

RAO receives first batch of job-seekers

In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to speed up the implementation of the employment initiatives for national job-seekers, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, on Tuesday received the first batch of citizens, amid precautionary measures against coronavirus, to receive the basic military training programme. **DETAILS ON P2**



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VISITORS ANEW



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE AT
\$71.80 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Tuesday reached \$71.80, comprising a decline by \$1.42, compared to the price of Monday which stood at \$73.22. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$71.66, thus \$5.26 per barrel higher than July delivery. Meanwhile, Brent crude was up 33 cents in London at \$73.28 per barrel. US crude inched up to \$71.56 a barrel while gold and industrial metal copper were both slightly lower at \$1,810.45 per ounce and 9,594.50 a tonne respectively.

QATAR ARMED FORCES
CHIEF ARRIVES IN OMAN

Ghanem Shaheen al Ghanim, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in the State of Qatar, and his accompanying delegation arrived in Muscat on Tuesday on an official several-day visit. The Qatari military official was received at Al Seeb Air Base by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and senior SAF officers. — ONA



READ IN

OPINION P9

Olympians brave the virus without cheers and applause
SAMUEL KUTTY

Feel the pain of others...
Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla

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MISSING BELARUS EXILE GROUP
LEADER FOUND DEAD IN KIEV

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Assigned by HM, Sayyid Badr to attend swearing-in ceremony of Iran President

Sultanate and Iran agree to boost bilateral cooperation

TEHRAN: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a session of talks with Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran.

The session reviewed the bilateral relations and the joint cooperation in different spheres between the two countries. The two sides affirmed their keenness in enhancing those relations to serve their joint interests for the good of their peoples. The session also touched on regional and international developments of mutual interest.

Sayyid Badr underscored the



Sayyid Badr with Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran on Tuesday.

importance of continuing to work on finding consensus in political solutions through peaceful dialogue and by backing all efforts exerted to achieve peace and security in the region.

On his turn, Dr Zarif commended the historical relations between the two countries, and the wise political role played by the Sultanate in dealing calmly with different issues. He also stressed the importance of the joint and multilateral cooperation, as well as the endeavours of establishing peace and stability.

The session was attended by Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, Oman's Ambassador to Iran, and officials from the two countries' foreign ministries.

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Badr arrived in Tehran earlier on Tuesday to represent the Sultanate in the swearing-in ceremony of the Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi. Sayyid Badr was received upon his arrival by Iranian officials and members of the Omani Embassy in Tehran.

— ONA

OVER 6,000 SCHOOL
STUDENTS GET JOBS

SULTANATE SEES DROP IN NEW COVID-19 CASES

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Large number of children aged 12 and above turned up with their parents to get the first dose of the vaccine against Covid-19 on Tuesday.

This is part of the ongoing National Immunisation Drive to administer the second dose of the vaccine from Sunday for people who have completed 10 weeks from the date of the first dose.

"A parent or a teacher has to register their ward's name on the Tarassud plus app or the Ministry of Health's website for the slot and visit the centre upon confirmation. We are expecting a greater number of children aged 12 and above in the coming days" said Dr Nada al Barwani, In-charge of the vaccination programme.

She further said that the

A parent or a teacher has to register their ward's name on the Tarassud plus app or the Ministry of Health's website for the slot and visit the centre upon confirmation

**DR NADA
AL BARWANI**
In-charge of programme

procedures have been made simple suiting the working hours of the parent who accompanies the child.

As many as 6,000 children were given the jabs before noon and

the rest followed in the afternoon, according to her.

Oman continued to witness a declining trend in the number of fresh Covid-19 cases with 309 new cases and 9 deaths reported on Tuesday. A total of 504 patients recovered taking the total recoveries to 280,927.

"The decreasing number of cases is the result of total lockdown and night lockdown which were imposed from time to time," said Dr Faryal bint Ali bin Khamis al Lawatiyah, Senior Consultant and Head of Infection Diseases Section — Internal Medicine Department at the Royal Hospital. Coming months too should show a decline in cases which will also be reflected on the number of patients in the intensive care units of various hospitals, she said.

SEE P2

NEW BATCH OF POLICE
PERSONNEL GRADUATES



A new batch of police recruits graduated from the Institute of Police Recruits at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in Nizwa, on Tuesday. The graduates were distributed in different units of the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

DETAILS ON P3

Omani physiologist among 'inspiring women' at Oxford University

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 3

Marking 100 years since the first woman was admitted to the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, Dr Sulaima bint Amer al Barwaniyah, Professor of Physiology at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and a graduate of physiology and anatomy from University of Oxford, has been named among the inspiring women of the department's society during her study at the university. Hence, her photo was displayed on the wall

of one of the department's lecture rooms along with photos of other inspiring women.

Dr Sulaima al Barwaniyah joined the University of Oxford's physiology laboratory in 1991 and after obtaining her PhD from the University of Oxford in 1994, she returned to her job at the department of physiology, College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University to become the first female Omani physiologist. Dr Al Barwaniyah obtained professorship in physiology and her



research focused on the remodelling of vascular ion channels in various physiological and pathological conditions such as physical exercise, aging and high blood pressure.

In 1998, Dr Al Barwaniyah returned to the University of Oxford at the department of pharmacology for a short research visit. In 2000 she was awarded the Fulbright Fellowships for senior researchers by the US government to work on potassium channels in the cerebral circulation at the University of Wisconsin.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 31°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 44°C Min 30°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:38 FAJR: 04:16 DHUHR: 12:18 ASR: 15:42 MAGHRIB: 18:53 ISHA: 20:10

Riyada to launch three incubators for SMEs in free zones

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Riyada (The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development) is gearing up to launch three incubators and business centres in special economic zones and free zones, to groom entrepreneurs and promote growth.

These incubators will help small and medium enterprises to enhance their contributions to the development of special economic and free zones.

The Authority has identified the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the Sohar Free Zone, and the Salalah Free Zone, for the launch.

Around 30 small and medium-sized enterprises will benefit from the services of incubators and business centres in areas related to investment.

The total number of SMEs registered in SEZD until June was about 840, while 46 new enterprises were registered until June this year.

Riyada announced that the cumulative value of the works allocated to small and medium enterprises for the ongoing projects is RO 63.716 million.

Halima al Zari, Chairperson of the Authority, visited a number of projects and institutions in Al Wusta Governorate including Duqm, and held a number of meetings

The Authority has identified the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the Sohar Free Zone, and the Salalah Free Zone, for the launch

with officials to develop the small and medium enterprise sector, craftsmen and prepare them to face the challenges.

The visit highlights the importance of the SMEs sector and the Authority officials urged young people to engage in entrepreneurship, especially projects aiming at national income diversification as well as projects based on innovation, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.

The Authority continues to educate young people about the importance of benefiting from the range of programmes and services, which include training them and enabling them to take advantage of the opportunities available in the economic and free zones.

This is done by linking them to projects implemented by government and private agencies, which will motivate and enhance them to establish projects in a way that ensures their participation in the national economy and , at the same time, ensures the success of and the growth of their projects.

VACCINATION FOR 12 YEARS AND ABOVE COMMENCES



The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education on Tuesday started the vaccination campaign for 12-year-old students in all governorates.

RAO receives first batch of job-seekers

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to speed up the implementation of the employment initiatives for national job-seekers, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, on Tuesday received the first batch of citizens — amid precautionary measures against coronavirus — to receive the basic military training programme.

The RAO employed its expertise and administrative capacities as well as its means of transportation in order to provide a suitable environment for conducting the necessary procedures for the new recruits in a speedy and a seamless manner. — ONA



Dhofar sees influx of tourists; Lockdown reports refuted



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Visitors are flocking to Dhofar to enjoy the khareef season with Salalah clocking temperatures in the twenties. It is ideal time to head to the governorate to beat the stress of pandemic and lockdowns, but one should take note of the timings of night lockdown, follow Covid protocol and ensure safe driving while enjoying the season.

The city has been witnessing the influx of tourists and hotels and hotel apartments are seeing a big surge in the demand this

year, compared to khareef 2020 that was completely washed out in total lockdowns.

One resident in Salalah said that all main roads and junctions in the city are bustling with traffic until 10 pm. "All vaccinated people are allowed to enter the city and generally people are following the precautionary measures imposed by the Supreme Committee. But still, there is this fear of the number of daily infections going up in the coming weeks." However, there are some reports of gatherings and crowding in tourist and commercial sites, hotel and

Hotel and tourism establishments must adhere to the preventive measures and not exceed 50 per cent of room occupancy

residential facilities, and markets. In some cases, people also did not commit to wearing masks.

Oman Meteorology has reported the spread of clouds over parts of Al Wusta and Dhofar with the activity of khareef clouds (fog and low clouds) and mist fall on the

coasts and mountains of Dhofar Governorate. Temperatures in, Salalah, Sadah, Taqah and Mirbat are expected to be 25 Degrees Celsius.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), represented by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar, had recently issued a notice to a hotel for not complying with the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

The ministry stressed all hotel and tourist establishments must follow precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 to

avoid prosecution.

The ministry has issued fresh guidelines for hotels and tourism establishments. The use of hotel facilities is limited to in-house guests during the ban period. Hotel establishments must adhere to preventive measures and not exceed 50 per cent of their capacity. Employees working in hotel establishments can obtain permits from their workplace to pass during the closure period.

The authorities have denied rumours that the Dhofar and Masirah Governorates will be closed until further notice. They

were responding to an image from July 2020 circulated in social media, which said the Dhofar Governorate will be in full lockdown until further notice.

It may be noted that hotels had an occupancy rate of 22.8 per cent in 2020, compared to 41.6 per cent in 2019 and 46 per cent in 2018. In 2020, 130,000 guests spent 202,000 nights in Dhofar compared to 297,000 guests spending 486,000 in 2019 and 271,000 guests spending 495,000 in 2018. Currently, Dhofar has 35 hotels, of which eight have five-star ratings.





New batch of police personnel graduates in Nizwa

NIZWA: A new batch of police recruits graduated from the Institute of Police Recruits at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in Nizwa, on Tuesday.

The graduates were distributed in different units of the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

The graduates underwent

field and physical training and martial arts to improve their military skills as well as training on the duties of police officers.

They also received scientific curricula designed for police recruits which includes police sciences and law that enable them to perform their duties.



Sultanate participates in regional meet on marine environment



MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority (EA), participated in the extraordinary virtual meeting of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME).

Eng Sulaiman bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director General of Nature Preservation, said that EA is effectively practicing its role in preserving marine environment in the Sultanate by following up the services offered in ports, as well as the fishing and shipping activities, the movement of oil tankers and various maritime trade

activities.

Al Akhzami stressed the importance of supporting marine pollution control programmes in the region in order to save marine life from deterioration.

The Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) operates in other countries besides the Sultanate, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The Sultanate's joining to the ROPME was ratified in 1979 as per the Royal Decree No 79/8. — ONA

Oman opens tourism office in China



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has opened a tourism representation office for the Sultanate in China.

The step comes within the context of a comprehensive system to develop and renew marketing plans and programmes being conducted by the Ministry to promote the Sultanate's tourism attractions through its offices abroad.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism deemed it necessary to expand its activities in the Chinese market after the number of tourists from the People's Republic of China increased by 141 per cent in 2018 and 2019 to 219,717.

The office in China will serve as a link connecting visitors of Expo Dubai 2020 to tourism packages that include visiting the Sultanate during the Expo's period.

The tourism representation office will play a role in raising the awareness of target Chinese visitors through campaigns aimed at promoting the Sultanate as a key tourism destination.

The office will also cement ties between local sector partners (companies and hotels) and their Chinese counterparts. It seeks to generate maximum benefits from the tourism sector. The office will establish long range business relations that benefits both sides.

The year-long contract lasts from August 1, 2021 to July 31, 2022, and it is renewable. — ONA

Office will serve as a link connecting visitors of Expo Dubai 2020 to the Sultanate through tourism packages

Over 1.5 million vehicles registered till June

MUSCAT: The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate till June 2021 increased by 0.1% to reach 1,541,562, compared to 1,539,994 till May 2021, according to the statistic released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Vehicles with private registration accounted for 79.2% of the total number of registered vehicles, reaching 1,220,521. As for vehicles with commercial registration, the number reached 232,168 (15.1%), while the number of taxis was 29,078 (1.9%).

The number of rental vehicles stood at 22,760 (1.5%) of the total vehicles registered until the end of June 2021.

The number of government vehicles reached 12,328, while the number of vehicles with temporary registration (temporary inspection, export and import) was 10,687.

The number of registered motorbikes was 6,104, while the driving tutoring vehicles reached 5,792. Meanwhile, the agricultural tractors reached 1,301, and the number of diplomatic vehicles reached 823.

371 deaths from road accidents in 2020

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 3

There were 371 deaths in 2020 due to traffic accidents, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) said in a report. Of these, 238 victims were Omanis and 133 expatriates and 230 of them were men.

Speed accounted for most road

accident deaths (198 or 53 per cent), followed by negligence 56, bad behaviour 47, vehicle defects 27 and overtaking 27.

Ten deaths were due to not leaving a safe distance, eight due to intoxication, and five due to weather.

Most deaths were reported from Muscat (25), Dhofar (28), and North Batinah (31).



Among colours, white was the most preferred colour for vehicles in the Sultanate with 662,718 (43%). Silver was the second choice with 198,269 (12.9%), while gray came as the third most prominent vehicle colour with about 124,200 (8.1%) vehicles.

As for engine capacity, the NCSI report indicated that the majority of vehicles (826,972) have engine capacities between 1500 and 3000cc while 350,218 vehicles have engine capacities between 3001 and 4500cc.

The number of vehicles with engine capacity above 4500cc stood at 200,535.

