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OMAN RACING WRAP
UP LE MANS WITH 5TH
PLACE IN RACE TWO



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SALALAH PORT'S
GENERAL CARGO
VOLUMES JUMP 20%



P20

EMERGING OMANI
FASHION LINE MIXES
HERITAGE WITH ART



MUSCAT

26,189 OMANI YOUTH IN BUSINESS

The total number of employed youth (Omanis) in the Sultanate in the age group 18 to 29 stood at 178,600 constituting 24 per cent of the total Omanis working in the Sultanate in 2020, according to the ‘The youth and Labour Market brochure’ issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The brochure also revealed that the number of youth business owners in the age group from 18 to 29 years stood at 26,189. **DETAILS ON P5**

DOCTOR-POPULATION RATIO HIGH IN OMAN

The number of doctors per 10,000 population in the Sultanate stood at as high as 20, while for nurses it was 44 in 2020. “This is against nine doctors and 26 nurses per every 10,000 population in 1990”, reveals the Annual Report published by the Ministry of Health. Significantly, the doctor-nurses ratio reached 2.2 in 2020 while medical officer and the specialist ratio remained at 1.1 in the same year. **DETAILS ON P3**

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Life prospers with what you do!

Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami

Hard imagery and sharp language

Dr Khalid Mohammed Al Balushi

INSIDE



DOZENS OF PALESTINIANS INJURED NEAR GAZA STRIP

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TROPICAL STORM HENRI BEARS DOWN ON US EAST COAST

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Assigned by HM, minister to preside over SQU graduation

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrooqiyyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation will preside over the 31st batch graduation ceremony

of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), scheduled to take place at the end of next month. The two-day ceremony will be held for the first time ever via video-conferencing in a live stream from the grand hall



of SQU’s Cultural Centre. The total number of graduates this year stood at 2,956 comprising holders of Bachelor, diploma and postgraduate degrees. All other possible options for the ceremony were taken

into consideration with a close follow-up to indicators of the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate. This stems from the keenness of SQU administration to ensure the safety of all graduates. — ONA

LOW RISK OF INFECTION AMONG THOSE WHO TOOK SHOTS

VACCINE A GAME CHANGER IN WAR AGAINST COVID-19

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Vaccines are a major weapon in the fight against Covid-19, offering effective protection against even highly contagious strains such as the Delta variant. They can flatten the curve provided the population is fully vaccinated. Brushing aside the doubts about the safety of the vaccines, Dr Zakariya al Balushi, Infectious Disease Consultant at Royal Hospital, said that the vaccine prevents infection. He said, “the infection among the vaccinated is very much less compared to others. Besides, the vaccine definitely reduces the risk of infection and studies proved that protection provided by the vaccine is stronger than the immunity that comes after the infection.” Taking polio drops as an example, Dr Zakariya explained that before the discovery of polio vaccination, many patients throughout their lives depended on prosthetic legs. “There is no cure for the polio virus, yet it has been controlled by the vaccine for many years”, he said. The Supreme Committee last Thursday said vaccination is a must to enter government and



The infection among the vaccinated is very much less compared to others. Besides, the vaccine definitely reduces the risk of Covid infections

DR ZAKARIYA
Royal Hospital

private establishments in Oman from September 1. It is also a condition to enter shopping malls,

restaurants as well as to attend cultural, sports, group events. Heads of government and private units must take the necessary measures to implement these decisions. Meanwhile, Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate have been witnessing a fall in recent weeks the vaccine campaign targeting 70 per cent of the population is gathering pace. The Ministry of Health on Sunday reported 385 new cases with 11 people succumbing to the infection in the last 72 hours. With this number, the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate reached 301,299 including 4,031 deaths. **SEE ALSO P2**

G7 leaders set to discuss Afghanistan on Tuesday

LONDON: G7 leaders will discuss the crisis in Afghanistan on Tuesday in a virtual summit, Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Sunday, a week after the Taliban retook power. “It is vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis and support the Afghan people to secure the gains of the last 20 years”, Johnson tweeted. The United Kingdom currently occupies the chair of the grouping of wealthy nations comprising Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, and Johnson has been pushing for a meeting for the past week. The Western allies have faced mounting criticism over their handling of the crisis in Afghanistan amid chaotic scenes as thousands of Afghans and foreigners try to flee Kabul following the group’s return to power. Following a virtual meeting last Thursday G7 foreign ministers urged the Taliban to provide safe passage for those trying to flee the capital, the bloc’s first formal statement on the crisis. In June, the G7 held its first in-person summit in nearly two years, in Cornwall southwest England.



A protester during a rally in support for Afghanistan at Place de la Republique in Paris, France, on Sunday. — AFP

Since then, the Taliban has launched a nationwide offensive and surprised the West by recapturing most of Afghanistan within weeks, as the United States and its allies withdrew from its two-decade military involvement there. The US, which has sent thousands of troops temporarily to try to secure the airport and help evacuate its nationals and Afghans who helped them, has set a deadline to complete the airlifts by August 31. However, allies including the UK have suggested they would support extending the deadline, an issue likely to feature prominently at Tuesday’s discussion. **SEE ALSO P7**

Oman’s two best trail runners eye 170-km UTMB race

MUSCAT: Hamdan al Khatri and Hamed al Harthi, Oman’s two best trail runners, will soon be taking their place on the start line in Chamonix, France, for the 2021 UTMB Mont Blanc 170-km trail running race. Having been forced to postpone last year’s attempt, Hamdan and Hamed are determined to make the most of the opportunity when the race kicks off on August 27. UTMB is described as ‘a mythical race, a unique experience’, and it is one of the most prestigious trail-running



events on the circuit. Starting around the foothills of Mont Blanc, the 170-km race course will take the athletes up to 10,000 metres where each participant must rely on their strength and push their mental and physical capabilities to the limit. The event attracts up to 10,000 runners each year and is considered an essential event for trail-runners around the world. The 31-year-old Hamdan and 62-year-old Hamed have dedicated the past few years to running, both competing in the

inaugural Oman by UTMB in 2018 and completing a variety of ultra-marathons around the world. Hamdan has raced at UTMB Mont Blanc before, in 2019, when he was the first and only Omani in the CCC 100-km race. Hamed al Harthi competed in the Oman by UTMB, in 2019, as well as Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina the same year. His crowning glory, however, was reaching the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro earlier this year. **SEE ALSO P12**

First, second phases
of Khasab Fishing
Port Development
Project completed



KHASAB: The fishing port in Khasab is one of the main pillars of economic and social development in the Governorate of Musandam, especially in Khasab. It is an important infrastructure that serves the marine fishing sector and the neighbouring wilayats.

Juma bin Suleiman al Shehhi, Head of Khasab Fishing Port, pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has completed the first and second phases of Khasab port development project in Musandam, at a cost of RO 1,600,000.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he said that after converting part of the transport port to a fishing harbour, its area became 92,000 square metres, including the port basin with an area of more than 87,000 square metres.

He explained that the port provides an opportunity for the region's economic growth. It also facilitates the fishing profession for

fishermen and provides all basic services and facilities, in addition to boosting the fish industries and related activities.

