels a car into space.

Along the way, Dom must "come to terms with whatever acts of the past to have hope for the future," Lin said, a theme that may resonate with pandemic-weary audiences.

"I can relate to that," he said. "It's something that we're all going through."

The film also brings back beloved character Han (Sung Kang), who was killed off in the third "Fast" movie, sparking a fan outcry. John Cena joins the cast as a villain, and rapper Cardi B makes a cameo appearance. Overseas ticket sales are nearing \$300 million.

The US and Canadian cinemas need a lift. Box office receipts plummeted 81% in 2020 from a year earlier to \$2.1 billion. Sales so far for 2021 stand at about \$881 million.

"F9" will be followed this summer by Marvel's "Black Widow" and "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," a "Space Jam" remake starring LeBron James, G.I. Joe spinoff "Snake Eyes," and DC Comics movie "The Suicide Squad," among others.

But challenges loom for independent operators and big chains including AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc, Cineworld Plc's Regal, and Cinemark Holdings Inc.

About 20% of US theatres remain closed, and some still limit capacity. It is unclear how many people feel safe sitting indoors around others who may not be vaccinated, or whether some may be happy watching streaming services at home.

"It comes down to consumer sentiment," said Shawn Robbins, chief analyst at BoxOfficePro.com. "That is really the unknown factor."

Jim Orr, Universal's president of domestic distribution, said he is optimistic about the prospects for "F9" as restrictions continue to relax. At least two-thirds of theatres are open in every major US market.

"We couldn't be more pleased with the opportunity in front of us to really just ignite the domestic box office," Orr said. "Everything's trending in the right direction." — **Reuters**

MUSIC

'Appalled' Billie Eilish apologises for racial slur in resurfaced video



BILLIE EILISH has apologised after a video surfaced appearing to show the American singer mouthing a racial slur and putting on accents.

In a statement posted on Instagram, the multiple Grammy Award winner said she was "appalled and embarrassed" by the edit, which she said was from when she was 13 or 14 years old and in which she can be seen mouthing the slur.

"I am appalled and embarrassed and want to barf that I ever mouthed along to that word," Eilish, now 19, said.

"This song was the only time I'd ever heard that word as it was never used around me by anyone in my family. Regardless of my ignorance and age at the time, nothing excuses the fact is that it was hurtful. And for that I am sorry."

A compilation video shared on TikTok this month also showed another clip which Eilish said was her speaking in a "silly gibberish made up

voice," something she said she had done since childhood when talking to "pets, friends, and family".

"It ... is in no way an imitation of anyone or any language, accent, or culture in the slightest," she said.

"Anyone who knows me has seen me goofing around with voices my whole life. Regardless of how it was interpreted, I did not mean for any of my actions to have caused hurt to others."

Following a spate of attacks on Asian Americans since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, US President Joe Biden last month signed into law the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act.

"I'm being labelled something that I am not," Eilish said, adding that she was addressing the video clip after fans had asked her to respond.

"I... have always worked hard to use my platform to fight for inclusion, kindness, tolerance, equity and equality." — **Reuters**

South Korean band SEVENTEEN show more mature sound in new EP

K-POP STARS SEVENTEEN say their latest EP "Your Choice" and lead single "Ready to Love" show off a more mature concept and sound but the motivations behind their music remain the same.

Formed in 2015 in South Korea, the band has racked up more than 2 billion streams worldwide, and is best known for hits such as "HOME; RUN" and "Left & Right." SEVENTEEN is riding on the smash success of two back-to-back albums last year - "... (Semicolon)" and "Henggarae" each sold over a million copies.

"Rather than saying that we've matured in a specific way, we've just always tried to sincerely convey our most honest emotions through our music and lyrics," said S.COUPS, rapper and leader of the group.

With 13 members and 3 units, the group produces much of their own material, from the music down to their choreography.

"I think a huge strength of SEVENTEEN's producing is that the members have a very deep understanding of our album," said member SEUNGKWAN, "and an even deeper affection for it."

Group members say their fans, known as CARATS, inspire them to bring out a better album each and every time.

"We believe that we should give back as much love as we have received, so with every album, we do our best to deliver quality music and performances with a greater sense of responsibility," said another member, MINGYU. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL

'World's happiest country' seeks migrants



REPEATEDLY DUBBED the happiest nation on the planet with world-beating living standards, Finland should be deluged by people wanting to relocate, but in fact, it faces an acute workforce shortage.

"It's now widely acknowledged that we need a spectacular number of people to come to the country," recruiter Saku Tihverainen from agency Talented Solutions told AFP.

Workers are needed "to help cover the cost of the greying generation", the recruiter explained.

While many Western countries are battling weak population growth, few are feeling the effects as sharply as Finland.

With 39.2 over-65s per 100 working-age people, it is second only to Japan in the extent of its ageing population, according to the UN, which forecasts that by 2030 the "old-age dependency ratio" will rise to 47.5.