There were 115,025 vehicles with engine capacity less than 1500cc. About 48,812 vehicles functioned without engines as they were designed and manufactured to be towed by another vehicle.

In terms of weights, the report stated that the majority of vehicles weighed less than 3 tonnes, reaching 1,389,728. As many as 69,910 vehicles weighed more than 10 tonnes.

About 44,963 vehicles weighed from 3 to 7 tonnes and 36,961 vehicles from 7 to 10 tonnes. — ONA



Extend support to
medics and their
families who are under
unprecedented stress
and workload amid
the pandemic

CARING OUR CAREGIVERS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A nurse says his father wants to make sure he comes home not before a day off. He would like to see the son in a video call because he can check if the son is in a hospital uniform or not.

This is just one instance to illustrate the kind of fear and stress stalking the families of medics. The number of Covid-19 cases are falling but the stress on the health staff and their families are nowhere near normal underscoring the importance of psychological support.

How do they cope with this difficult situation? They respond differently from trying to be practical and some handle it by joking about it, said Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Senior Psychiatrist.

“Actually, they follow strict policies at the hospital. The staff wear full protective gear while on duty,” pointed out Dr Hamed. When asked what advice he would give to the health staff and the families, Dr Hamed said, “Staff need to

learn some basic psychological well-being skills like how to relax after work. Be aware that some friends and relatives will be discussing Covid and the number of cases, this can be stressful to the staff as it makes them think about Covid all the time.”

“Getting support from colleagues is also useful, since they face the same situations and would be able to share coping skills or even acknowledging and validating the person’s feelings,” he pointed out adding it is important to select whom to vent out to.

“The stress amongst medical staff is experienced even during sleep. Some staff talked about having recurrent dreams of dead patients coming back to life, especially young patients who got worse quickly and the medics were unable to save them,” he said.

All this indicates a need to relax when away from a stressful environment. “During the peak time when the number of patients was high, staff felt overworked and some have had very sick patients to look after and it’s hard to give up on sick patients. Patients

“

The stress amongst medical staff is experienced even during sleep. Some staff talked about having recurrent dreams of dead patients coming back to life, especially young patients who got worse quickly and the medics were unable to save them

DR HAMAD AL SINAWI
Senior Psychiatrist

when they die have only staff at their bedside since family members are not allowed to visit. In some countries, when the demand for ICU beds was high, sometimes there were three or four patients needing an ICU but there was only one ICU bed. This forces doctors to “choose” which of the four patients is likely to benefit from the ICU bed.”

According to the senior psychiatrist, this situation often creates ethical dilemmas as there may be no clear guidelines on how to choose from the patients. Also, some doctors feel it is not fair they are making such life and death decisions. But eventually most of the health staff have been coping with the situation by eventually learning to adapt to ongoing stress, which is defined as psychological resilience.

“Psychological resilience is the ability to cope with a crisis or stressful situations and return to normal times quickly. Resilient people use mental processes and behaviours to de-stress and protect themselves from the potential negative effects of stress,” explained Dr Hamed. An example of

resilience is being able to cope with the death of a loved one, or adapting to a new job after losing the one you loved. Or even going back to studying after failing an exam.

“The good news is that resilience can be learned by developing thoughts, behaviours, and actions that allow you to recover from the stressful events in life,” advised Dr Hamed.

But something intriguing comes out of the experience. “When people share similar stress the group transforms into a team or a tribe. They get attached to each other and form a new identity,” noted Dr Hamed. What would be some tips for the staff to relax when they are not working?

“I highly recommend adequate sleep and healthy eating. Physical exercise is essential to boost mental health. Getting indulged in something you enjoy doing, watching a movie, reading (non-medical books), listening to music or gardening. Painting is good but maybe not for everyone. There is scientific evidence that gardening is good for your mental health.”



Book on educational statistics released

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Statistics and Information, issued the annual book of Educational Statistics for the academic year 2020/2021.

This book is one of the most important annual publications related to educational statistical data, and one of the most important sources for documenting this data in the ministry.

The Department of Statistics and Information is keen to issue this book annually, and to publish it electronically in multiple ways through the educational portal and website, to make it easier for the beneficiary to access data.

The annual book consists of (11) chapters, and includes many statistical data covering government schools' data in terms of numbers of students, academic



classes, numbers of faculty, administrative, and technical staff.

The book also contains data

on the numbers of special education schools, private and international schools, and literacy

classes and adult education. The book also includes data related to human resources, training

and rehabilitation programmes, information and communication technology data, and educational evaluation, in addition to the development of statistical data and financial data.

This version of the book took nearly five months of work. Modern digital display methods (infographics) were used in designing statistical data to be a new addition to the contents of this version, and to keep pace with the method of tabulation and electronic publishing, in addition to its effectiveness in presenting statistical data in a more clear and smooth manner.

The number of these infographics reached nearly 50 designs that were implemented by the design team at the Department of Statistics and Information in the Ministry.

Sultanate attends GCC meet on higher education

MUSCAT: The Sultanate participated in the 19th meeting of the GCC committee of heads of higher education qualifications equivalency committees on Monday. The virtual meeting was hosted by the GCC Secretariat General.

The Sultanate was represented by Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education.

The meeting discussed means of developing mechanisms to certify equivalence qualifications issued by GCC member states as per the regulations of each country.

The meeting also touched on means of benefiting from experiences of GCC countries in assigning credential evaluation companies to speed up equivalency procedures and reduce the turnaround time.

The participants emphasised the importance of raising social awareness on the impacts of forging academic qualifications on GCC communities. They also reiterated the importance of unifying media coverage on the GCC level in regard to this issue.

The participants extended their thanks to the Sultanate and the United Arab Emirates for their efforts in collecting data and information about combating forged qualifications through the experiences of GCC and other countries.

— ONA

■ 6-MONTH SQUID FISHING SEASON BEGINS



The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the directorates of fisheries in the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar, completed preparations for the squid fishing season by conducting awareness events for artisanal fishermen. The ministry's monitoring teams will intensify their activities on the coastlines of the three governorates during the fishing season.

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO 192m

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 122, worth RO 192 million was announced this week.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are as follows:

The total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 192 million, for a maturity period of 28 days, from August 4, 2021, until September 1, 2021. The

average accepted price reached 99.951 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.950 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.64160 per cent and 0.64192 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 0.75 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Yoga keeps Covid-19 at bay and helps speedy recovery

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 3

The significance of yoga — in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic that has upended the lives of millions of people around the world — has increased markedly. While the public health crisis has brought to the fore the importance of strengthening our immune systems, studies indicate that yoga contributes to improving our health since it is a combination of physical exercise, controlled breathing and meditation.

Yoga expert Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna has been encouraging people to embrace efficient yoga practices to support good health and wellbeing amid the pandemic. "There are a number of yoga practices and breathing exercises which when practised on a regular basis helps boost immunity and proves beneficial to patients struggling with Covid-related complications."

She adds, "In fact, these days Covid recuperation focuses on yoga and breathing techniques. Body movements and regulated breathing by way of yoga enhances natural resistance and

The breathing techniques especially helped me when I was recovering from Covid. Breathing exercises induce a feeling of calm — an important element of recovery and quality of life. The techniques strengthened my lungs and helped me deal with the uneasiness I felt

OMANI NATIONAL

helps in swift recovery from the infection. Through poses and breath control, yoga works on relaxation, circulation, purification, and self-awareness."

By recommending a series of breathing exercises depending on the severity of symptoms, Dr Kavitha has helped many people in Oman through online and personalised interactions.

An Omani national, one of Dr Kavitha's yoga students, says, "She has taught me various yoga techniques. The breathing techniques especially helped me when I was recovering from Covid. Breathing exercises induce a feeling of calm — an important element of recovery and quality of life."

He adds, "The techniques strengthened my lungs and

helped me deal with the uneasiness I felt."

Another Omani student says Dr Kavitha motivated her to learn yoga. "As my experience goes, yoga helps improve health and control stress. My advice to all is to practice yoga daily and stay healthy."

Thanking Dr Kavitha for her devoted service to promoting yoga and sun salutation (surya namaskar) techniques, a Sri Lankan national says, "Her recently launched book, Tamoghna is definitely useful for yoga practitioners and will certainly help inspire others to understand how surya namaskar can change various aspects of our lives. I thank her and her book for inspiring me to learn about surya namaskar."

She added, "Practicing surya namaskar has become important especially during Covid since it boosts our immunity."

Practising yoga regularly also has the potential to reduce stress and increase a sense of well-being. It has definitely helped this Omani national to sleep better and feel relaxed.

Dr Kavitha, who has been practising yoga for the last many years, has extensively researched the subject. In fact, she has accomplished the incredible feat of performing 648 surya namaskars (sun salutations) at a stretch. It is widely acknowledged that completing so many surya namaskar is a unique achievement as it requires a special commitment and strong willpower.

It may be recalled that Kavitha's comprehensively researched book 'Tamoghna' articulately explicates the science behind surya namaskar. The book also traces the history of yogic philosophy, the crux of yoga practice and deals specifically with the vast benefits of surya namaskar. The book inspires yoga practice with a deeper understanding of the elaborate connection of mind, body and spirit.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 31/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Last date for inquiries submission	Last date for obtaining Tender Docs.	Last date for Submission
40/2021/MM/PA-8	Maintenance of Elevators for Muscat Municipality Buildings	25/- OMR	23/08/2021	09/09/2021	12/09/2021
41/2021/MM/PA-9	Supply of Printers, Office Devices and Interactive Smart Displays	25/- OMR	23/08/2021	09/09/2021	12/09/2021

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the etendering Website starting from the date of bids submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted **at The box's located in the First floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.**

Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

NOTES:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Raisi inaugurated as Iran president

TEHRAN: Ebrahim Raisi was on Tuesday inaugurated as president of Iran. “Following the people’s choice, I task the wise, indefatigable, experienced and popular Hojatoleslam Ebrahim Raisi as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote in a decree read out by his chief of staff.

Raisi replaces Hassan Rouhani, whose landmark achievement was the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six major powers.

From the outset, Raisi will have to tackle negotiations aimed at reviving the nuclear deal from which the US unilaterally withdrew imposing sweeping sanctions.

Raisi, in his inauguration speech, said the new government would seek to lift “oppressive” US sanctions, but would “not tie the nation’s standard of living to the will of foreigners”.

“We believe the people’s economic position is unfavourable both because of



Iran’s new President Ebrahim Raisi receives the endorsement decree for his presidency from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in Tehran, on Tuesday. – Reuters

the hostility of our enemies and because of the shortcomings and problems inside the country,” he said.

In his response, Khamenei acknowledged Iran suffered from “many shortcomings and problems,” but quickly added: “The country’s capabilities are even more numerous.

“Fixing economic problems takes time and cannot be done overnight,” he said.

Raisi won a presidential election in June in which more than half the electorate stayed away after many heavyweights were barred from standing.

A former judiciary chief, he has been criticised by the West for

his human rights record.

Tuesday’s ceremony marked Raisi’s formal accession to office. He will next be sworn in before parliament on Thursday when he is to submit his proposed government line-up.

ECONOMY TOP CHALLENGE

Iran’s economic woes, exacerbated by US sanctions, will be the new president’s top challenge, said Clement Therme, a researcher at the European University Institute in Italy.

“His main objective will be to improve the economic situation by reinforcing the Islamic republic’s economic relations with neighbouring countries” and others such as Russia and China, Therme said.

The 2015 deal saw Iran accept curbs on its nuclear capabilities in return for an easing of sanctions.

But then US president Donald Trump withdrew from the accord three years later and ramped up sanctions again, prompting Tehran to pull back from most of its nuclear commitments. — AFP

UAE lifts ban on transit flights including from India and Pakistan



DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates will on Thursday lift a ban on transit flights including from India and Pakistan, the National Emergency and Crisis Management Authority (NCEMA) said on Tuesday.

India and Pakistan are important markets for Emirates, Etihad Airways and other UAE carriers flydubai and Air Arabia.

The Gulf state, a major international travel hub, had banned passengers from many South Asian and African states travelling through its airports this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

NCEMA said on Twitter that passengers travelling from countries where flights had been banned would be able to transit through its airports from August 5 as long as they present a negative PCR coronavirus test taken 72 hours prior to departure.

Final destination approval would also have to be provided, the authority said, adding that UAE departure airports would arrange separate lounges for transiting passengers.

The transit ban had also included Nepal, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Nigeria.

Dubai state carrier Emirates welcomed the government’s decision to allow travel to resume from the affected countries. There was no immediate comment from other UAE airlines on the announcement, which also eased an entry ban on residents returning from countries where flights had been suspended.

NCEMA said a ban on entry to the UAE for passengers from these countries would also be lifted for those with valid residencies and who are certified by Emirati authorities as fully vaccinated.

— Reuters

Lebanese officials ‘criminally negligent’ over port blast

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch on Tuesday accused Lebanese authorities of criminal negligence for failing to secure a shipment of hazardous chemicals that caused last year’s monster port blast, despite repeated warnings.

The watchdog recommended an independent UN investigative mission conduct its own inquiry,

and advocated for broad international sanctions against top officials.

The August 4, 2020 explosion of a shipment of ammonium nitrate fertiliser haphazardly stored at the Beirut port for six years killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital, in one of the world’s

largest non-nuclear blasts.

A 126-page HRW report, released one day before the first anniversary of the tragedy, identified top officials in the government, customs, the army and security agencies who were aware of the shipment and its dangers but failed to take necessary action.

“Multiple Lebanese authorities were, at a minimum, criminally negligent under Lebanese law in their handling” of the ammonium nitrate shipment, said the report, which draws on interviews and official correspondence, including previously unpublished material. — AFP

Deadly wildfire races towards Turkish power plant

MARMARIS, Turkey: A roaring blaze raced towards a Turkish thermal power plant on Tuesday and farmers herded panicked cattle towards the sea as wildfires that have killed eight people raged on for a seventh day.