He pointed out that the fishing port in Khasab serves 2,100 local fishermen and the villages in the wilayat. He added that there are 1,100 boats, 41 fishing vessels and 59 fish transport vehicles.

"Developments also covered the establishment of an ice factory, refuelling station, in addition to ships, boats, engines, and marine equipment repair workshops. Some commercial shops dedicated to fishing activities, including selling fishing gear and equipment, cafes, restaurants and other necessary activities are set on the spot with an aim to serve the fishing sector", he added.

Noting that the next stage will include the establishment of a fish market, a building for the port's administration, stores and a prayer room, the port is expected to stretch over an area of 92,000 square metres. — ONA

OMSB signs pact with Oman
LNG Development Foundation

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 22

The Oman LNG Development Foundation signed an agreement with the Oman Medical Specialties Board (OMSB) to finance the training of medical personnel at Sur Hospital in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate — a move that will pave the way for the accreditation of the hospital as a training centre.

The agreement also includes a provision for the Board's Medical Simulation and Innovation Center to provide various specialised training courses for doctors of the hospital.

The programmes will be delivered virtually via the Center's eLearning platform, while others will be offered for in-person attendance at the Center's well-equipped facilities. These courses are designed to develop the skillsets and capabilities of Sur Hospital's medical staff from different specialties.

Sunday's agreement was signed



by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, CEO — Oman Medical Specialties Board, while the Oman LNG Development Foundation was represented by its CEO, Dr Amor bin Nasser al Matani.

In remarks, Dr Al Sabti said the pact comes within the framework of efforts by public and private sector organisations to support

collaboration with the aim of boosting the capabilities of Omani medical personnel and raise the overall standards of healthcare services in the Sultanate.

VACCINE, A GAME CHANGER



Vaccines are a major weapon in the fight against Covid-19, offering effective protection against even highly contagious strains such as the Delta variant. They can flatten the curve provided the population is fully vaccinated. Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate have been witnessing a fall in recent weeks the vaccine campaign targeting 70 per cent of the population is gathering pace.

Boost to beautification projects in Saham

SAHAM: The Municipal Affairs Directorate in the Wilayat of Saham has initiated a number of development and beautification projects in different parts of the wilayat.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Ahmed al Maimani, Director of the Municipal Affairs, explained that these projects meet the needs of the people and add an aesthetical and civilised view to the place.

Closed and air-conditioned glass canopies, a decorative roundabout, gardens and parks provided with recreational services are among key projects that will see the light of day.

He added that the



department is committed to set a number of landscaping projects to add the aesthetic character to the wilayat.

"We look forward to implementing other projects, the most important of which are the establishment of a public walkway equipped with the necessary services, and providing a set of stalls for street vendors seeking to find new job opportunities", he pointed out. — ONA



MSX declines
11 points

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index 30 on Sunday lost (11.5) points, comprising a drop by (0.29 per cent) to close at (3,971.53) points, compared to the last session, which stood at (3,983.07) points.

The trading value stood at (RO 1,458,921), comprising a fall by (19.9 per cent), compared to the last session, which stood at (RO 1,822,213).

The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value declined by (0.077 per cent) to reach about (RO 21.60) billion. The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached (RO 112,000), comprising (7.69 per cent). The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached (RO 209,000), comprising (14.32 per cent).

AFDF Board to finance 12 projects worth RO 1 million



MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF) on Sunday held its second meeting of the year under the chairmanship of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries

and Water Resources, AFDF Board Chairman.

The meeting discussed the executive position of the funded projects and the AFDF's financial situation in the first half of 2021.

The AFDF Board reviewed

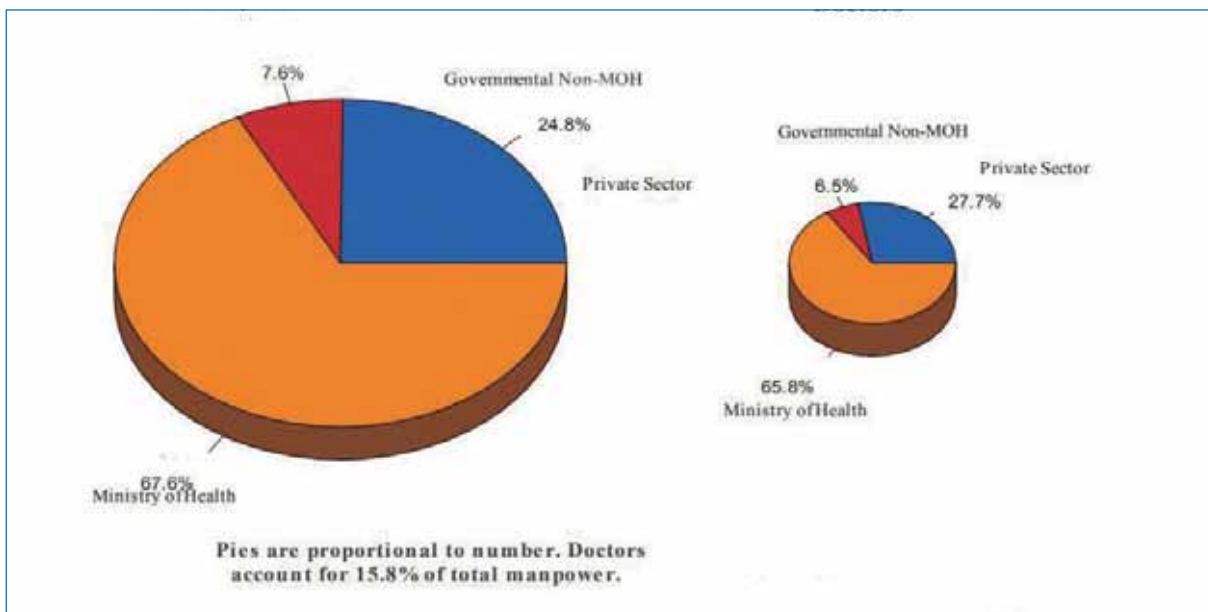
the new projects to be funded in 2021. The Board agreed to fund 12 projects worth RO one Million, including 5 in agriculture and livestock sectors, 6 in fisheries and one in food safety.

These projects will contribute

in generating income for the fund, in addition to developing and sustaining the related sectors. They will also support the food safety system and create work opportunities. — ONA

Oman tops WHO's doctor-population ratio

2 DOCTORS FOR 1,000 PEOPLE AGAINST GLOBAL STANDARD OF 1 FOR 1,000



SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyvp

The number of doctors per 10,000 population in the Sultanate stood at as high as 20, while for nurses it was 44 in 2020.

"This is against nine doctors and 26 nurses per every 10,000 population in 1990," reveals the Annual Report published by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

Significantly, the doctor-nurses ratio reached 2.2 in 2020 while medical officer and the specialist ratio remained at 1.1 in the same year.

However, the ratio suggested by the World Health Organisation was one doctor per 1,000 patients.

For Oman it was 2 per 1,000 population.

According to the recent OECD data, Italy has 4 doctors per 1,000 of its population while Spain has 3.9, the United States 2.5 and China 2 doctors per 1,000 people.