The government has warned that the nation of 5.5 million needs to practically double immigration levels to 20,000-30,000 a year to maintain public services and plug a looming pensions deficit.

Finland might seem like an attractive destination on paper, scoring high in international comparisons for quality of life, freedom and gender equality, with little corruption, crime and pollution.

But anti-immigrant sentiment and a reluctance to employ outsiders are also widespread in Western Europe's most homogenous society, and the opposition far-right Finns Party regularly draws substantial support during elections.

TIPPING POINT

After years of inertia, businesses and government "are now at the tipping point and are recognising the problem" posed by a greying population, said Charles Mathies, a research fellow at the Academy of Finland.

Mathies is one of the experts consulted by the government's "Talent Boost" programme, now in its fourth year, which aims to make the country more attractive internationally, in part through local recruitment schemes.

Those targeted include health workers from Spain, metalworkers from Slovakia, and IT and maritime experts from Russia, India and Southeast Asia.

But previous such efforts have petered out. In 2013, five of the eight Spanish nurses recruited to the western town of Vaasa left after a few months, citing Finland's exorbitant prices, cold weather and notoriously complex language.

Finland has nonetheless seen net immigration for much of the last decade, with around 15,000 more people arriving than leaving in 2019.

But many of those quitting the country are higher-educated people, official statistics show.

Faced with the OECD's largest skilled worker shortage, some Finnish startups are creating a joint careers site to better bag overseas talent.

"As you can imagine, this is a slow burner," Shaun Rudden from food delivery firm Wolt said in an email, adding that "We try to make the relocation process as painless as possible."

"Ranking have 'not yet helped as much as we could have hoped."

"If you stop someone in the street in Paris or London or Rome or New York, I still don't think most people know — **AFP**



Showing the hidden potentials of Oman through painting, photography and recycling

By Mai Al Abri

This week, on June 20 to be specific, the world celebrated Father's Day — a time dedicated to honouring fathers for all the sacrifices they made for their families.

Multi-skilled artist Intisar al Ghanbousi has perfectly captured the bond between a child and her father through her artwork she called 'Don't Let Go of My Hand', which she proudly dedicated to her father.

"The relationship between daughters and their fathers is one of the most heartwarming and strong bonds there is especially when a father is fully involved in her daughter's life and dedicated his time and actually treat her like a princess showered with love", she said.

Intisar's father is an inspiration among fathers having supported her in many of her dreams and helping her to achieve what she dreamt of. As a way of honouring this special bond, she was pushed by a powerful drive to finish the said piece.

"My father was among the many powerful reasons that pushed me to come up with some of my most inspired works", she said.

"Made from clay and sculpted with my father in mind, this is a message of thanks to all fathers in the world for the way they care for their daughters", she said.

As a young Omani artist, Intisar's attention couldn't be centred into one type of art. Other than sculpture, she is also a gifted painter and also dabbles in photography.

Her subjects also differ finding inspiration from everything she sees around her. One of the areas of focus she has is nature.

"People who want a closer relationship with the natural world should be looking for ways to engage their emotions. Often, people associate nature with the countryside. While this is great, it is not always easily accessible for everybody", Intisar said.

"I am lucky to have this access and thus, focus on the heritage side of Oman believing that the past is the main component of the present development", she added.

"This access to heritage sites influences the emotions of the artist, forcing him or her to unwittingly create marvellous pictures of each scene", she said.

Al Ghanbousi focuses also on recycling materials to use in her art.

"Glass bottles, plastic bags and other waste that would end up filling landfills or floating in the sea, have in the hands of some artists, become a form of sustainable art that highlights the degradation of the

planet and surprises with its originality. For me, I use only wood and turtle shells", she said.

"Today's society generates an enormous amount of waste. As a result, recycling has become an essential action to protect the environment. She adds, saying that each individual can play a role to prevent this pollution, and to artists, this waste is a material that they collect from nature and reproduced into a beautiful art".

"Just like us, our waste also deserves a second chance and recycling has led to the emergence of an artistic movement known as recycled art, that is currently inspiring many artists around the world with its critical message regarding excessive consumption and environmental pollution", she said.

Intisar explains that it takes her days or months to finish one work, depending on the style, the form of art, the surrounding factors around her.

"In architectural photography, as I am very interested in this field, it takes time to study a building's form and then experiment with various angles, settings, timing and effects to achieve unique and interesting shots. The most famous buildings and landscapes have been photographed thousands of times, so it's key to find a new approach to make your image stand out".

Another side of creativity that Intisar practices are decorative art.

"It is one of the fine arts known since ancient times and is used as an aesthetic view. It is made up of dots, lines, geometric shapes and some repetitive botanical drawings that are intertwined and coordinated wonderfully. I am inspired by the decorations on doors, windows, ornaments and old local beliefs. I rely on two styles in one artwork and I use digital printing", she said.

"The gold colour always seems attractive to the eye, that is why I use it in most of my decorative artworks".