The nation of 84 million has been transfixed in horror as the most destructive wildfires in generations erase pristine forests and rich farmland across swathes of Turkey’s Mediterranean and Aegean coasts.

Frightened tourists have been forced to scamper onto boats for safety and dozens of villages have been evacuated as wild winds and soaring heat spread the flames.

An AFP team in the Aegean city of Marmaris saw farmers pulling their screaming animals out of burning barns and pulling them to

the relative safety of the beach.

Officials in neighbouring Greece have blamed two smaller fires on the island of Rhodes and the Peloponnese peninsula on a record heatwave they link to climate change.

Temperature in excess of 40 degrees Celsius across the south of Turkey also set off a record surge in electricity use that caused power outages on Monday in cities such as Ankara and Istanbul.

Turkey’s energy ministry blamed the outages on drought-like conditions that have emptied dams responsible for hydropower production and a “record level” in electricity use in the heat.

But the mayor of the Aegean coast city of Milas said he was more worried about what might happen should an uncontrolled



A woman watches from a beach the forest burning on Tuesday in Mugla, a Marmaris’ district, as Turkey struggles against its deadliest wildfires in decades. — AFP

fire raising massive plumes of smoke over the region engulf the local thermal power plant.

‘WHOLE NEW DIMENSION’

Milas Mayor Muhammet Tokat posted an increasingly urgent series of messages on Twitter showing the blazes spreading up a hill toward the presumed location of the plant.

“This is a critical place,” he said in one video showing the blazes.

“The fire has reached the residential complexes,” he posted an hour later. “Going beyond this hill will mean that the fire will reach a whole new dimension.”

Tokat is a member of Turkey’s main opposition party and one of a growing chorus of voices critical of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s response to the disaster. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Iran Covid infections hit new daily high

Iran announced more than 39,000 new Covid cases on Tuesday, the highest in a single day in the Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic.

The health authorities in Iran said another 378 people died of coronavirus and 39,019 tested positive in the past 24 hours.

According to official figures widely believed to underestimate the real toll, the virus has killed 91,785 people in the Islamic republic out of 3,979,727



cases of infection.

Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran says it is struggling to import vaccines for its 83 million population.

CAIRO

Sisi calls for price hike on subsidised bread

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi on Tuesday said it is time to increase the price of the country’s subsidised bread for the first time in decades.

Sisi did not propose an amount for any potential increase, but any change to the food support system in the world’s largest wheat importer are highly sensitive. Bread was the first word in the signature slogan chanted in the 2011 uprising that unseated Egypt’s former president, Hosni Mubarak.



Bread is currently sold at 0.05 Egyptian pounds (\$0.0032) per loaf to more than 60 million Egyptians who are allocated five loaves a day under a sprawling subsidy programme.

BAGHDAD

Iraq says US to return 17,000 artefacts

The US is returning more than 17,000 ancient artefacts looted and smuggled out of Iraq after the US invasion in 2003, including a 3,500-year-old clay tablet bearing part of the Epic of Gilgamesh, Iraq said on Tuesday.

Tens of thousands of antiquities disappeared from Iraq after the 2003 invasion. Many more were smuggled or destroyed by the iconoclastic IS group, which held a third of Iraq between 2014 and 2017 before it was defeated by Iraqi and international forces.



US authorities working to recover the artefacts recently reached an agreement with Baghdad to return items seized from dealers and museums in the United States.

In brief

■ KOLKATA



16 MORE KILLED, DOZENS RESCUED IN INDIA FLOODS

At least 16 people have been killed and a quarter of a million people displaced from their homes after heavy monsoon rains lashed eastern India, officials said on Tuesday, as the air force joined rescue efforts.

The latest deaths in West Bengal came a few days after 11 people were also killed in the state as the torrent of water swept away homes and triggered landslides.

Flooding and landslides are common during India's treacherous monsoon season from June to September and causes widespread devastation.

The annual downpours have been worsened by climate change, experts say.

■ TOKYO



JAPAN TO HOSPITALISE ONLY MOST SERIOUS COVID CASES

Japan will hospitalise only Covid-19 patients who are seriously ill and those at risk of becoming so while others isolate at home, officials said, as worries grew about a strained medical system amid a surge in Olympics host city Tokyo and elsewhere.

The country has seen a sharp increase in coronavirus cases, and is recording more than 10,000 daily new infections nationwide. Tokyo had a record high of 4,058 on Saturday.

Tokyo hospitals are already feeling the crunch, Hironori Sagara, director of Showa University Hospital, said.

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH TO VACCINATE 10 MILLION IN SEVEN DAYS

Bangladesh extended its strict lockdown on Tuesday and announced plans to vaccinate at least 10 million people in a week as the country battles a major Covid-19 surge.

The vaccination drive from August 7 will be led by tens of thousands of health workers at 14,000 health centres, senior minister A K M Mozammel Haque said.

"More than 10 million people will be vaccinated in a week. Elderly people, workers and shopkeepers will be given the priority," Haque said.

Health ministry spokesman Maidul Islam Prodhani said there was enough stock to inoculate 12 million people.

Afghan army urges civilians to evacuate besieged city

KANDAHAR: Residents of a besieged Afghan city were urged to evacuate on Tuesday as the army prepared a major offensive against Taliban insurgents after three days of heavy fighting.

The Taliban have seized control of much of rural Afghanistan since foreign forces began the last stage of their withdrawal in early May, but are now focused on capturing provincial capitals, where they are meeting stiffer resistance.

Fighting is raging for Lashkar Gah, the capital of southern Helmand province, with the United Nations saying at least 40 civilians had been killed in the last 24 hours.

General Sami Sadat, commander of the 215 Maiwand Afghan Army Corps, told residents to get out as soon as they could.

"Please leave as soon as possible so that we can start our operation," he said in a message to the city of 200,000 delivered via the media.

"I know it is very difficult for you to leave your houses — it is hard for us too — but if you are



A policeman holds a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) along a road in Herat. — AFP

displaced for a few days please forgive us," he added.

"We are fighting the Taliban wherever they are. We will fight them and... we will not leave a single Taliban alive."

Officials said earlier that insurgents had seized more than a dozen local radio and TV stations in the city, leaving only one pro-Taliban channel broadcasting Islamic programming.

At least 40 civilians were killed and more than 100 wounded in

the last 24 hours in Lashkar Gah, the UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan said on Tuesday.

"Deepening concern for Afghan civilians... as fighting worsens," UNAMA tweeted.

"UN urges immediate end to fighting in urban areas."

ROOFTOP CHANTS

"Fighting was intense this morning," said Sefatullah, director of Sukon radio in the city.

Deepening concern for Afghan civilians... as fighting worsens. UN urges immediate end to fighting in urban areas

UNAMA

He said US and Afghan air force planes had pounded Taliban positions, adding fighting was ongoing near the city's prison and a building housing the headquarters of police and intelligence agencies.

In recent days, the US military has intensified air strikes across the country in a bid to stem Taliban advances.

The loss of Lashkar Gah would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government, which has pledged to defend cities at all costs after losing much of the rural countryside to the Taliban over the summer. — AFP

Pakistan reaches 1m shots a day after warning

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan hit a target on Tuesday to vaccinate one million people a day against Covid-19, making strides in its inoculation campaign just weeks away from a deadline for workers in public-facing roles to obtain vaccination certificates.

The government announced last week that from the end of this month that workers in schools, shopping malls and hospitality businesses, and the transport and air travel industries would be barred from entering public offices unless they had a certificate.

"Happy to report that the target we had set for 1 million vaccinations in a day was crossed," Asad Umar, the minister in-charge for Covid-19 operations, said in a tweet.

Pakistan has seen soaring coronavirus infections, fuelled by the highly transmissible Delta variant, putting its poor health infrastructure under extreme pressure.

Out of a population of 220 million, more than 31 million have received one vaccine shot, but only 6.7 million have been



Residents line up to receive a vaccine against Covid-19 at a vaccination facility in Karachi, on Tuesday. — Reuters

fully vaccinated, according to the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC), a military run body that oversees the Covid-19 operations.

It said Pakistan registered 3,582 new cases and 67 deaths in the last 24 hours, with more than 3,300 people in critical condition. So far 23,529 people have died of

Covid-19 in Pakistan, with over one million infections. Officials say more than 70 per cent of new cases are Delta variant infections.

After a sluggish start to the inoculation campaign, the new requirement for certificates of vaccination has led to a rush of people seeking shots, with queues stretching over a kilometre

outside some vaccination centres, notably in Karachi.

The provincial government in Sindh has put extra pressure on people to get vaccinated, warning that it would withhold the salaries of government servants and block people's cell phone SIM cards unless they had the required certificates. — Reuters

N Korea wants curbs eased to restart US talks: Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea wants international sanctions banning its metal exports and imports of refined fuel and other necessities lifted before it restarts denuclearisation talks with the United States, South Korean lawmakers said on Tuesday.

The North has also demanded the easing of sanctions on its imports of luxury goods to be able to bring in fine beverages and suits, the lawmakers said after being briefed by Park Jie-won, head of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), South Korea's main intelligence agency.

The briefing came a week after the two Koreas restored hotlines

that North Korea suspended a year ago, the first hint in months that North Korea might be more responsive to engagement efforts.

"As a precondition to reopen talks, North Korea argues that the United States should allow mineral exports and imports of refined oil and necessities," Ha Tae-keung, a member of the parliamentary intelligence committee, told reporters, citing Park.

"I asked which necessities they want the most, and they said high-class beverages and suits were included, not just for Kim Jong Un's own consumption but to distribute to Pyongyang's elite," he said, referring to North Korea's



North Korea leader Kim Jong-un

leader.

North Korea's state-run media made no mention on Tuesday of any new request for the lifting of sanctions to restart talks.

The UN Security Council

has imposed a wide range of sanctions on North Korea for pursuing its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in defiance of UN resolutions. North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006 and test-fired missiles capable of hitting the United States. The United States, Japan and South Korea have also imposed their own sanctions on North Korea.

North Korea has not tested a nuclear weapon or its longest-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) since 2017, ahead of a historic meeting in Singapore between Kim Jong Un and former US president Donald

Trump in 2018.



A resident is given a nucleic acid test for the coronavirus in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province, on Tuesday. — AFP

BEIJING: China's Wuhan city will test its 12 million residents for the coronavirus after confirming its first domestic cases of the highly transmissible Delta variant.

Wuhan, where the virus first emerged in late 2019, had reported no local coronavirus cases since mid-May last year but on Monday authorities confirmed three cases of the Delta variant. The strain has been found in a handful of provinces and big cities including Beijing over the past two weeks.

"To ensure that everyone in the city is safe, city-wide nucleic acid testing will be quickly launched for all people to fully screen out positive results and asymptomatic infections," Wuhan official Li Qiang told a news briefing.

Parts of an industrial and technology zone were sealed off, a measure rarely seen in the city since a lockdown last year.

The new cases in Wuhan, along with infections in the nearby cities of Jingzhou and Huanggang since Saturday, were linked to cases in the city of Huaian in Jiangsu province, said Li Yang, vice-director of the Hubei province disease control centre.

The outbreak in Jiangsu is believed to have begun in the provincial capital of Nanjing in late July, with the Delta variant mostly likely introduced on a flight from Russia, officials have said.

China brought the epidemic under control last year and fought just a few localised outbreaks after that.

— Reuters

Missing Belarus dissident found hanged in Ukraine park



Vitaly Shishov is seen in Kyiv, Ukraine on July 18. – Reuters

KIEV: A missing Belarusian dissident was on Tuesday found hanged in a park in Ukraine, with police opening a murder probe and supporters accusing the regime of Alexander Lukashenko of killing the activist who helped his compatriots flee repression.

Vitaly Shishov, 26, headed the Belarusian House in Ukraine, a non-governmental organisation, and was involved in everything from helping fellow compatriots settle in Ukraine to staging anti-regime protests.

Belarus strongman Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, has been cracking down on any form of dissent since mass protests erupted after last year's elections, deemed unfair by the West.

Many Belarusians have fled, often to neighbouring Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania.

"Belarusian citizen Vitaly Shishov, who had gone missing in Kiev yesterday, was today found hanged in one of the Kiev parks, not far from where he lived," the police said in a statement.

It said they had opened a murder probe. Igor Klymenko, head of the national police, told reporters police were pursuing two main leads: suicide and murder disguised as a suicide. He said the activist had scratches on his nose and body which were consistent with a fall.

An AFP journalist saw several police cars and dozens of police at the scene, some carrying black bags.

The activist went jogging in Kiev on Monday morning but did not return and could not be

reached on his mobile phone.

The Belarusian House in Ukraine accused the Lukashenko regime of being behind the murder of Shishov.

"There is no doubt that this is an operation planned by Chekists to liquidate a Belarusian who presented a true danger to the regime," the NGO said in a statement, referring to security service agents.

Shishov moved to pro-Western

Vitaly Shishov, 26, headed the Belarusian House in Ukraine, a non-governmental organisation, and was involved in everything from helping fellow compatriots settle in Ukraine to staging anti-regime protests

Ukraine in the autumn of 2020, after joining anti-government protests in Belarus, and helped establish the Belarusian House in Ukraine. The NGO said that it had repeatedly received warnings about possible "provocations, including kidnapping and liquidation" and that Shishov had been followed.

Belarusian authorities have used force to put down historic demonstrations against Lukashenko's rule and have been trying to snuff out remaining dissent, jailing university students and shutting down independent media. — AFP

Delta variant surges across US South; political leaders clamp down again

NEW JERSEY: The US states of Florida and Louisiana were at or near their highest hospitalisation numbers of the coronavirus pandemic on Monday, driven by the still-spreading Delta variant, as one doctor warned of the "darkest days" yet.