While the public sector accounts for 62 per cent of the total health staff, the private sector accounts for 28 per cent of doctors, 76 per cent of dentists and 70 per cent of pharmacists.

The percentage of Omanisation in the health Sector has reached 73 per cent in MoH and 13 per cent in Private Sector. At the same time, the rate of Omanisation in MoH throughout the years, has increased in all medical and

paramedical categories. The increase among nurses from 12 per cent in 1990 to 66 per cent in 2020.

Omanis account for 98 per cent of the health administrators, 100 per cent of the medical orderlies and 100 per cent of the administrative support staff (white-collar staff, skilled and unskilled labour). According to the report Omanisation among doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses collectively has reached almost 60 per cent in 2020 compared to 59 per cent in 2019.

For MoH, there has been an increase in pharmacists in 2020 compared to 2019; by 3 per cent, while there has been a decrease

Indian School Board launches ISQUIZ 2021

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 22

The third edition of ISQUIZ (Indian School Quiz), one of the biggest online Inter-School events conceptualized by the Board of Directors, designed to augment the holistic development programme for the students of all Indian Schools was inaugurated at a ceremonious virtual function organised by Indian School Muscat, the Host School of ISQUIZ 2021, on Saturday, August 21.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman graced the occasion as the chief guest; and Dr Ram Shankar, Controller of Examinations, Central University of Odisha and Joint Secretary, CBSE was the special guest.

The grand inaugural ceremony



commenced with a prayer song sung by the school choir. Master Vishwanath Praveen, Assistant Head Boy, Indian School Muscat welcomed the august gathering.

In his introductory message, Sachin Toprani, President of the Indian School Muscat Management Committee

congratulated the team that has worked tirelessly to ensure the seamless conduct of the Quiz at different levels. He lauded Indian School Muscat as the epicentre of academic endeavours and the most happening place leading way to subtlety of perfection. He wished all the brainy warriors the joy of crossing horns of smartness and calibre with each other.

Indian School Board Chairman Dr Sivakumar in his inaugural address, underscored the indispensable role quizzing plays in enhancing the IQ of students. "It is not just the matter of asking questions and providing factual information, but synthesising knowledge using analytical skills, considering profound nuances of question before answering makes the quiz competition as an enhanced learning activity," he said.

Believers hopeful of resuming Friday mass prayers soon

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

With the ease in Covid-19 restrictions, believers are hopeful Friday mass prayers will resume soon. An official said pandemic protocol will be strictly maintained at the mosques.

"We are hopeful and we can only hope during these times of the pandemic. We are expecting a positive decision soon so that the Friday congregational prayers can be resumed," an official of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) told the *Observer*.

"Strict vigil on safety should be observed in accordance with the Covid-19 protocols if Friday prayers are allowed to resume," Abdulaziz al Ghafri, Assistant General Manager of Preaching and Guidance of MoARA said.

Oman halted public gatherings and mass events in March 2020 to battle Covid-19, mosques

were reopened partially in November for the five times compulsory prayers in accordance with the Covid protocols of the Ministry of Health.

Mosques were allowed to open 15 minutes prior to prayers with individuals asked to bring their own prayer mats. However, the Friday special prayer or Juma were not allowed.

"We have all the reasons to expect that the long-lost Friday mass prayers would resume," Mohiyidheen Alavi, a trader who never missed Juma prayers in his life before the pandemic, said.

In June 2021, mosques which had a capacity of not less than 400 worshippers were allowed to open without Friday congregation.

If a green light is given by the Supreme Committee which is tasked with monitoring developments arising out of the pandemic, believers will be urged to follow strict adherence to Covid-19 norms at the congregations in mosques.

Al Najd Agriculture Development Company



شركة النجد للتطوير الزراعي

Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company looking for a General Manager responsible for managing the overall performance of Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company, developing strategic plan to fulfil Company's vision and mission. The responsibilities will also include achieving the strategic objectives, performance, and expansion targets, promoting revenue, and profitability. The position holder will be accountable to the Board of Directors for fulfilment and implementation of all plans and policies. Represent the Company to Government and stakeholders.

Key Result Areas

- Preparation and achievement of business strategy and business plan for the Company;
- Top line and Bottom line of the Company;
- Efficiency and sustainability of Company operations;
- Effective integration of all functions;
- Company finance and administration;
- Customer satisfaction, and
- Employee's management and development.

Key Tasks

- Oversee day-to-day operations
- Determine the overall direction, strategy and goals of the Company.
- Formulate the long-term objectives, plans and targets of the Company.
- Translate the business plan into budget, goals and targets for the Managers. Direct and coordinate their efforts and monitor achievement not the same.
- Review activity reports and financial statements regularly and monitor farms performance continuously to ensure approved business plans are executed successfully.
- Direct the growth and business development initiatives of the Company, ensuring adequate resources allocations.
- Set out specific performance standards in key areas.
- Guide and assist Managers in all operational issues involving planning, coordination, adherence to target/work schedule, etc.. to improve sustainability and increase profitability, consumer reach and productivity.
- Evaluate performance of Managers for compliance with approved policies and objectives of the Company and required performance goals and standards.
- Coordinate with the Board of Directors for the evaluation of feasibility of new projects.
- Develop and maintain contacts with stakeholders and competent authorities and major customers to further business interests.
- Manage selection, development, measurement, motivation, cooperation, and termination of team staff.
- Any other responsibilities entrusted by the Board of Directors.

Education Level – Minimum Requirement

- Bachelor's degree in Agriculture
- MBA or Master Degree in Agri-business or related fields is an added advantage.

Work Experience

Overall experience of at least 20 years in agribusiness of which a minimum of 6 years working experience as a Manager or 4 years as General Manager in crop production in the private sector (mandatory).

Skills

- knowledge of fodder, bulb vegetables and grain sustainable production in hot dry climate;
- Cultivation under central pivot irrigation and drip irrigation system over large areas;
- Practical knowledge of mechanized farming.
- Business acumen and commercial orientation
- Strong management and business background
- Knowledge of finance/production/operations management, quality assurance and control, familiarity/comfortable with using statistical tools
- Strategic planning and implementation
- Examining and re-engineering operations and procedures
- Develop technical, marketing, and financial plans, analyze, and interpret all related data
- Knowledge of profit and loss, balance sheet and cash flow management and general finance and budgeting.
- Knowledge of corporate governance and general management best practices
- Excellent leadership, project management and people management
- Financial awareness to understand and interpret numbers
- Excellent written & verbal communication / presentation skills
- Excellent written and spoken skills in English.

Generic Skills

- Strong Character
- Integrity and loyalty
- Good understanding of labour, environment and business law
- Solid judgement qualities
- Self motivated
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability

Please send the cv's to email address : soaad@alnajd.com.om, the last day Sunday 5/9/2021

TAPPING ADVENTURE LOVERS

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate will seek to tap the potential of its mountainous topography and long pristine beaches to tap adventure lovers.

As per the initiatives of Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has been developing regulatory measures for the adventure tourism industry in Oman to prepare guidelines for the Adventure Safety Guide (ASG) Management System and create a system for issuing permits to conduct adventure activities.