More than 10,000 patients were hospitalised in Florida as of Sunday, surpassing that state's record. Louisiana was expected to break its record within 24 hours, prompting Governor John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, to order residents to wear masks again indoors.

"These are the darkest days of this pandemic," Dr Catherine O'Neal, chief medical officer of Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, said at a news conference with Edwards. "We are no longer giving adequate care to patients."

O'Neal urged Louisianans to get vaccinated, warning that hospitals were overwhelmed. Many nurses were out sick with the virus, she said, leaving the state with a staffing deficit of 6,000 people.

Hospitalisations in Arkansas are also soaring and could eventually break records.

In California, political leaders in eight San Francisco Bay Area counties reinstated mandatory indoor mask orders in public places as of midnight Tuesday morning.



A woman walks past a sign calling for mask wearing at Penn station in New York on Monday. – AFP

Governors of New York and New Jersey said transport, jail, hospital and nursing home workers would be required to get vaccinated or submit to regular testing. Denver Mayor Michael Hancock said inoculation would be mandatory for the city's more than 11,000 employees.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo urged bars, restaurants and other private businesses to require that customers be vaccinated before they can enter. Cuomo said vaccines could be made mandatory for nursing home workers, teachers and healthcare workers if case numbers do not drop.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy suggested he could clamp down even further on residents and businesses.

The moves represent the latest attempts by policy makers to spur reluctant Americans to get vaccinated as the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus surges nationwide.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican, has taken the opposite stance. He issued an executive order last week barring schools from requiring face coverings, saying parents should make that decision for their children.

District officials in Broward and Gadsden counties, facing a threat by DeSantis to withhold state funds, said on Monday they were dropping mask mandates this fall, the News Service of Florida reported. — Reuters

5m fewer girls to be born over next 10 years

PARIS: An estimated 4.7 million fewer girls are expected to be born globally in the next 10 years because of sex-selective practices in countries with a cultural preference for male offspring, a trend that could undermine social cohesion in the long term, research showed on Tuesday.

The research suggested that the projected shortfall in the number of girls being born will lead to a surplus of young men in around a third of the global population by 2030, which could lead to increased anti-social behaviour and violence.

Sex-selective abortions have been on the rise for the past 40 years in countries throughout southeast Europe along with south and east Asia, with as-yet undetermined demographic impacts.

To model what short- and long-term effect sex selection will have on societies, an international team of researchers analysed data



The research suggested that the projected shortfall in the number of girls being born will lead to a surplus of young men in around a third of the global population by 2030.

from more than three billion births over the last 50 years.

Focusing on 12 countries where the male-to-female ratio had increased since 1970 and another 17 where that ratio was at risk of increasing due to social or cultural trends, they simulated two scenarios.

The first assumed an increase in the rate of sex selection, based on statistical evidence.

The second scenario assumed increased sex selection in certain countries, based on observed trends and decreased fertility, but for which specific data were lacking.

In scenario 1, countries saw a shortfall of 4.7 million in the

number of girls being born by 2030. For scenario 2, the figure jumped to more than 22 million globally by 2100.

Authors of the research, published in the *BMJ* medical journal, said the bias towards male offspring could lead to a "marriage squeeze" in affected countries.

"Fewer-than-expected females in a population could result in elevated levels of anti-social behaviour and violence, and may ultimately affect long-term stability and social sustainable development," they wrote.

The United Nations defines sex-selective practices alongside child marriage and female genital mutilation as harmful practices targeted under the Millennium Development Goals.

The authors of the new study called for better data collection of such practices in order to stamp them out, as well as wider education initiatives. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Russia restricts Navalny ally movement

A Russian court on Tuesday slapped Lyubov Sobol, a key ally of jailed opposition leader Alexey Navalny, with a year and a half of restricted movement for breaching coronavirus regulations this year.

Russia's opposition says authorities have stepped up a campaign of intimidation against dissenters ahead of a parliamentary vote in September, allegations the Kremlin has rejected.

In June, Russia declared Navalny's organisations extremist



and barred his allies from running.

Sobol, 33, is a key figure in a new generation of opposition challengers, and had planned to run for parliament.

LONDON

Abuser held 11 yrs later on basis of daughter's DNA

A British court jailed a rapist for 11 years on Tuesday on the basis of DNA evidence from the daughter conceived in the attack decades earlier. In a case dating back to the 1970s, Birmingham Crown Court in central England found Carvel Bennett, 74, guilty of raping a 13-year-old girl, who became pregnant as a result of the attack. The victim gave the baby up for fostering and later adoption.

But her daughter, who like the victim cannot be identified



for legal reasons, found out the circumstances of her conception when she turned 18.

She then decided to pursue her mother's case, providing DNA samples.

ATHENS

People flee as wildfire nears industrial zone

People were fleeing their homes on Tuesday as a large wildfire raged near an industrial area outside Athens, prompting authorities to evacuate a summer camp and disrupting road traffic.

Amid scorching temperatures during Greece's worst heatwave in over 30 years, more than 300 firefighters with 35 vehicles and 10 aircraft were battling the blaze at the foothills of Parnitha mountain in the suburb of Varympompi.

"The fire has reached the yards



of our houses. The situation is dramatic," Spyros Vrettos, mayor of Acharnes region told Open TV. Television images showed thick plumes of black smoke above a wooded area.

Why the EU is paying more for new Covid shots

FRANCESCO GUARASCIO

The European Union has agreed to pay a premium on new orders of Covid-19 vaccines because it is requiring tougher terms to be met, European officials said, as the bloc tries to protect supplies after a rocky start to its vaccination campaign. The higher price is less than the United States has agreed to pay in its latest order in July.

On Sunday, the Financial Times reported the EU has agreed to pay Pfizer and BioNTech 19.5 euros (\$23.1) for each of their Covid-19 shots under a contract signed in May for up to 1.8 billion doses, up from the 15.5 euros per dose under two initial supply contracts for a total of 600 million vaccines. This was in line with previous reports.

The price for Moderna shots went up to \$25.5 a dose, the newspaper said, referring to a 300 million vaccine deal, up from \$22.6 in its initial deal for 160 million jabs.

EU lawmaker Tiziana Beghin, a member of Italy's 5-star ruling party, said the EU was being been ripped off. "It's inexplicable," she said.

Moderna's price is still at the lower end of the \$25-\$37 range indicated by the company last year, but Pfizer and BioNTech had previously said prices would be lower for bigger volume deals. Others said there were good reasons to pay more and that circumstances had changed greatly from when initial deals were struck with drugmakers last year. France's European affairs minister Clement Beaune told French radio RFI on Monday the likely higher prices were still under negotiation and were the result of stricter clauses on variants, production and deliveries.

One European official familiar with negotiations with vaccine makers said the value of the drugmakers' shots had risen since evidence had emerged of their efficacy and of the positive impact they had on helping the economy to recover from a pandemic-induced recession.

"Several factors played a role," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

All the vaccines used in Europe have been shown to have a beneficial impact, but those made by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, have faced restrictions on their use in the EU because of concerns they can in rare instances lead to blood clots.

— Reuters



The price for Moderna shots went up to \$25.5 a dose, referring to a 300 million vaccine deal, up from \$22.6 in its initial deal for 160 million jabs. It's inexplicable

TIZIANA BEGHIN
EU Lawmaker



GETTING THE JAB

Mr Lordi of the Finnish hard rock band Lordi receives the second dose of Covid-19 vaccination in an event organised in Rovaniemi, Finland on Monday.

— Reuters

Olympians brave the virus without cheers and applause



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

THE DREADED VIRUS HAS TAKEN AWAY OUR RIGHTS TO CHEER AND SHOUT FOR OUR FAVOURITE STARS. IT HAS VERY MUCH CONSTRAINED WHERE WE CAN GO AND WHAT WE CAN DO

The stadium exploded with earth-shaking applause and cheers when Usain Bolt raced to become the fastest man on earth? Moments like Bolt playing to the crowd and taking a victory lap after his historic win at the London games was absent when Lamont Marcell Jacobs achieved a stunning finish in the Olympic men's 100 metres final in Tokyo on Sunday to take the most coveted title in athletics.

There was hardly anybody in the galleries to cheer up or chant a national anthem as the stadium was caught in the eerie silence except for the gunshots to start the race. The stadium looked like a garden without flowers as spectators have been barred from attending the events in an extended state of emergency as Japan is still struggling to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reports across all Olympic arenas in Tokyo confirm that a joyous atmosphere is conspicuously absent. It has been shaped up as a TV-only event. Athletes are competing in a muted atmosphere as the virus-hit Tokyo failed to muster the required excitement.

To maintain the Olympic enthusiasm, athletes have been cheering as loudly as they could themselves to support each other. It's a jarring development for the sports world that there are no spectators to support the participants. Like professional sports, many Olympic events feed off crowd energy. No fans means an underwhelming presentation for viewers at home.

According to The Guardian, for people in Tokyo, concern has been replaced by indifference. A thriving city enthusiastically hosting a global sporting event is a sight to behold. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in Japan, Tokyoites regarded the idea of hosting the Olympic events with scepticism.

"Right now, Tokyo is not one. That is hardly the fault of the Japanese. With about 80 per cent of the population opposed to the Olympics, fans banned from attending events and Covid numbers surging, it is little wonder the streets are not alive with joy. But the silence - and an absence of signage, flags and adornments - is stark, the newspaper reported.

TV footage showed empty galleries except for a handful of officials, guests and a few members of participating teams. Even the number of athletes is reported to be smaller than most years, due to strict Covid-19 protocols at the Olympic Village. Visitors like journalists and officials have been confined to hotels, venues and the main press centre.

We get Olympics like the competition of the highest order every consecutive four years. This helps us get a chorus of excitement, and, most of all, a general celebratory tone. But all these are completely missing this year.

Sports, arguably, have been affected the most of all. The dreaded virus has taken away our rights to cheer and shout for our favourite stars. It has very much constrained where we can go and what we can do —another grim symbol of the state of the world!

The athletes are still showing up and competing even without the ability to enjoy the sights and sounds of Tokyo as they are risking their health. We should be more open enough to appreciate them.

Feel the pain of others, not treat it as a contagious pandemic



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

STAY EMOTIONALLY CLOSER TO YOUR DEAR AND NEAR ONES TO TIDE OVER THE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Whether at work, in a new group of friends, or even in your own family circles, it is normal for individuals to stay away from or stop conversation with sad or pessimistic people. We fear it will infect us like coronavirus.

When we truly love others who are suffering, we can't pretend not to see their frustration or worries. We can help those we love by accepting them for who they are. Let us accept that others have a right to be their own unique persons. That means having a right to their own feelings, thoughts and opinions.

Emotions are exchanged through facial expressions and tones of communication. Interestingly, you may have found that when you interact with certain people, you open up more than usual, but with others guarded.

In other words, you don't have to tolerate someone because their bad mood is unbearable. Many of us must have come across a workplace wrecked by the negative demeanour or bad behaviour of one or two persons. That reminds us of the saying, "one bad apple can spoil the bunch."

If you are happily working

from home and are looking forward to not returning to the office, it may be because Covid-19 pandemic has put you out of an unhappy office.

Just like an irritating colleague spoils the work environment, intolerable social media figures or influencers with huge followings can spread their negativity to millions.

How can we help others if we ourselves are not optimistic? For instance, during an emergency in a flight you can't assist your neighbour with an oxygen mask without you putting it first properly. So start each day with new hopes and

sufficiently build them up to help out someone else.

It is not easy to lift someone out of sadness or pain. But start by gently diverting the attention of those in low spirits to activities that they love. It improves the state of mind.

I think that an individual should realise that the people who love him don't want him to suffer. So, he or she should not withdraw from social circles or pretend to be happy just to make others more comfortable. This won't help anyone.

The unhappiness of those around us can indeed be contagious, but we don't have

to tackle it like the pandemic with physical distancing. Stay emotionally closer to your dear and near ones to tide over difficult situations.

Life is a mixture of happiness, sadness, anger, laughter, indifference, hatred, envy and other emotions. Sadness reminds us of the importance of happiness in our life. Treat it as a minor irritant. Sadness gives us the opportunity to look inward and strive for a better way of living. It also helps us to feel the pain of others..

(The author is a physician, medical innovator and writer)

Taha named coordinator for Fina Worlds in Abu Dhabi

ADIL AL BALUSHI
TOKYO, AUG 3

Taha al Kishry, Oman's board member in world swimming body, has been named the coordinator for the Fina World Championships to be held in Abu Dhabi in December. This was decided at the second Fina bureau meeting at Tokyo Aquatics Centre on Tuesday.

The meeting was presided over by Fina President Dr Hussain al Musallam. Many board members were present in Tokyo while others attended remotely through advanced communication platforms.

munication platforms.

The Fina president appreciated the efforts by the members during the past period since election of the new board in Doha in June.

Kuwait's Al Musallam praised the tremendous efforts taken by the organising committee to host the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games with implementation of all strict precautionary measures which secured safety of all the participants and assisted to have a safe Olympic Games in all the venues especially in swimming competitions.

Also, the Fina chief congratulated all the swimmers who bagged medals during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and to those who registered new world and Olympic records. Six world records



and 33 Olympic records have been registered in swimming competitions during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Taha al Kishry briefly presented the latest updates for Fina World Swimming Championship in next December in Abu Dhabi including the logistics, technical and other related subjects.

Al Kishry was named by Fina to be the coordinator between the organising committee and the Fina.

The Fina bureau reviewed the Fina staff manual policy. The members raised their amendments and suggestions ahead of the policy approval in the forthcoming meeting as part of Fina World Swimming Championship in Abu Dhabi.