The government, to date, has developed over 50 trekking paths across the country.

With this regard, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, issued decision 124/2021 to add organising adventure trips to the activities of travel and tourism offices.

This decision, which will be published in the Official Gazette, will come into force after 90 days from the date of its publication.

Any licensed company or sole proprietorship must obtain a licence to organise tourist trips for groups or individuals inside the Sultanate or abroad, according to programmes that include transportation or reservations in hotels or tourist establishments.

The services by these companies include selling or exchanging tickets, facilitating transportation (air, marine and land).

The companies can provide special services for tourists, like getting entry and exit visas, insurance services and reservations of the places.

The licensed companies must have a certificate granted by the security and safety auditor to practice the activity, which includes adventure tourism trips.

The decision states that it is not permissible to engage in the activity of organising adventure tourism trips, except after obtaining a licence.

The licensed company must provide the tourist with detailed information about the trip, potential risks, instructions and insurance.

The company shall not organise adventure tourism trips in the prohibited sites without obtaining the approval of the concerned authority, in accordance with the decisions and instructions issued by the concerned authorities.

It should take necessary precautions to avoid the risks resulting from natural disasters or weather conditions.

The licensee must cancel adventure tourism trips in case of warning instructions on weather conditions or natural disasters from the Civil Aviation Authority or the concerned authority.

The security and safety auditor will be responsible for providing the ministry with any information or data related to the licensee.

“It will carry out periodic or annual field visits to follow up the quality and guarantee the licensee’s commitment, and check the qualifications of trainers, mentors, working assistants, tools and other services.”

The adventure activities include off-road driving and group tours (including biking, and all off-road vehicles), two-wheel electric bikes, cycling, zip lines, roller coasters, carts, skates, paintball, bungee jumping or skydiving and swinging over canyons or under bridges or hitting caves, going down inside a cave, travelling through canyons, long journeys through valleys and climbing natural or artificial surfaces and underwater navigation.

LICENSED TOURISM COMPANIES WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFETY OF ADVENTURE TOURISTS. THEY WILL ALSO MAKE SURE THAT TOURISTS ARE INSURED AGAINST ALL POTENTIAL RISKS

MoE implements specialised training programme



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 22

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers launched a specialised training programme targeting more than 100 Bachelor of Education (BoE) graduates in Kindergarten, pre-school, and early education.

The training programme comes in order to enrol these trainees in a position as first field teachers in public schools within the framework of the National Employment Initiative. The programme kicked off on Sunday, August 22, and continues until February 3, 2022.

The implementation of this specialised training programme comes out of the high interest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the Omani youth employment, and his constant affirmation that they are the wealth of nations and their inexhaustible resource.

The programme also comes in line with the keenness of the Ministry of Education to empower Omani national cadres from obtaining the professional

skills that qualify them to engage in institutional work, and to replace the non-Omani cadres — especially in the field of localising the teaching profession in the first cycle of basic education.

The statistics of the past academic year 2020-2021 indicate that there are 1,040 female non-Omani teachers in the field, in addition to the increasing number of students registered annually in basic education, without the presence of qualified Omani teaching competencies.

Implementing this specialised training programme for graduates in the disciplines of (kindergarten, pre-school children, and early education), seeks to provide these graduates and candidates with knowledge and specialised skills in the fields of Islamic education, the Arabic language, and social studies in line with the requirements of teaching in grades (1-4). The programme also aims to provide them with effective teaching strategies in the classroom situation in line with the needs of the job field, as well as to direct them towards employing educational technology and educational platforms in the ministry in teaching students in those classes.

It also aims to deepen their understanding of educational developments in the education system in the Sultanate, in addition to enabling them to apply assessment tools for those classes based on the requirements of the student-learning document, and to provide them with professional self-development skills.

It is worth noting that the implementation of this specialised training programme will take place in two phases.

The first phase is the direct central training phase where it takes place in the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers for six weeks, during the period from September 30 to August 22. In the seventh week, the training will be virtual. In the eighth and ninth weeks, trainees will be field-trained in schools to teach the curricula of the first field in the first cycle.

The second stage is the non-centralised training, which will be in the educational governorates, one day per week every Monday for 15 weeks during the period from October 24 till March 2, 2022, which represents 15 training days, both direct and virtual.

MoH takes part in GCC and Jordan virtual coordination meeting on public health

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 22

The Ministry of Health (MoH) participated in the virtual third coordination meeting of the GCC countries and Jordan in the field of public health.

The meeting aimed at following up the implementation of the recommendations agreed upon in the previous meetings of the specialised working groups.

During the meeting, the joint work plan was presented by the General Secretariat. The meeting also stressed strengthening the relations of cooperation and partnership among the GCC, and the active countries, regional and international

organisations and to complete the implementation of joint action plans and what has been agreed upon at the working groups and joint committees formed for this purpose, as well as to update the detailed plans of the working group.

The joint committee of senior officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs between the GCC and Jordan recommended at the beginning of this year to extend the main work plan between the Gulf and Jordanian sides, and to update the detailed work plan, in addition to extend the Main Action Plan approved previously by their Highnesses and Excellencies the Ministers of Foreign Affairs for a period of five years, ending 2025.

The joint committee further recommended communicating through diplomatic channels to hold meetings for specialised work teams in the near future.

It was also agreed that the specialised work teams would update each detailed work plans as well the mechanisms considering developments in their field of work, according to specific programmes and periods, focusing meanwhile on achieving tangible outputs.

Moreover, the work teams should assign liaison officers from Jordan and the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and promote joint work among the business sector representatives of both sides.

Never throw masks away

DR NISMA HARIS
MUSCAT, AUG 22

It is a common sight these days to see masks and gloves littered in the parking lots, on the roads, grounds, sidewalks, beaches and parks.

Masks are the first line of defence against ongoing pandemic but when it comes to its safe disposal, we are least bothered.

Our planet is already overwhelmed with litter and now we have this additional pandemic litter that is further fanning the flames. We all are well aware that it is not a healthy practice to litter but despite our sagacity, we all do it sometimes or the other subconsciously.

What drives us to throw waste in the open is laziness or carelessness to hunt for a trash bin. We think about what difference it makes. It's the job of litter pickers why do we bother.

So goes our thinking. Contaminated masks improperly disposed of are a potential health hazard to public health. Moreover, they are new plunderers of our environment along with cigarette butts and food wrappers.

As per UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), owing to historical data; it is expected that 75 per cent of used masks and other pandemic-related waste will end up in landfills or floating in seas.

We witness birds and animals throttled to death after being entrapped and entangled in mask loops. Larger animals can even mistake them for food and can ingest masks, gloves and PPEs.

The very thought of entry of pandemic litter into our food chains through the land, water bodies, or animals is stupefying and horrifying. These are the immediate consequences of pandemic litter which are no more pernicious than its delayed consequences hundreds of years later as medical waste is composed of

Unless we dispose of face masks, gloves, PPE kits responsibly, there is a high risk of the pandemic litter entering into our food chains

single-use toxic plastics.