The Fina board members approved host broadcasting for 2023 World Aquatics Championships in Doha. Also, the members reviewed the marketing plan and raised their amendments prior to the final approval.

The first draft of the Fina general programme for the forthcoming period was presented to the board members. The programme featured supporting the national associations, supporting the top swimmers, establishing training and education swimming centre, organising development courses for coaches and referees, scholarship for the top junior and youth swimmers.



Belgium's Simon Gougard and Vincent Vanasch celebrate after winning their match against India. — Reuters

Australia sink Germany to set up Belgium showdown

TOKYO: Australia set up a showdown with world champions Belgium in the men's hockey final at the Tokyo Olympics after handing 2016 Olympic bronze medallists Germany a 3-1 defeat on Tuesday.

Young forward Tim Brand opened the scoring for Australia with a seventh-minute goal when he pushed in a powerful shot from team mate Flynn Ogilvie that crossed the striking circle.

"Luckily I was so close to the goal because it (the ball) went pretty high," Brand said. "We've beaten two top teams, Holland and Germany, so I think we're on a bit of a roll."

Germany equalised off a penalty corner by flicker Lukas Windfeder, but were not able to keep the Kookaburras at bay, with Blake Govers giving them the lead shortly before halftime.

After the teams returned, Germany could not capitalise on their circle penetrations.

Lachlan Sharp sealed the German team's fate with a late-game goal, marking a painful end to their Tokyo campaign.

"The Aussies were more effective in both circles," Germany captain Tobias Hauke said. "If you lose the game in this style... it's really hard, that is why there are tears."

Australia and Belgium play their gold medal match on Thursday, while India and Germany will battle for bronze.

LAST STEP

Belgium's Red Lions beat India 5-2 earlier on Tuesday.

"We're very proud for making the finals, but the last step is yet to be made," Belgium captain Felix Denayer said.

They needed less than two minutes to get the opening goal when defender Loick Luypaert scored off a penalty corner.

Eight-time Olympic champions India, who last claimed the top prize at the 1980 Moscow Games, went ahead through goals from Harmanpreet Singh and striker Man-deep Singh.

But Belgium always believed they could make the final said Alexander Hendrickx, who is top scorer at the Tokyo tournament. — Reuters

IZU, Japan: The talk during the protracted build-up to Tokyo 2020 was that Britain's days of sweeping all before them and plundering a golden bounty in the velodrome might be numbered.

Two days into the track cycling programme, the evidence suggests the doom-mongers were not far off the mark.

In the space of a head-spinning couple of hours at the Izu Velodrome high in the hills west of Tokyo on Tuesday, the British team's hold on three events in which they have enjoyed total Olympic domination was ripped away.

A fearsome foursome of German women destroyed Britain in the team pursuit final with their second world record of the day and third in 24 hours — inflicting a first-ever Olympic defeat on Britain's golden girl Laura Kenny.

Britain had won the team pursuit on its debut in the women's programme at London 2012 before repeating in Rio in 2016.

Shortly after that, Kenny's husband Jason was part of a British trio overpowered by the Netherlands in the team sprint, ending a run of golds in that event spanning three Games.

Before all that there was chaos and controversy as Britain's male team pursuit squad, minus the injured Ed Clancy, were annihilated by world champions Denmark in their heat.

Denmark, who were accused by the British team of using tape on their shins to go faster in Monday's qualifying rounds, actually caught the reigning champions before the end of the 4km pursuit — a humiliation if ever there was one.

'TAPE-GATE'

To rub salt into their wounds, Danish leader Frederick Madsen was going so fast he failed to notice that he was about to catch British straggler Charlie Tanfield and ploughed straight into the back of him at 60kph.

As if 'tape-gate' had not caused enough confusion, it was more than half an hour before the Danes were actually confirmed as



Gold medallists Roy van den Berg, Harrie Lavreysen, Jeffrey Hoogland and Matthijs Buchli of the Netherlands celebrate on the podium. — Reuters



Germany's team compete to setting the new world record during the women's track cycling team pursuit finals. — AFP

winners of a heat that ended with angry scenes.

Denmark will face Italy in the final after the Italians broke the Danish world record in a rip-roaring heat against New Zealand, stopping the clock at 3:42.307.

Denmark, who raised the bar in team pursuit when they stormed to world gold in Berlin in 2020 in 3:44.672, will, according to Madsen, have to do so again in Wednesday's showdown against an Italian outfit powered by Filippo Ganna.

Road world champion Ganna called for one more big effort.

"My team-mates demonstrated that all the work we've been doing throughout these years paid off," he said.

"They need now just to hold on for 24 hours more, and then if

they want to get wasted they can do whatever they want to. I'll be the first to join them."

TRADING WORLD RECORDS

Germany's women were favourites in the sprints here in Izu. Few predicted what a stunning impact their team pursuists would make.

The quartet of Franziska Brausse, Lisa Brennauer, Lisa Klein and Mieke Kroeger served a warning when they smashed Britain's five-year-old world record in Monday's opening skirmishes.

When Britain then reclaimed it by beating old rivals the United States to reach the gold-medal ride on Tuesday it seemed that Laura Kenny would once again come through, and claim a fifth

gold to move ahead of Dutch great Zijlaard-van Moorsel as the most successful female cyclist in Olympics history.

But Germany immediately took it back in their heat against Italy and in the final found yet another level as they dropped the world record to 4:04.242 — a barely credible six seconds faster than the time Kenny's Britain team rode to take gold in Rio.

"We're just super-happy that we had the run of our life," said Brennauer, who said a switch of strategy during a recent training camp had been the key to their speed.

Kenny, 29, had won the team pursuit and omnium and London and Rio, so silver is not something she is accustomed to.

"Germany took everyone by surprise. We knew they were going to go fast, just not that fast," she said.

A win for the flying Dutch sprint trio of Harrie Lavreysen, Roy van den Berg and Jeffrey Hoogland was less surprising but no less emphatic with Hoogland powering them to gold.

"We came here only for gold," Lavreysen said.

Incredibly it was the first Dutch gold medal in a men's track event at the Olympics since 1936.

It might not be the last one this week. — Reuters



Top orders to be tested as England face India without Stokes

LONDON: Batsmen on both sides are set to face a stiff examination when an England team without Ben Stokes face India in the first Test in Nottingham starting on Wednesday.

Although England captain Joe Root boasts an impressive Test average of 48.68, the next best in his side belongs to opener Rory Burns, with 33.23.

Zak Crawley in particular has seen his Test returns decline dramatically since making a brilliant 267 against Pakistan, with a mere 123 runs in 12 subsequent innings.

Following England's 1-0 series loss to New Zealand in June — their first home campaign reverse in seven years — former captain Alastair Cook said the current top order "can't handle" the pressure of Test cricket.

There are worries too about India's batsmen ahead of a five-match campaign that comes 50 years after the tourists' first series win in England.

India captain and star batsman Virat Kohli has not scored a Test hundred in nearly two years, while opener Mayank Agarwal was ruled out of the first Test with a suspected concussion after being hit on the head batting in the nets on Monday.

Cheteshwar Pujara, meanwhile, averages under 30 in England.

And Ajinkya Rahane, since kick-starting India's stunning revival during their eventual series wins in Australia last year with 112 in Melbourne, has passed fifty just once in 13 subsequent Test innings.

Just as India prepared pitches favouring their spinners during

Mayank Agarwal was ruled out of the first Test with suspected concussion after being hit on the head batting in the nets on Monday

a 3-1 win at home to England earlier this year, it would be no surprise were a green surface designed to maximise the skills of veteran England new-ball duo Stuart Broad — playing on his Nottinghamshire home ground — and James Anderson to be on show this week.

Anderson, England's all-time leading wicket-taker, has an especially brilliant Test record at Trent Bridge, with 64 wickets in 10

matches at under 20 apiece.

'Ready'

India, however, also have an impressive seam attack featuring the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma and Mohammad Siraj.

"We expect England to give us such wickets, this is their home conditions," said vice-captain Rahane, with India having been in England for several weeks since a World Test Championship final loss to New Zealand.

"We are not too worried about what wickets they are giving us. We are ready."

The series may be decided by which team copes best with the Covid restriction surrounding players on both sides.

It was announced on Friday that key all-rounder Stokes was taking an "indefinite break from

all cricket" to prioritise his mental health.

England and India, two of world cricket's biggest drawcards, have made little concession to the coronavirus by continuing to pursue packed schedules that can be especially onerous for multi-format stars such as Stokes.

Both sides face a gruelling programme, including the T20 World Cup and bilateral overseas tours after the end of this series, which could mean that some of India's multi-format stars are on the road for more than seven months, with the Indian Premier League having been moved to the UAE because of rising Covid-19 infection rates in India itself.

Root, talking about Stokes on Monday, said: "From my point of view, I just want my friend to be

OK."

He added: "In terms of scheduling, that's way off my remit. We have tried as best we can over the last year to look after the players in terms of resting and rotating, giving guys the opportunity to get out of very difficult environments so that they can be as fresh for as long as possible."

Root requires a mere 22 runs to succeed Cook as his country's top run-scorer in all formats, and is just one win away from surpassing Michael Vaughan's record of 26 as England's Test captain.

Root, while acknowledging the value of personal runs, said: "Test cricket is not about you as an individual."

"It is about winning for England and contributing to something bigger than yourself." — AFP

Euro hero Chiellini signs two-year deal with Juventus

ROME: Giorgio Chiellini has signed a new two-year contract with Juventus, the Serie A club announced on Monday, a few weeks after the Italy captain led his country to triumph at Euro 2020.

Chiellini, 36, was out of contract after his previous deal with Juve expired at the end of June, while Italy were still on their charge to European Championship victory.

He put pen to paper on a contract that runs until 2023, contrary to initial reports in Italy which said he was prepared to agree to a deal until the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which takes place in November and December next year.

"Giorgio Chiellini embodies everything that Juventus stands for, and it is through his commitment and excellent displays over the course of last 16 years that has earned him a contract renewal," Juve said.

"There is an overlap in Giorgio's DNA and that of Juve's. He forms a big part of Juve's history, yet also the present and the future," they added.

The announcement of his new contract was expected, with chairman Andrea Agnelli saying last week that the club were waiting for the centre-back to return from his post-Euro holidays before agreeing a new deal.

Chiellini began his long Juventus career in 2005 and was a pillar of the team which won nine successive Serie A titles before Inter Milan broke their rivals' run of domestic dominance last season.

He has also contested two Champions League finals and won five Italian Cups with Juventus.

Chiellini and his Juve teammate Leonardo Bonucci were central to Italy's success at this summer's Euro, providing the solid basis from which Roberto Mancini's vibrant team

flourished.

The Azzurri won the tournament in impressive style, cruising through their group and seeing off the likes of Belgium and Spain in the knockout stages before beating England on penalties in the final at Wembley.

He has played 112 times for his country, finishing runner-up at Euro 2012. — AFP



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Oman’s financial wealth grows to \$64bn in 2020

KEY FINDING: 49 per cent of financial wealth is investable wealth, says report

BUSINESS REPORTER
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Oman’s financial wealth grew by a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.8 per cent annually from 2015 to reach a high of \$64 billion in 2020 — 49 per cent of which is investable wealth — as the Sultanate’s market showed resilience in the face of the protracted Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

The report, titled ‘Global Wealth 2021: When Clients Take the Lead’,

reveals that despite the pandemic’s enduring financial impact, global prosperity and wealth grew significantly throughout the crisis and are likely to continue to expand significantly over the next five years, in line with the emerging economic recovery.

“The Sultanate of Oman’s wealth has been favourable over the past five years, demonstrating resilience despite pandemic-related tailwinds, with economic productivity accelerating as per Oman Vision 2040 aspirations. Activities in this direction have encouraged Omani citizens to engage in the global economy, which has, in turn, driven sustained increases in wealth growth,” said Mustafa Bosca, Managing Director and Partner at Boston Consulting Group.



Oman, which represented 3 per cent of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) financial wealth in 2020, is expected to witness strong growth of 5 per cent CAGR to reach \$82 billion by 2025, an \$18 billion increase from 2020.

Meanwhile, the region’s financial

wealth is forecast to reach \$2.7 trillion in 2025 from \$2.2 trillion in 2020.

A spotlight on onshore asset allocation shows that equities and investment funds (55 per cent) accounted for the largest proportion of assets in 2020.

Oman, which represented 3 per cent of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) financial wealth in 2020, is expected to witness strong growth of 5 per cent CAGR to reach \$82 billion by 2025, an \$18 billion increase from 2020.

Looking ahead, the allocation of onshore assets is expected to be similar with equities and investment funds expected to be the largest share of onshore assets in the Sultanate, amounting to 54 per cent.

BCG’s report also shows Oman’s changing landscape of the wealthy

in the coming years, with the rise of the next-generation affluent and high-net-worth clients. These individuals, between 20 and 50 years of age, have longer investment horizons, a greater appetite for risk, and often a desire to use their wealth to create positive societal impact as well as earn solid returns.

Many wealth managers are not yet ready to serve these new clients. “Greater economic attainment is a primary driver behind the Sultanate’s increased wealth. Looking ahead, wealth demographics will continue to shift, facilitating a subsequent shift in client needs and expectations which compels local wealth managers to ensure their offerings are geared towards local needs or younger wealth segments,” concluded Bosca.

Panel to study potential for pharma industries hub in Salalah Free Zone

KEY FACTORS: Proximity to maritime gateway, raw materials and temperature-controlled warehouses, as well as connectivity with global markets offer competitive advantages to investors: OPAZ

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu



The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has commissioned a panel of experts to explore the potential for a hub to be established within Salalah Free Zone dedicated to pharmaceutical-related investments and activities.

The panel, representing officials from OPAZ, Ministry of Health, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Salalah Free Zone, has been tasked with evaluating the free zone’s appeal as an investment destination for the manufacturing of all kinds of pharmaceuticals, hospital consumables, and medical devices catering to the domestic, regional and global markets. Reporting on the proposed study, Duqm Economist – the newsletter of OPAZ – stated in its latest edition that the initiative stems from the burgeoning global demand for pharmaceutical products fuelled by the disastrous coronavirus epidemic.

“It also reflects OPAZ’s plan to attract local and international corporates to invest in this sector

(with a pledge to) expedite the associated procedures (to support such investments),” it noted.

According to OPAZ, a number of factors bode well for the growth of a major pharmaceutical industrial hub in the free zone adjoining the Port of Salalah, a major transshipment and logistics gateway overlooking the Indian Ocean.

The port sits astride major international shipping routes that connect all of the key global markets to the Sultanate, says OPAZ.

Investors can also leverage existing and planned free trade agreements (FTAs) with major economies such as the United States, the European Union and other countries and blocs of the world.

Also auguring well for this initiative is the port’s excellent multimodal transport and supply chain infrastructure.

In addition to benefiting from shorter transit times to major global markets, investors looking

at Salalah Free Zone can also take advantage of competitive access to raw materials produced by local petrochemical plants, and proximity to temperature-controlled warehouses as well.

Already, the free zone is home to an array of investments focused on pharmaceuticals, nutritional products and other healthcare-related commodities.

Philex Pharmaceutical Industries, the biggest of these ventures, has already brought into operation part of its estimated \$300 million-worth integrated pharmaceutical complex.

While a secondary packaging unit was launched in May 2020, the centrepiece of the massive venture — a pharmaceutical plant set on 110,000 sq metres — is currently under construction and will commence the first phase of operations next year. In addition to medicines, the company’s product line-up will include hard tablets and capsules, and the country’s first injectable solutions.

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund			
Investment Manager Report			
For the 6M- 2021 ending 30th of June 2021			
The second quarter of 2021 marked the continuation of a global rally as markets enjoyed a wave of sustained optimism. After peaking at level of 1.74% at the end of the first quarter, the 10 year US government yield subsided to end the second quarter at 1.46%. Promises of no early tapering and an official transitory inflation narrative contributed to alleviating investors’ inflation worries. Valuations across most risk asset classes continued to grow, as investors seek exposure to secular growth and try to hedge against the possibility of inflation. While many indices seemed richly valued on a trailing basis, most companies positively surprised on the earnings and sales fronts and revised their guidance upwards for the remaining of 2021.			
While the success of vaccine roll out is at the forefront of a continued economic recovery, monetary policy remains a focal point given the ample amount of liquidity provided by central banks across the globe. Fiscal policies are also playing an increasing role as social inclusiveness and aggressive environmental targets need serious financial backing in order to be achieved. While debt levels are elevated by historical standards, the combination of elevated debt levels and increasing government yields highlights the necessity of continual monetary support in order to avoid a liquidity squeeze.			
On the commodity front, Brent enjoyed another remarkable quarter, rallying 18% to close the quarter at USD 75 a barrel, USD 11 higher than the previous quarter. The vaccine rollout in advanced and emerging economies contributed to a recovery of consumption and supply side discipline among OPEC members contributed to crude’s strong price performance.			
During the first quarter, the Fund gained 8.48%, trailing the benchmark’s quarterly return of 8.90%. Healthcare and Industrials were among the best performing sectors, on the back of improving earnings, a strong global backdrop and opportunistic corporate restructuring. Bahrain was the best performing GCC country, posting a 14.74% return, followed by Saudi Arabia (11.08%), UAE (10.56%), Oman (9.91%), Kuwait (9.86%) and Qatar (2.39%).			
As the economy both global and regional continues to be resilient, many risks remain. Change continues to be the only constant. For our region, a robust global backdrop bodes well for energy demand, while the economic upswing relieves businesses who have suffered in the recent past, it is corporations that take full advantage of government reforms and a structural change that are better equipped to outperform in the future. We plan on continuing to adopt a cautious approach while taking advantage of a mutating environment to deliver results to our unit holders.			
UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2021			
	30 June 2021	30 June 2020	31 December 2020
	RO	RO	RO
Assets			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	10,613,548	6,634,899	8,158,406
Cash and cash equivalents	81,106	1,713,175	1,347,752
Dividend receivable	692	-	-
Interest receivable	-	8,315	5,802
Total assets	10,695,346	8,356,389	9,511,960
Liabilities			
Amount due to related parties	29,537	23,165	26,759
Accruals and other payables	22,179	10,703	10,000
Total liabilities	51,716	33,868	36,759
Total net assets attributable to the unitholders	10,643,630	8,322,521	9,475,201
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	10,695,346	8,356,389	9,511,960
Net asset per unit attributable to the unitholders	0.830	0.640	0.732
UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021			
	30 June 2021	30 June 2020	31 December 2020
	(6 months)	(6 months)	(12 months)
	RO	RO	RO
INCOME			
Dividend income	199,542	124,539	151,503
Interest income	6,880	11,903	25,140
Foreign exchange gain	252	-	5,165
Other income	-	-	7,537
Total income	206,674	136,442	189,345
Net realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	204,905	(1,598,320)	(928,099)
Net unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	963,508	151,436	727,029
Net investment income/(loss)	1,375,087	(1,310,442)	(11,725)
EXPENSES			
Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)	24,122	34,774	55,760
Management fees	54,465	47,745	96,960
Administration fee	7,565	7,499	15,061
Custodian fees	4,760	4,787	9,626
Fund Management Body’s fee	21,000	21,000	35,000
General and administration	5,234	6,807	10,088
Foreign exchange loss	-	8,787	-
Total expenses	117,146	131,399	222,495
Profit/(loss) and total comprehensive income/(loss) and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the period/ year	1,257,941	(1,441,841)	(234,220)
Profit/(loss) per unit	0.098	(0.112)	(0.018)

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778864, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

Investment Manager & Administrator



Contrasting views on return to office after home-working

After a prolonged period of working from home, practically from the start of the pandemic, one in four employees in the City area — the financial district — of London, wants to continue working full-time from home, once the Covid-19 crisis is over, according to a poll by Accenture.

The consulting firm surveyed 1,406 UK-based workers in banking, capital markets and insurance last month and found that 24 per cent would prefer to work entirely from home after a full return to the office is possible post-pandemic.

More than a third (39 per cent) of respondents said they were willing to forgo compensation to enable them to work fully

remotely in the future.

Around 70 per cent of respondents to Accenture's poll said the introduction of a flexible working schedule would help them adjust to working life post-pandemic, while 69 per cent of poll participants said that they would prefer to work just two days a week or fewer in the office in future.

The UK and Ireland banking strategy lead at Accenture, Laura O'Sullivan, said the survey findings signalled "loud and clear that the majority of employees at all levels want the pre-pandemic routine to be a thing of the past."

She said: "The focus needs to move not only to where employees are doing their work, but how they are doing their work. It's about making employees productive wherever they are."



ANDY JALIL
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24 PER CENT WOULD PREFER TO WORK ENTIRELY FROM HOME AFTER A FULL RETURN TO THE OFFICE IS POSSIBLE POST-PANDEMIC

O'Sullivan added: "We are only at the start of the changes that will be needed in tooling leadership behaviours and employee experience to make these new ways of working a long-term solution for thriving teams. This is a great opportunity to reimagine the employee experience."

Firms who fail to respond adequately to employees' needs post-pandemic could face a staff exodus. Accenture's research found.

One in four (27 per cent) felt additional pressure from Covid-19 had not been taken into consideration by their employers, while a third (34 per cent) said they had considered or are considering leaving their current firm.

Meanwhile, about one in ten of respondents said they had considered leaving or did not

intend to return to the financial services industry altogether. Stress and lack of work/life balance were cited as motivating factors behind their decision.

In contrast to the view expressed for preference for working from home, there is an argument in favour of working from the office or dividing time between the two. The pull of returning to the office might be "bigger than we anticipate", the Bank of England's (BoE) chief operating officer has said.

"We anticipate that the number of staff in our buildings will increase over time and that — in accordance with a recent study of the personal preferences of BoE employees — staff will average about three to four days in the office and around one to two days from home," said Joanna Place at

a virtual event for the Investment Association last month.

"My own personal view is that the pull of the office might be a bit bigger than we anticipate." During the event, focused on the future of the world of work, Place said the central bank would be asking staff to work for at least one day per week in the office from September.

The guidelines issued by the BoE encourages teams to have "regular 'team days', where staff are encouraged to engage in collaborative work and on building social capital".

Firms across the City have been announcing plans to roll out a hybrid working setup, which would see employees split their time between the office and home. *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

Purshottam Kanji, Instant Cash donate 100 tabs for ISM students

MUSCAT: Purshottam Kanji Exchange and Instant Cash Global Money Transfer jointly donated 100 tabs for students in Indian School Muscat. In very simple function, Purshottam Kanji Exchange General Manager, Supin James and Instant Cash Representative Nihas, handed over the 100 tabs to Indian School Muscat Principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan and Vice-Principal Saji S Nair.

During Covid-19 pandemic, the society was in tremendous pressure and due to online classes, many students were unable



to attend properly. With the financial crisis created by the pandemic, devices were not

easy own.

Purshottam Kanji Exchange, as a part of their CSR, took this initiative with Instant Cash to donate these tabs.

Supin said, "It is our responsibility to contribute back to society, especially to ISM management, staff and parents who have been part of Purshottam Kanji Exchange success story and we are bound to support such good initiatives taken by ISM and wish them great success."

Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan, Principal of ISM, said, "This kind gesture is a fine

example of how an organisation understands the importance of education and they have come forward in supporting the needs of the students. ISM management, teachers, staff and parents will be thankful for this wonderful support extended by Purshottam Kanji Exchange and Instant Cash." Saji S Nair, Vice-Principal of ISM, added, "The eligible students will be given the tabs at the earliest and it will be based on the Expression of Interest from the parents. The identification process will be soon carried out and it will be handed over."

Hyundai Santa Fe redefines SUV ownership experience



MUSCAT: OTE Group, exclusive distributor of Hyundai vehicles in the Sultanate, has unveiled the brand's newest offering: the 2021 Hyundai Santa Fe — the longstanding family SUV of choice.

The product of a complete makeover, the 2021 Santa Fe benefits from bold design, cutting-edge technologies, and an array of driver assistance features — attributes that are set to reinforce its already robust appeal in the competitive SUV segment of the market.

The latest iteration of the fourth-generation Santa Fe has undergone a dramatic overhaul of its exterior.

A signature feature is its cascading grille flanked by two restyled, and slim LED headlights, in addition to a new front bumper, revamped T-shaped LED daytime running lights and a stylish skid plate.

In other highlights, the 2021 model comes with a sculpted hood, broad wheel arches, restyled alloy wheels, updated LED taillights and a concealed exhaust system.

Pitched as an upscale family SUV, the 2021 Hyundai Santa Fe features a new body platform with a generous wheelbase of 2765 mm.

OAB extends support to families affected by floods

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to support the community and in line with its sustainability strategy, Oman Arab Bank announced the launch of an initiative to aid families and individuals that were affected by the recent floods in Sur.

The OAB initiative will see the provision of a three-month loan deferment for affected Bank customers, as well as financial support for families in need, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development. Highlighting the importance of



Rashad al Shaikh

this initiative, Rashad al Shaikh, Head of Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "Our community initiatives are targeted towards those within the community that need it most. With this in mind, we will be deferring loans for our



Feras al Farsi

customers who have been affected, for a period of three months to help them overcome this difficult situation."

From his side, Feras al Farsi, Head of Sustainability and CSR at OAB, said, "A key focus of our

sustainability strategy is centred on reinforcing our relationship with our communities. Given the impact of the floods and the effects of the pandemic, we are doing our best to extend support to affected families and individuals that need it most. Together with the Ministry of Social Development, the cases are reviewed and necessary action is taken accordingly. We will also be donating to the Ministry and recommending three SME construction companies, who are our customers, to facilitate the required repairs."

CCED supports training of future-ready Omanis in Oil & Gas sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 3

As part of its strategy to empower national talent to excel in the oil and gas sector, well-known upstream energy firm CC Energy Development (CCED), has seen 95 per cent of its maintenance technicians and production team acquire the Advanced Diploma in Oil & Gas Operations from City & Guilds in the UK.

With 161 team members receiving the globally-recognised diploma to date, the value-driven energy company continues to nurture the next generation of energy sector qualified experts through a number of on-the-job training programmes to significantly accelerate their skills development.

This achievement also



emphasises CCED's vision to build a world-class energy business in Oman that is dedicated to hiring and developing home-grown talent across all functions.

"Talent acquisition and development is a translation of CCED's forward-thinking strategy to build a highly skilled national workforce in the oil and gas

industry," said Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CCED.

"Effective planning and management to develop and most importantly, retain Omani talent is vital for long-term success in our rapidly evolving and fast-growing sector. We are determined to ensure that our team enjoys a rewarding career by developing the skillsets

required to excel in everything they do."

Simpson added, "With the unprecedented macroeconomic backdrop due to the pandemic, we entered 2021 with strong momentum across our operations. This is a reflection of our resilient business model, prudent approach to risk management, significant technology investments, and our teams' dedication to deliver for our customers and communities."

CCED aims to be a leading institution in attracting the best and brightest talent in the local market by hiring exceptional fresh graduates that demonstrate great promise, as well as attracting highly qualified and experienced team members with industry experience. To date, the company employs close to 700 people, with an Omanisation rate of over 90 per cent.