Apart from causing environmental and health havoc, the estimated financial cost by UNEP in areas of tourism and fisheries is around \$40 billion. It's simple. Just dispose of it properly in a trash can. If you are unable to find one, keep it with you in a paper bag and then dispose of it in the garbage later.

We are responsible inhabitants of this planet and surely, we don't want to be disease spreaders or environmental damage inducers.

One little initiative can save the other person and we need to keep the chain intact so that if everyone plays their part well, together we can hand over our forthcoming generations a litter-free healthy planet.

As I mentioned, plastic pollution has already been a ticking bomb with pandemic litter adding on to it as stray bullets. The absolute need of the moment is to implement stringent measures to curb public pandemic littering by the concerned authorities locally, nationally as well as globally.

Using fabric masks is an eco-friendly resource for non-healthcare workers.

Planet-friendly alternatives which are recyclable, biodegradable, and non-toxic should be encouraged and promoted both at small scale and large-scale levels. Lest we become vigilant and start acting or be ready for litter epidemics everywhere gyrating to illnesses and ailments procreators.

The author is a physician, content creator and wellness adviser. dr.nisma.healthyvows@gmail.com



Over 26,000 Omani youth are business owners, says NCSI report

MUSCAT: The National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) released "the youth and labour market brochure" in which the total Omani youth (18 to 29 years) amounted to about 549,969 young males and females (20.1 per cent) of the total Omanis in the Sultanate (2,731,456) according to the E-Census of Population, Housing and Establishments 2020 data.

The brochure stated that the total number of employed youth in the Sultanate in the age group (18 to 29) amounted to 178,600 (79 per cent males and 21 per cent females) constituting 24 per cent of the total Omanis working in the Sultanate in 2020.

The brochure further indicated that 50.4 per cent of working youth work in the public sector (79,600) and 49.4 per cent work in the private sector (78,100), while



0.2 per cent work in other sectors.

As for the level of education, the Omani youth working in the public sector (60.8 per cent) of them hold a General Diploma, 13.7 per cent hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, 7.6 per cent hold a Higher Diploma, and 17.9 per cent do not have a General Diploma.

As for the private sector, the brochure showed that the construction sector attracted the largest number of young Omani workers among other economic activities in the private sector by (23.5

per cent), followed by the wholesale and retail trade sector, and repair of vehicles and motorcycles with 14.5 per cent, the manufacturing sector by 12.8 per cent, and mining and quarrying sector with 9.3 per cent. The financial and insurance activities sector was the least among the sectors.

The brochure also revealed that the number of Omani youth business owners in the age group from 18 to 29 years reached 26,189, (17.7 per cent of the total Omani business owners in the Sultanate), of whom 77.7 per cent males, and 22.3 per cent females. The data also showed that the largest number of youth business owners is concentrated in Muscat Governorate (4,730), Dhofar Governorate (4,570) and North Al Batinah Governorate (4,415).

— ONA



الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (ش.م.ع.م.)
UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOC)

P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24689498, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.upcmanah.com

Notice of Issued Share Capital Reduction

Based on the decision of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Company held on 18 August 2021 and in accordance with the provisions of articles 141 and 142 of the Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019, United Power Company SAOC, which is registered in the Commercial Register with commercial registration number 1460366, announces that it is in the process of reducing its issued share capital of RO 2,000,000 (Two Million) to 500,000 (Five Hundred Thousand).

Creditors that have any objection to the proposed share capital reduction are required to submit the reasons for their objection to the company's headquarters at the following address:

United Power Company SAOC,
PO Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman,
for the attention of : Mr. Zoher Karachiwala,

with a copy of the objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Register at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 15 (Fifteen) days from the date of this notice.

Dozens injured after Israel strikes Gaza

GAZA CITY: Israeli warplanes bombed Gaza on Saturday after clashes between its troops and Palestinian protesters left dozens injured, including an Israeli border policeman and a 13-year-old Palestinian boy who were both critically wounded.

The Israeli military said it carried out air strikes against four weapons sites and that it had reinforced its Gaza division with additional troops.

The escalation came exactly three months since Israel and the enclave's rulers Hamas reached a truce following their deadliest fighting in years.

Israeli troops fired at Palestinian protesters who gathered near the Gaza border wall, the army and Palestinian witnesses said.

A Palestinian gunman fired at Israeli troops through an opening in the wall and crowds of young protesters hurled explosives over the barrier and tried to scale it.

The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry said the injured included a 13-year-old boy left in a critical condition after being hit in the head.

"Forty-one civilians were wounded with various injuries," the ministry said in a statement,



A Palestinian protester with the national flag as she takes part in a demonstration by the border fence with Israel, east of Gaza City, denouncing the Israeli siege of the Palestinian strip, on Saturday. — AFP

with Hamas saying "thousands" of protesters had taken part.

The Israel Border Police said a 21-year-old sniper in its under-cover unit was critically wounded when he was shot by a Palestinian protester.

"His condition is critical and there is a risk to his life," it said of the wounded officer.

Israeli police commissioner Kobi Shabtai in a statement vowed

the force would "continue to act firmly and with all our might against those who want to harm us."

Defence Minister Benny Gantz had warned that "these are definitely extremely serious events that will have a response".

Shortly after his comments, the Israeli Air Force said on Twitter that its "fighter jets struck four weapons manufacturing and stor-

age sites belonging to the Hamas organisation".

There were no immediate reports of any casualties from the strikes.

Hamas had called a protest on Saturday to mark the burning 52 years ago of Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam.

"Al Aqsa Mosque is a red line, and any attack on it will be met

with valiant resistance from our people," the movement said in a statement.

Late on Saturday, Hamas and other groups in Gaza issued a joint statement in which they "saluted the heroic youth" who clashed with Israeli forces. The violence is some of the worst since the May 21 ceasefire came into force.

Over 11 days in May, Israel pounded Gaza with air strikes in response to rockets fired from the enclave. Hamas said it took action after Israeli security forces stormed Al Aqsa in May.

Reconstruction in Gaza has stalled since the ceasefire, in part because of a crippling blockade Israel has maintained on the enclave since Hamas seized power in 2007.

On Thursday, Israel announced it would allow funds from Qatar to reach impoverished Palestinians in Gaza. Other restrictions remain. The ceasefire Egypt brokered between Hamas and Israel has largely held, although there have been flare-ups.

On Monday Israel said its "Iron Dome" missile defence system intercepted a rocket fired by Palestinians in Gaza into Israel, the first time since the recent battle. — AFP

Iran urges Japan to unblock funds worth billions

TEHRAN: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi called on Japan to release Iranian funds frozen in the country because of US sanctions, Iranian state TV reported after the president met on Sunday with the visiting Japanese foreign minister.

Iran has been unable to obtain tens of billions of dollars of its assets mainly from exports of oil and gas in foreign banks, including \$3 billion of its funds in Japan, due to US sanctions on its banking and energy sectors. The sanctions were reimposed in 2018 after Washington abandoned Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers.