Enjoy distinct experiences in the stylish Toyota C-HR



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The C-HR's high-quality interior is designed to delight the most discerning drivers. Exuding a genuine sense of luxury and refinement, the cabin offers an elegant contrast between curving surfaces and crisp lines to deliver a fresh, yet comfortable environment.

In Oman, the nationwide parts and service network of Saud Bahwan Automotive supports Toyota's outstanding product quality. No wonder that today, Toyota is one of the most trusted and well-known brands.



ME's largest digital asset platform reports strong H1 results

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 3

BitOasis, the first and largest digital asset (cryptocurrency) platform in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, delivered a strong half yearly result for 2021, with trading volumes to date exceeding \$3 billion, and more than half of that in H1 2021.



A pioneer in the region since its launch in 2015, BitOasis has seen a doubling of its user base in the last six months compared to the same period last year, and increased interest from institutional and family office investors in the region.

Earlier in the year, BitOasis' entity registered in Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) became the first platform authorised to operate a regulated Multilateral Trading Facility (MTF) and Custody platform for digital assets in ADGM and the UAE, to serve retail, accredited investors, trading firms and institutions. The platform is intended to allow buying and selling of digital assets with local currencies, and will launch after securing additional launch approvals from the FSRA. BitOasis' parent company will be seeking additional licenses across the region to further expand its footprint and offering.

Ola Doudin, CEO and co-founder of BitOasis, said: "The first half of 2021 has been one of many milestones, both in terms of performance for BitOasis — processing over \$3 billion, and a doubling of users. This sends a strong message of confidence in the region's crypto market for the long-term.

"The growth trajectory for BitOasis includes expansion of our team in a number of countries across the region, acquiring additional regulatory licences, and ensuring we remain industry leaders in serving the market by rolling out more tokens and products for our users."

When the chips are down: Global shortage to keep crimping carmakers

LONDON: BMW and Stellantis became the latest major carmakers to warn on Tuesday that the global semiconductor chip shortage that has bedeviled the industry this year will drag on throughout 2021 and beyond, hitting production and sales.

Carmakers, forced by the Covid-19 pandemic to shut down plants last year, face stiff competition from the sprawling consumer electronics industry for chip deliveries, hit by a series of supply chain disruptions during the pandemic.

Automobiles have become increasingly dependent on chips — for everything from computer management of engines for better fuel economy to driver-assistance features such as emergency braking.

Starving for chips, carmakers have focused production on higher-margin models, and have benefited from higher vehicle prices amid low inventories for consumers.

Stellantis chief financial officer Richard Palmer said on Tuesday the world's fourth largest carmaker did not expect chip supply to improve before the fourth quarter, with a total projected production loss of around 1.4 million vehicles in 2021.

BMW, which has so far been relatively less affected by the chip shortage than some of its peers thanks to strong relations with its suppliers, also warned that the second half will be more challenging for the German luxury carmaker.

"The longer the supply bottlenecks last, the more tense the situation is likely to become," BMW chief financial officer Nicolas Peter said in a statement.

"We expect production



A man passes car frames at a BMW factory in Shenyang, China. — Reuters

Automobiles have become increasingly dependent on chips — for everything from computer management of engines for better fuel economy to driver-assistance features such as emergency braking

restrictions to continue in the second half of the year and hence a corresponding impact on sales volumes."

Other carmakers from Tesla to Ford Motor Co have warned that for the foreseeable future, a lack

of chips is the main speed bump. "While we're making cars at full speed, the global chip shortage situation remains quite serious," Tesla CEO Elon Musk said last week.

German chipmaker Infineon Technologies also painted a grim picture on Tuesday, saying it was battling extreme tightness in its markets as the latest wave of the Covid-19 cases disrupts production in Asia and inventories hit all-time lows.

"The rebound of global car markets continues to be hampered by acute supply limitations across the entire value chain," Infineon CEO Reinhard Ploss told analysts.

"All in all, it will take time to get back to a supply-demand equilibrium." "In our view, this will

take until well into 2022," Ploss added.

The Ifo economic research institute said on Tuesday that the German car industry and its suppliers faced the worst chip supply shortage in 30 years. A poll showed that 83 per cent of companies were affected, up from 65 per cent in April.

"This is leading to production stoppages," Ifo researcher Oliver Falck said. "The shortages of semiconductors will persist for some time to come." On Sunday, French car lobby group CCFA-PFA warned that the global chip shortage and a new surge in coronavirus infections are hurting the prospects for a strong rebound by the French car market. — Reuters

Fed's Bullard sees more volatile economic 'regime' emerging in US

WASHINGTON: The coronavirus pandemic may have pushed the United States into a volatile era of stronger growth and better productivity, but higher interest rates and faster inflation as well, St Louis Federal Reserve President James Bullard said, elaborating on why he thinks the US central bank should end its crisis-era policies.

Bullard, who five years ago said he viewed the United States as mired in an epoch of low growth, low productivity and low inflation, said he is beginning to think a new "regime" may have arrived where the Fed will have to cope with faster change and more frequent shocks.

For more than a decade before the pandemic, "economic growth

We will have long, lingering effects as the rest of the world recovers. You have shortages and bottlenecks everywhere. You have Europe likely to grow more quickly in coming quarters

JAMES BULLARD
President, St Louis Federal Reserve

was slow and not very volatile and inflation in tandem was slow and not very volatile," Bullard said.



"This environment is a very different one where you have upset the global equilibrium...The reverberations will continue, and you will have a lot more volatility than you are used to."

On the plus side that could mean a run of productivity — enhancing developments that keep US growth and wages rising fast; the risk is higher inflation that could upend the Fed's current expectation that

price pressures will ease on their own and allow for continued loose monetary policy.

"We will have long, lingering effects as the rest of the world recovers. You have shortages and bottlenecks everywhere. You have Europe likely to grow more quickly in coming quarters," Bullard said.

"You have industries still adjusting to the post-pandemic world — many things happening, and at a pace we are not used to." In that setting "monetary policy needs to be more nimble."

His comments come with a specific policy recommendation: that the Fed begin trimming its \$120 billion in monthly asset purchases soon, cut them to zero by early next year, and be ready to

raise interest rates if inflation does threaten to remain too high for too long.

After missing its 2 per cent target during a decade of weak inflation, the Fed wanted to encourage a period of faster price increases, but now may be at risk of getting too much of what it asked.

But his views speak to a deeper prospect: That the economy may have changed in fundamental ways over the past 18 months, leaving the Fed looking at a different landscape than when it established a new framework just about one year ago. That framework envisions giving more weight to job growth, and allowing inflation to run above 2 per cent for a time to let employment expand. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

SINGAPORE

Crude oil prices reverse course after early bounce

Crude oil prices reversed course after an early bounce on Tuesday, as concerns over coronavirus curbs combined with slowing factory activity in key markets weighed on sentiment.

Brent crude oil futures shed 26 cents, or 0.4 per cent, to \$72.63 a barrel, as of 0645 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 16 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$71.10 a barrel.

ANZ analysts in a note highlighted resurgent economic risks to major oil consumer



China from the coronavirus pandemic. "Cases of the highly contagious Delta variant have emerged in 14 of 32 provinces. This could see further mobility restrictions introduced," ANZ analysts wrote. — Reuters

BANGKOK

Thai stock investor mood at nine-month low

Investor confidence in Thai financial markets for the next three months dropped to a nine-month low, dented by a prolonged Covid-19 outbreak, a capital market group said on Tuesday, as the country struggles with a surge in coronavirus cases.

A survey in July by the Federation of Thai Capital Market Organizations (FETCO) showed its investor confidence index slumped to 64.37 from 106.5 in the previous month.

"The confidence index fell



further due to the worsening outbreak situation in the country, while the distribution of vaccines has been delayed," federation chairman Paiboon Nalinthrangkurn told in a news briefing. — Reuters

BRUSSELS

Euro zone producer price inflation accelerates

Euro zone producer price inflation accelerated in June on higher energy prices, data from Eurostat showed on Tuesday.

Producer prices increased 10.2 per cent on a yearly basis in June, faster than the 9.6 per cent growth posted in May, but slightly slower than the economists' forecast of 10.3 per cent.

Excluding energy, producer price inflation growth climbed to 5.6 per cent, from 4.9 per cent in the previous month.



Among components of producer prices, energy prices registered the biggest annual growth, of 25.4 per cent annually, in June, followed by a 10.6-per cent rise in intermediate goods prices. — dpa

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Liwa almuthida Contracting Company announces its registration with the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 3300404, announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No. (30) of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments on all. Anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

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features



Pomegranate season in Jabal Akhdhar to captivate visitors anew

Jabal Akhdhar is home to nearly 30,000 pomegranate trees and in the next two weeks, these prize fruits will be harvested in different farms across the Green Mountain. From the yearly highly-anticipated pomegranate auction to the harvest itself, it's a sure tourist magnet that even the tourism and hospitality sector in the mountain has been busy preparing for... **P20**

MUSIC

READ

THE OFFICIAL HARRY POTTER BAKING BOOK

BY JOANNA FARROW

Forty-three tasty recipes inspired by the Harry Potter films.

Meet a pint-size US piano prodigy

BRIGITTE XIE READS music, can play Beethoven's Sonatina in F Major and has won a spot to perform at Carnegie Hall. She is 4 years old.

Brigitte's feet dangle above the ground when the petite girl sits on the piano bench, her hands moving gracefully across the keyboard. With long brown hair in a pony-

tail and bow, she cast her dark eyes shyly downward when her mother, Nicole Sun, asked if she likes piano and if it was fun. "Yeah, fun," Brigitte replied.

Brigitte's father, Tao Xie of Ridgefield, Connecticut, signed her up for piano lessons on Zoom about a year ago to give her something to do during Covid-19 lockdown.

"At the beginning, I never expected that she's going to be a prodigy or anything," he said. "But yeah, it turns out it's amazing."

Brigitte was the youngest winner of the prestigious Elite International Music Competition, which earned her a spot at Carnegie Hall. She was supposed to play at Carnegie Hall as part of the American Protégé International Music Talent Competition in November 2020. That got postponed to this November and now to November 2022 due to Covid-19.

Brigitte's mother gives credit to her piano teacher, Felicia Feng Zhang.

"Brigitte came to me when she was just two months after three years old," her teacher said. "From the lessons, I observed she has a curious mind and she loves to learn. We call that passion." — **Reuters**





Persy's Way: A cat's journey from Oman to England

Text by Ray Petersen
Photo by Lena Petersen

NO... IT'S NOT MISPELT, our Turkish Angora cat's name is Persy. He is completely white, like the washing powder 'Persil,' and branded "whiter than white."

We thought Persy should go to the UK, to have the best possible acclimatisation opportunity, joining our other feline family, already in County Durham, with Sasha and Chris. We often hear returning expatriates complaining that "it's expensive to move pets 'home' after a stint in Oman," but mostly, it takes time and energy. Regrettably, many pets are 'dumped,' as inconvenient. How people can do that... I don't know.

While considering our options, good friends, Andrea Wenke and Frans Kohler, going on vacation to the Netherlands, and offered their assistance, and Lena got to work. Cats going to the UK cannot fly in, due to animal importation rules, so Persy would fly to Amsterdam, and travel by taxi to London. Andrea contacted KLM registering as Persy's in-flight 'travel buddy,' while Lena contacted Johnny Paget, of 'Happy Saluki Pet Transport' and arranged Persy's collection from Schiphol Airport and transit to London. To keep the process simple for Andrea and Frans, and facilitate a smooth transition to the pet taxi, Lena also booked 'Luxury Assistance,' at Schiphol. Through social media interactions, Lena learned of other travelling pets, Mouse, Moxey, and Qatar owned Ahmed, and with Julie-Ann Al Hinal, created a Whatsapp group, facilitating their pets' travel to the UK with 'Happy Saluki,' making it much more affordable.

Of course, there were documentation and veterinary formalities, however, it's not too

onerous. First, we completed authorisation letters for Andrea, and 'Happy Saluki' as taking responsibility for Persy during his travels. Dr Peter Nolosco at Capital Vets had earlier completed Persy's 'pet passport,' with his neutering, inoculation, and rabies tests, then Qurum Vets' Varsha Karnick, their pet transport specialist, did the international documentation, while Dr Daisy Trilk gave Persy a complete physical check-up. The pre-flight certification from the government vet facility at Muscat Airport was also straightforward. The next day, we took Andrea, Frans, and Persy to Muscat Airport, and check-in and pre-flight documentation was efficiently checked by their ground staff, Persy's cage was x-rayed, and we waved people and pets goodbye.

Lena had a reassuring message from Schiphol's Luxury Assistance Operational Manager, Jim Seelmann, to say that he was 'in place, with an assistant, waiting for the 'travel buddies' and the cats.' 'Happy Saluki's' Dave Clark, had also arrived and was in communication with the airport team, so the coordinated operation was coming together perfectly. The airport team assisted the 'travel buddies' through immigration, luggage collection, and customs,



then uplifting the cats. Andrea Wenke explained that it was "hassle-free, efficient service by Speelman's team, well worth the cost!" The group met Clark at an agreed meeting point, and the cats were handed over to 'Happy Saluki,' and after photos, it was time for goodbyes, the 'travel buddies,' 'Luxury Assistance,' and 'Happy Saluki,' each going their own way.

Clark linked the group to his ongoing location, to follow his progress, and whenever he stopped to check, feed, and water the cats, he sent photos. After crossing the English Channel, Mouse, Moxey, and Ahmed were handed over to their owners en-route to London, while Persy stayed at 'Happy Saluki' with Sarah Paget



until Sasha and Chris picked him up the following day. He is now resting and getting to know the wider cat family in County Durham, where for him, one adventure ends, and another begins.