"The improvement of ties with Japan is of great importance for Iran ... Any delay in unblocking Iranian assets in Japanese banks is not justified," Raisi said in his meeting with Toshimitsu Motegi, who arrived in Tehran late on Sunday for a two-day visit. — Reuters

Turkish bombardment kills two in Iraq: local official

ARBIL, Iraq: Two civilians were killed on Sunday in Iraq's northern Kurdistan region by a Turkish army bombardment as forces battled the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels, local officials said.

Turkey regularly targets northwest Iraq in operations against the PKK, which Ankara considers a terrorist organisation.

The Kurdish separatists have waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, and maintain bases in the rugged mountains across the border in Iraq. The latest violence comes six days before a regional summit in Baghdad.

The Iraqi civilians were killed in Iraq's Zakho district, an area bordering Turkey, said local mayor Farhad Mahmoud.

"They had gone to an area where it is advised not to go," Mahmoud said, adding that they were not from the area, but had been visiting from the city of Mosul. "They were caught in a Turkish bombing and died."

PKK fighters said clashes were ongoing on Sunday.

Turkey has installed around a



dozen military bases over the past 25 years in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, and it launched a new cross-border offensive in April against the PKK, consisting of both aerial and ground attacks.

Residents of dozens of villages in the area have fled the conflict.

Last Tuesday, eight people died in a Turkish airstrike in northern Iraq's Sinjar region.

Repeated Turkish raids have stoked tensions with Baghdad, but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned that his

country will "deal with" the PKK presence if Iraq is unable to do so.

Last Wednesday, Iraq's national security council condemned "unilateral military actions" and rejected "the use of Iraqi land for settling scores," but did not specifically mention of Turkey.

Ankara is one of Baghdad's key trading partners, and Erdogan has been invited to next week's regional summit in Baghdad.

But it is not known if Erdogan will attend, or if Turkish operations in Iraq will be discussed. — AFP

Currency clash puts a hole in the pocket of Yemenis

DUBAI: Alongside a grinding seven-year military conflict, Yemen's government and the Ansar Allah are locked in battle on another front — a currency war that has opened up a gulf in riyal values.

Both the government and the Ansar Allah used the same notes until late 2019 when the latter banned new banknotes printed in government-run Aden, due to concerns about inflation.

The resulting difference in money supply has since seen the riyal's value plummet to around 1,000 to the dollar in government areas, while the value in Ansar Allah-controlled zones has held relatively stable at 600.

Citizens and businesses in both government and Ansar Allah-controlled zones have been left out of pocket by the divergence, but especially those in the former, given rampant inflation there.

This internal exchange rate has also complicated trade and led to manipulation by profiteers, to the detriment of most in a country on the verge of famine.



A man holds (bottom to top) new and older issues of the 1000 Yemeni Riyal banknote in Aden. — AFP

"Right now, we have... an exchange rate of the same currency inside the country," said Amal Nasser, an economist with the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies. "This is bizarre from an economic perspective".

According to Nasser, other experts and ordinary Yemenis, the gap between the two currency values meant higher transfer costs between the two zones.

Yemen's conflict has split the country between the mostly Ansar Allah-controlled north, and the south under the internationally-recognised government which

Both the government and the Ansar Allah used the same notes until late 2019 when the latter banned new banknotes printed in government-run Aden, due to concerns about inflation

relocated the central bank to Aden after the insurgents seized Sanaa in 2014.

The war has pushed the nation, long the poorest on the Arabian Peninsula, to the brink of famine and economic collapse, with most schools, factories, hospitals and businesses either destroyed or closed.

As the riyal plummeted to new lows in recent weeks in government areas, the central bank there pledged to withdraw the series of banknotes which had accumulated in its territory after the Ansar Allah ban in late 2019. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Iran Covid deaths at new daily high

Iran's health ministry on Sunday reported more than 680 daily Covid deaths for the first time, as nationwide curbs to contain the spread of the virus were lifted.

The ministry said the deaths of 684 people in the past 24 hours brought the total number of fatalities to 102,038.

Iran also registered 36,419 new infections raising the total since the pandemic started to 4,677,114.

Iranian health officials have acknowledged that the ministry's



figures understate the real toll but even they make Iran the worst-hit Middle Eastern country.

Last week Iran tightened curbs to contain the spread of the virus.

TRIPOLI

Libya starts restoring water supply

Mains water is to be restored to western Libya after a week-long cut prompted by sabotage threats from loyalists of a jailed Muammar Gaddafi-era official, the water authority said.

"The wells and pumps are being switched back on to gradually restore supply," the authority said on its Facebook page on Saturday. "The crisis is over." The announcement brought welcome relief to Libyans forced to cope without water as a summer heat wave gripped North Africa.



The water authority is responsible for a huge network of pipelines, dubbed the Great Man-Made River, which was one of the major projects of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi during his four decades in power.

DOHA

Qatar sets October 2 for first legislative polls

Qatar's first legislative polls for two-thirds of the advisory Shura Council will be held on October 2, according to a decree issued by the ruling emir on Sunday and published by his office.

Qataris will elect 30 members of the 45-seat body while Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani will continue to appoint the remaining 15 members.

The Council will have legislative authority and approve general state policies and the budget. It will also exercise



control over the executive, except for bodies setting defence, security, economic and investment policy.

Qatar, a small but wealthy gas producer which already holds municipal polls.

In brief

KUALA LUMPUR



PM PLEAS FOR UNITY TO FIX VIRUS-HIT ECONOMY

Malaysia's new prime minister called on his colleagues Sunday to end a months-long political crisis and come together to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, in his first speech as the country's fourth premier in as many years.

Just days after the previous government collapsed in a storm of political infighting, Ismail Sabri Yaakob urged lawmakers to unite to help the country recover from the pandemic.

"The political crisis that has hit the country is causing unrest among the people," the 61-year-old said in a televised address Sunday evening.

"Let us move forward. Let us stem this grab for political power."

MANILA



FILIPINOS STILL HAIL PACQUIAO DESPITE DEFEAT TO CUBAN

Filipinos on Sunday still hailed Philippine boxing icon Manny Pacquiao as the "people's champ" despite his defeat to Cuban boxer Yordenis Ugas in a 12-round fight in Las Vegas.

Ugas, 35, won by unanimous decision against the 42-year-old Pacquiao to retain his World Boxing Association's super welterweight championship.

Philippine presidential spokesman Harry Roque said public support for Pacquiao's boxing career "has always been unwavering" and his loss will not diminish the pride he has brought to Filipinos. "Senator Pacquiao will forever be etched in the hearts of Filipinos as our people's champ," he said.

SINGAPORE



US VP HARRIS BEGINS ASIA TRIP AMID

Vice President Kamala Harris began a trip to Asia Sunday where she will offer reassurances of Washington's commitment to the region after the chaotic US pullout from Afghanistan and Taliban takeover.

The hardline group's swift return to power a week ago, and desperate scenes of thousands trying to flee, have cast another shadow over the United States' status as a global superpower.

But on her visit, which includes stops in Singapore and Vietnam, Harris will seek to allay concerns about US dependability.

"The vice president will make clear throughout the trip that we do have an enduring commitment to the region," said a senior US official.

7 Afghans killed in Kabul airport chaos



Afghan evacuees queue before boarding Italy's military aircraft during the evacuation at Kabul's airport on Sunday. — Reuters

KABUL: The Taliban fired in the air and used batons to make people line up in orderly queues outside Kabul airport on Sunday, witnesses said, a day after seven people were killed in a crush at the gates.

On Sunday, there were no major injuries as gunmen beat back the crowds and long lines of people were being formed, the witnesses said.

Britain's defence ministry said seven Afghans were killed in the crush around the airport on Saturday as thousands of people desperately tried to get a flight out, a week after the militant group took control of the country.

Sky News showed footage of soldiers standing on a wall on Saturday attempting to pull the injured out from the crush and spraying people with a hose to prevent them from getting dehydrated.

A Nato official said that at least 20 people have died in the past seven days in and around the airport. Some were shot and others died in stampedes, witnesses have said. Panicked Afghans have tried to get on flights abroad, fearing reprisals and a return to a harsh version of Islamic law the group ex-

Afghan gives birth on US evacuation flight

KABUL: An Afghan woman gave birth onboard a US evacuation flight after going into labour on the way to the US military base in Ramstein, Germany, the US Air Mobility Command announced on Sunday.

She began having complications during the flight, but her condition improved after the C-17 transport aircraft

flew lower, increasing the air pressure in the plane, according to the command on Twitter.

The manoeuvre helped save her life, it added. After landing in Ramstein, the woman gave birth to a baby girl in the plane's cargo hold with the help of soldiers. Mother and child are doing well.

As of Saturday evening, 2,300 evacuees from Afghanistan

have been brought to Ramstein on 17 planes, and more flights are expected to arrive on Sunday and the following days. Former local US forces and their families, who are leaving their home country for fear of the Taliban, are initially being accommodated in aircraft hangars at the airbase. From there, they are to be flown to the United States. — dpa

ercised when it was in power two decades ago.

Leaders of the Taliban, who have sought to show a more moderate face since capturing Kabul last Sunday, have begun talks on forming a government. The United States and other foreign countries including Britain have brought in several thousand troops to manage the evacuations of foreign citizens and vulnerable Afghans, but have stayed away from the outside areas of the airport.

"Our forces are maintaining strict distance from the outer areas of the Kabul airport to prevent any clashes with the Taliban," the Nato

official said.

A Taliban official said on Sunday that "we are seeking complete clarity on foreign forces' exit plan."

"Managing chaos outside Kabul airport is a complex task," the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told Reuters.

Afghans who fled the country this week have spoken about their despair at leaving loved ones behind and the uncertain future ahead. "It was very difficult to leave my country," a veiled woman told Reuters in Doha, Qatar. "I love my country."

On Saturday, the United States and Germany told their citizens in

Afghanistan to avoid travelling to Kabul airport, citing security risks as desperate crowds gathered.

Army Major General William Taylor told a Pentagon briefing on Saturday that 5,800 US troops remain at the airport and that the facility "remains secure".

On Sunday, a Pentagon spokesman said the United States would deploy 18 commercial aircraft, including from United, American Airlines and Delta, to help transport people who have already been flown out of Afghanistan.

Taylor said that in the past week the United States has evacuated 17,000 people, including 2,500

Putin: We don't want Afghan militants in Russia

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on Sunday rejected the idea of sending people evacuation from Afghanistan to countries near Russia, saying he did not want "militants showing up here under cover of refugees", Russian news agencies reported.

Putin criticised the idea of some Western countries to relocate refugees from Afghanistan to neighbouring Central Asian countries while their visas to the United States and Europe are being processed.

"Does that mean that they can be sent without visas to those countries, to our neighbours, while they themselves (the West) don't want to take them without visas?" TASS news agency quoted Putin as telling leaders of the ruling United Russia party.

"Why is there such a humiliating approach to solving the problem?" he said.

The United States held secret talks with a number of countries in a desperate attempt to secure deals to temporarily house at-risk Afghans who worked for the US government, Reuters reported last week.

Putin said Russia, which allows visa-free travel for residents of ex-Soviet Central Asian countries, opposes that.

"We don't want militants showing up here under cover of refugees," TASS cited Putin as saying. — Reuters



People stand in line outside a grocery store in Wellington. — Reuters

New Zealand may rethink virus strategy after Delta spreads

WELLINGTON: New Zealand conceded its ambitious "Covid zero" elimination strategy may no longer be viable on Sunday as an outbreak of the virulent Delta variant spread further.

Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins reported a further 21 cases in a virus cluster that emerged in Auckland last week, ending a six-month run of no local cases and sparking a national lockdown.

Hipkins said Delta's highly transmissible nature was making this outbreak more difficult to contain than others, raising "big questions" about the elimination strategy.

"The scale of infectiousness and the speed at which the virus has spread is something that, despite all the best preparations in

the world, has put our system under strain," he told TVNZ.

New Zealand's widely praised Covid-19 response -- which has resulted in just 26 deaths in a population of five million -- centres on eliminating the virus from the community.

It has relied on strict border controls backed by hard lockdowns when any cases do slip through, but Hipkins said Delta may force a rethink.

"(Delta's) like nothing we've dealt with before in this pandemic," he said.

"It does change everything, it means that all of our existing preparations begin to look less adequate and raises some pretty big questions about the future of our long-term plans." — AFP

Lockdown until majority vaccinated: Australia PM

MELBOURNE: Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Sunday defended the country's lockdown strategy to combat coronavirus outbreaks until at least 70 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated.

On Saturday, Australian police arrested hundreds of people during anti-lockdown demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne, capitals of the country's two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria, that are under a strict lockdown.

The federal government announced late last month a plan that envisaged lockdowns as a key strategy to quell outbreaks until 70 per cent per cent of the population gets vaccinated and a gradual re-opening of Australia's borders when that number reaches 80 per cent.

"You can't live with lockdowns forever and at some point, you need to make that gear change and that is done at 70 per cent," Morrison said in a television interview on the Australian Broadcasting Corp.



People walking along the quiet George Street in Sydney as the city extended its two-month-old lockdown and introduced a partial curfew to contain a fast-spreading coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

Victoria, in its sixth lockdown since the start of the pandemic, on Sunday, recorded 65 locally acquired cases. On Saturday Australia saw its worst number of Covid-19 infections ever, with NSW and Victoria battling a growing outbreak of the highly transmissible Delta variant.

Only about 30 per cent of people aged over 16 have been fully vaccinated so far, according to health ministry data released

on Saturday, mainly due to scarce supply of Pfizer (shots and public unease about the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The pace has picked up recently, as supplies increase and the Delta outbreak continues to spread. A Newspoll conducted for The Australian newspaper earlier this month suggests that 11 per cent of Australians said they will flatly refuse to get vaccinated. — Reuters

UK to begin offering Covid antibody testing

LONDON: The United Kingdom will begin offering Covid-19 antibody testing to the general public in the coming week for the first time, British media reported on Sunday.

The government's new programme is intended to produce data on antibody protections for people following infection by different coronavirus variants, according to details of the programme published by multiple media outlets, including Sky News and BBC.

From Tuesday, anyone aged 18 or over in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, will be able to opt in to the programme when receiving a PCR test, Sky News reported.