Thanks to all those who contributed, Persy's way was relatively smooth, and I guess the primary lesson is that, working with others, solutions may not always be as expensive or demanding as they may seem at first. And the final word, therefore, is a request to returning home expatriates... Don't put your pet friends back on the street... they deserve better... in fact, Persy was only going to be a short term foster. But... they get into your house, your home, and your heart.

ENTERTAINMENT

US comedian and non-smoker Kathy Griffin to undergo surgery for lung cancer



AMERICAN COMEDIAN Kathy Griffin said on Monday that she had been diagnosed with lung cancer although she has never been a smoker.

Griffin, 60, said in social media postings that she would undergo surgery to remove part of a lung, and that doctors were optimistic about the outcome.

"I have cancer. I'm about to go into surgery to have half of my left lung removed. Yes, I have lung cancer even though I've never smoked!" Griffin wrote.

"The doctors are very optimistic as it is stage one and contained to my left lung," she added.

Griffin, a two-time Emmy winner, has been out of the spotlight since 2017, when she lost jobs and sponsorships after posing with a fake severed head depicting then-US President Donald Trump in what was intended to be a joke. The Secret Service opened an investigation into the incident but no legal action was taken against Griffin. —Reuters

Amazon's pricey 'Lord of the Rings' TV series to launch Sept 2022



AMAZON'S MULTI-MILLION dollar TV version of "The Lord of the Rings" will launch in September 2022, Amazon Studios said on Monday.

The streaming platform said filming on the first season has wrapped in New Zealand, and it released the first images of the show.

"The journey begins September 2, 2022, with the premiere of our original The Lord of the Rings series on Prime Video," Jennifer Salke, head of Amazon Studios, said in a statement.

Amazon is spending about \$465 million film-

ing the first season of the show, according to New Zealand government officials. It is expecting to make five seasons of the show, making it one of the most expensive TV series ever.

It said in a press release that the first season would be available in more than 240 nations, with new episodes released weekly.

The epic fantasy plot will take place thousands of years before the events narrated by writer JRR Tolkien in his books "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings." — Reuters



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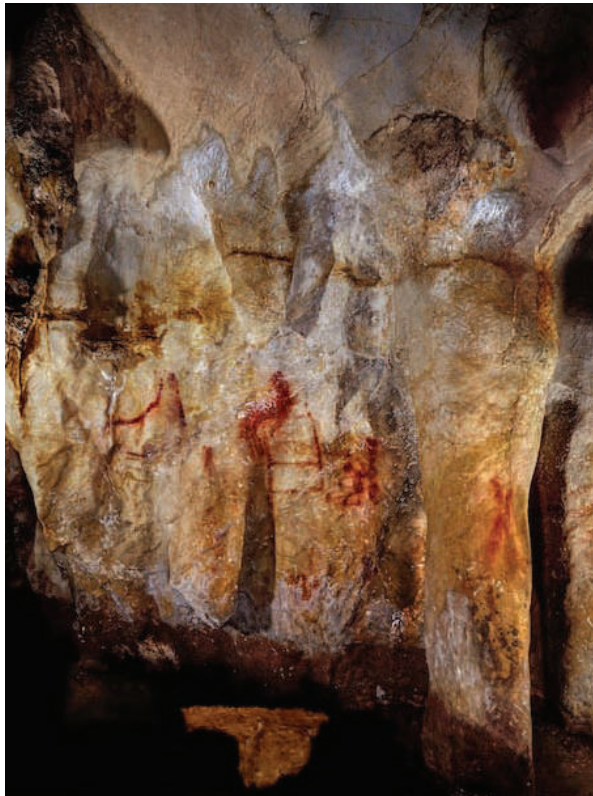


AROUND THE WORLD

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DISCOVERY

Study confirms ancient Spanish cave art was made by Neanderthals



NEANDERTHALS, LONG PERCEIVED to have been unsophisticated and brutish, really did paint stalagmites in a Spanish cave more than 60,000 years ago, according to a study published on Monday.

The issue had roiled the paleoarchaeology community ever since the publication of a 2018 paper attributing red ochre pigment found on the stalagmitic dome of Cueva de Ardales to our extinct "cousin" species.

The dating suggested the art was at least 64,800 years old, made at a time when modern humans did not inhabit the continent.

But the finding was contentious, and "a scientific article said that perhaps these pigments were a natural thing," a result of iron oxide flow, Francesco d'Errico, co-author of a new paper in the journal PNAS said.

A new analysis revealed the composition and placement of the pigments were not consistent with natural processes — instead, the pigments were applied through splattering and blowing.

What's more, their texture did not match natural samples taken from the caves, suggesting the pigments came from an external source.

More detailed dating showed that the pigments were applied at different points in time, separated by more than ten thousand years.

This "supports the hypothesis that the Neanderthals came on several occasions, over several thousand years, to mark the cave with pigments," said d'Errico, of the University of Bordeaux.

It is difficult to compare the Neanderthal "art" to wall paintings made by prehistoric modern humans, such as those found in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc cave of France, more 30,000 years old.

But the new finding adds to increasing evidence that Neanderthals, whose lineage went extinct around 40,000 years ago, were not the boorish relatives of Homo sapiens they were long portrayed to be.

The team wrote that the pigments are not "art" in the narrow sense of the word "but rather the result of graphic behaviours intent on perpetuating the symbolic significance of a space."

The cave formations "played a fundamental role in the symbolic systems of some Neanderthal communities," though what those symbols meant remains a mystery for now. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES



Explore Switzerland's magical region of Vaud starting with these seven activities

LOCATED IN THE southwestern part of Switzerland in its French-speaking region between Lake Geneva and Lake Neuchâtel, the region of Vaud is a dream vacation destination.

With Switzerland now open, travelers can explore the magical region of Vaud where days are long, evenings balmy and nature abundant.

This spectacular Swiss destination offers culture, fine dining and outdoor adventure with the breathtaking backdrop of the picturesque Lake Geneva and the Alps.

Here are seven things you can do when visiting this Olympic Capital that has influenced and inspired many artists over the years from Lord Byron and Audrey Hepburn to Charlie Chaplin, David Bowie and Freddie Mercury.

1) EXPLORE THE HISTORIC FORT DE CHILLON

The whole family will love this 20th-century fortification on the edge of Lake Geneva. Once the primary way to protect the road and rail lines passing from Lausanne to the mountainous interior region of Lausanne, it is now a must-see location to learn about the region's history. Guests can relive the experiences of a Swiss soldier through a range of fun activities



including quizzes, strategy games, augmented reality and 3D games. For an extra taste of military life, visitors can take a seat at the Concordia Platz where the soldiers sat before pausing for a gourmet coffee break or dining at the fort's cafe.

2) PEDALO ON LAKE GENEVA

Whether spending some romantic time with that special someone or taking a group of friends out to experience the wonders of the water, witnessing the spectacular scenery from the lake gives a unique experience to the region. With pedal boats for two or up to seven people, this offers a unique insight into the scale of the Swiss scenery in the blissful serenity of Lake Geneva.

3) HOP ABOARD THE CHOCOLATE TRAIN

Guests can experience some of



Switzerland signature foods on an exceptional culinary excursion. The adventure begins by rail on the Belle Époque carriage from Montreux to Montbovon before taking a luxury bus through the scenic region. At the first stop in Gruyères, visitors can discover the secrets of the production of the world-famous cheese by the same name, before setting off to explore the medieval town. Chocolate lovers will then get to explore the famous chocolate factory in Broc which concludes with an irresistible tasting.

4) GET INSPIRED AT THE OLYMPIC MUSEUM

Sport-lovers can learn about the founders of this world-famous sporting event and the cultural, social and historical impact it has had on the world since its birth. With 1,500 objects and 150 screens to relive great Olympic moments, the Museum offers

visitors a unique experience in a place where information, reflection and emotion are shared around sport.

5) LEARN MORE ABOUT ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST-LOVED STAGE STARS AT CHAPLIN'S WORLD

Film fans can walk in the steps of Hollywood's legendary Charlie Chaplin, immerse in the studio to experience the silent world of film or roam the sprawling ten-acre estate the star once walked retracing the steps of the cinematic hero. The last 25 years of his extraordinary life were spent in Switzerland as he enjoyed the peace and privacy it provided, with views of Lake Geneva and the Alps.

Now, the museum in his honour invites the world to celebrate the life of this much-loved man.



6) INDULGE IN A LUXURIOUS BRUNCH AND CRUISE WITH BRUNCH ABOARD

Notable grape drinks, fine dining and spectacular scenery await as visitors gently cruise across Lake Geneva and dine on local delicacies at Café Léman. The cruise takes guests around this majestic region which includes witnessing one of the local UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the terraced vineyards of Lavaux and its charming hillside villages, offering a picturesque paradise.

7) DISCOVER AQUATIS AQUARIUM - VIVARIUM LAUSANNE

Aquatis presents animals through a totally immersive and interactive scenography using innovative digital technologies. More than an aquarium or a vivarium, Aquatis is an excep-

tional journey through our planet's most fascinating freshwater environments. Aquatis invites visitors to dive headfirst into an immersive trip around the five continents to discover the main freshwater ecosystems and their flora and fauna.

The region is served by Geneva international airport, which is a short 40-minute train ride away from Lausanne. The region boasts a strong infrastructure including luxurious and affordable accommodation and a well-connected transportation system. To accompany the visit to this Olympic Capital, guests can now download a free copy of the Lausanne Travel Journal. The Carnet

de Voyage is the notebook that will entertain children during their stay in Lausanne. Filled with activities related to the city, they can discover Lausanne through explorations, drawings, games, collages, and lots of surprises. Something to keep them busy while



visiting Lausanne's must-see sites. The additional bonus is that guests can present their Carnet along the journey to receive exciting surprises. To learn more, visit www.region-du-leman.ch/en/Z5192/media-corner



Pomegranate season in Jabal Akhdhar to captivate visitors anew

By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here



THE SOFT INTERMITTENT rains drizzled the plants of Jabal Akhdhar. At night, the temperature still drops to a good 24 degrees Celsius. The inhabitants of Balad Seeq welcome these rains. In two more weeks, they will be busy again. The rains are just an additional gift — a preparation and conditioning for the harvest of the prized pomegranate trees.

We met Abdullah al Saqry nearly three years ago. Owning nearly 200 trees of pomegranate, he's one of the popular Jabal Akhdhar farmers who has opened his farms to visitors. For an old man in his 80s (he forgot his age and can't recall when he was born), he remains to be one of the most prolific and active farmers who still personally manages his farm.

He has hired help and in preparation for the harvest season in the next two weeks, he has started handing out instructions.

He knows his farm too well. He knows that on average, each of these trees can bear 60 to 100 fruits each. He has about 16 different varieties on his farm and depending on size, quality and sweetness, they can cost differently — the best ones fetching up to RO 6 apiece.

While the farmers in Jabal Akhdhar are also challenged by Covid19, the work never stops. The trees and the fruits have their own challenges too from pests that can kill the trees to the bats or animals that can eat the fruits. So the farmers always keep an eye to protect the trees during the flowering season all the way to the harvest season.

While visits to the farms have slowed due to earlier Covid19 restrictions, Abdullah is aware that the pomegranate season will bring visitors once more to their doorsteps.

While the number varies depending on who you ask, Oman's Green Mountain is said to be home to around 30,000 pome-

granate trees. Farmers like Abdullah know the season well. The trees start to flower as early as March in time for the damask roses harvest season. It would take another five months before the fruits can be ready. Starting from the mid-week of August till October, they will be busy harvesting again.

AUCTIONING FOR BEST PRICE

At the peak of the harvest season, before Covid-19 and even last year, an auction usually takes place. Auctioning the pomegranate fruits had been a ritual driving a large number of buyers to the different farms spread over the Green Mountain.

Just like how date fruits are auctioned, the pomegranate auction helps both bidders and sellers to save on time and effort. By buying the fruit of a whole tree or farm, farmers do not have to worry about how they can market their harvest. A lot of these auctions happen around Balad Seeq — Abdullah's village as it is where a great number of pomegranate trees and farms can be found with good quality.

The auction process can usually take three days. The bidders are given samples of the fruits. They taste it and check its quality and the bidding process begins. Usually, they would set the bidding for the next harvest season. One tree can have a starting bid of RO 50 to RO 70. This year, despite the Covid19 challenge, the farmers are hoping that they can get bigger bids.

For Abdullah and his family, whatever is unsold during bidding are sold separately by piece. Many farmers also opt for selling the fruits by piece or have it in bulk orders as they can dictate the prices better.

A BOOST FOR MOUNTAIN HOTELS

Just like the rose harvest season, the pomegranate harvest season is also a highly anticipated event among hotels in Jabal Akhdhar. Anticipating the excitement revolving around the event, tour packages are usually organised to give visitors a better opportunity to experience and impart knowledge about this time-honoured tradition.

Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the pioneers when it comes to creating a buzz about the season. Guests staying at the highest resort in the Middle East can embrace the beauty of the blooming landscape with nature walks, mountain climbing and an exclusive pomegranate tour guided by the resort's Mountain Guru, whilst Anantara Spa presents a seasonally inspired spa journey that harnesses the richness of the fruit.

A representative from the resort said that part of their package is a pomegranate tour.

"On the one-hour pomegranate tour, guests traverse the Saiq Plateau to witness the harvesting of the iconic fruit, interacting with local farmers who are happy to explain how they have farmed for generations and select the perfect specimens," Anantara shared.

"Those looking to pamper themselves can indulge in the Royal Pomegranate Escape, the perfect polish for a smooth and radiant body at the resort's elegant spa. Rich in antioxidants, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar pomegranates have long been revered for their ability to regenerate, nourish and protect the skin. The two-hour treatment commences with a full body pomegranate scrub, followed by a relaxing massage and rehydrating facial," they added.

For more information or to make a booking, call +968 2521 8000.