Participants, on testing positive for Covid-19, will be sent two finger-prick tests to complete at home to inform the UK Health Security Agency of the antibody response to different coronavirus variants, BBC reported. The first of these tests should be taken as soon as possible after the patient receives their positive result, and the second should be taken 28 days later. — **Agencies**

Henri bears down on US east coast

NEW YORK: Tropical Storm Henri was on course to make landfall on the US east coast on Sunday, with millions in New England and New York's Long Island preparing for flash flooding, violent winds and power outages.

The US National Hurricane Center said in its 7:00 am (12:00 GMT) advisory that Henri 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of Montauk Point in New York state.

Forecasters downgraded Henri from a hurricane but warned heavy rainfall and the risk of surging seas as the storm churned in the Atlantic, packing maximum sustained winds of 70 miles per hour.

As the surface layer of oceans warms due to climate change, cyclones are becoming more powerful and carry more water, posing an increasing threat to the world's coastal communities, scientists say. Storm surges amplified by rising seas can be especially devastating.

A swath of the northeastern coastline, including New York City, was under alert as the storm approached. If Henri is upgraded again then it would be the first



A man takes a photo on a beach as Tropical Storm Henri approaches, in Montauk, Long Island on Sunday. — AFP

hurricane to hit New England in 30 years.

Nasty weather that preceded Henri late on Saturday forced New York City to halt a star-studded Central Park concert billed as a "homecoming" for a metropolis hard hit by the pandemic.

The approaching then-hurricane had prompted New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to

announce a state of emergency and the deployment of 500 National Guard soldiers in anticipation of response efforts.

"It's as serious as a heart attack," he warned.

He said the storm was expected to make landfall on Long Island, home to the plush Hamptons villages where wealthy New Yorkers retreat in summer, around

noon (16:00 GMT) on Sunday.

"It will be about a 26-hour event," Cuomo added, telling New Yorkers to expect "significant power outages" and "significant flooding" in some suburbs of the Big Apple.

Henri was anticipated to miss New York City by several miles, but still caused tropical storm conditions that

began on Saturday night.

The National Weather Service said 1.94 inches of rain fell in the park between 10 and 11 pm on Saturday, the wettest hour on record in New York City.

In the park an announcer cut off pop legend Barry Manilow mid-song to urge revellers to proceed swiftly but calmly to the nearest exit.

"I guess for safety it makes sense. I mean I can hear the thunder," said attendee Maria Fuentes. The NHC warned of "a dangerous storm surge, hurricane conditions and flooding" in areas of southern New England and Long Island.

Henri is expected to produce three to six inches of rain (7.5 to 15 centimetres) across the region, with isolated maximum totals near 10 inches, the NHC warned.

The heavy rainfall "may result in considerable flash, urban, and small stream flooding" as well as river flooding, it added, saying storm surges of 5 feet were possible in coastal areas. High winds are expected to knock out electricity for hundreds of thousands of people across the region and delay countless flights. — **AFP**

Josephine first Black woman in France's Pantheon

PARIS: The remains of Josephine Baker, a famed French-American dancer, singer and actress who also fought in the French resistance during WWII, will be moved to the Pantheon mausoleum in November, an aide to President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday.

It will make Baker (pictured), who was born in Missouri in 1906 and buried in Monaco in 1975, the first Black woman to be laid to rest in the hallowed Parisian monument.

A group including one of Baker's sons campaigning for her induction met with Macron on July 21, Jennifer Guesdon, one of the members, said.

"When the president said yes, (it was a) great joy," she said.

"It's a yes!" Macron said after the July meeting, *Le Parisien* newspaper reported on Sunday.

An aide to Macron confirmed to AFP that the ceremony will take place on November 30.

"Pantheonisation is built



over a long period of time," the aide said.

The Baker family have been requesting her induction since 2013, with a petition gathering some 38,000 signatures.

"She was an artist, the first Black international star, a muse of the cubists, a resistance fighter during WWII in the French army, active alongside Martin Luther King in the civil rights fight," the petition says.

Another member of the

campaign group, Pascal Bruckner, said Baker "is a symbol of a France that is not racist, contrary to what some media groups say".

"Josephine Baker is a true anti-racist, a true anti-fascist," Bruckner said.

The ceremony will take place on November 30, the date Baker married Frenchman Jean Lion, allowing her to get French nationality.

The Pantheon is a memorial complex for great national figures in French history from the world of politics, culture and science.

Only the president can decide on moving personalities to the former church, whose grand columns and domed roof were inspired by the Pantheon in Rome.

Of the 80 figures in the Pantheon, only five are women, including the last inductee Simone Veil, a former French minister who survived the Holocaust and fought for abortion rights, who entered in 2018. — **AFP**

Dark days of tourism in Paris

PARIS: Few tourists are gazing at the Mona Lisa or wandering the streets of Paris this summer, dashing hopes that the top tourist destination would see brighter days after last year's pandemic-linked desertion.

The City of Light has seen between 3.6 million and 4.7 million visitors between June and August, down from 10 million in 2019, before the coronavirus emerged and wrecked international travel, according to tourism office figures.

Only 2.6 million tourists visited Paris last year.

"With clients from afar not coming, the impact is considerable," Didier Arino, director of the travel firm Protourisme, said.

France eased its travel rules ahead of the summer season, putting countries in a red, orange and green colour-coded system that determines if visitors need to take a Covid-19 test before arriving, have a compelling reason to visit or quarantine.

Museums and other cultural venues reopened after long closures, though visitors have to show proof of vaccination or negative tests.

But Paris visitor numbers still disappointed. Arino said occupancy rates at hotels in Paris were worse than elsewhere in France,



Police patrol restaurants to check health pass compliance in Paris. — AFP

with revenues down 60 per cent.

Romain Jouhaud, director general of 4 Roues Sous 1 Parapluie, a company that offers guided visits in a classic French car in the capital, said he only had 120 customers this summer compared to 360 in 2019. Most of his clients are from the United States and Australia.

"We're trying to get a bit more French clients but our problem is that our average price (150 euros) is a little high," he said, noting that the French usually spend less than foreigners.

Tour guides have also suffered from the absence of tourists, with activity dropping by more than 80 per cent in the Ile-de-France

region, which includes Paris, according to the FNGIC association of guides.

"Paris is a mirror of the great European capitals," Arino said. "They all have problems and the more they depend on foreign clients, the more difficult it is."

On the river Seine, the sightseeing boat company Vedettes de Paris has seen turnover drop 50 per cent compared to 2019. French clients used to make up half the number of passengers; they accounted for 65 per cent this year.

The company has adapted by adding an "aperitif cruise" and installing an area to play petanque on its dock. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

VIENNA

CTBTO head warns advent of nuclear war

For the new head of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, global warming is not the only global danger.

"We as the human race face two major existential threats: One is climate change, and the other one is the advent of a nuclear war," said Robert Floyd, who took over the CTBTO this month. Although it is a global problem, awareness of nuclear weapons is not universal, said Floyd, who succeeded Lassina Zerbo of Burkina Faso.



"If we have a battle where nuclear weapons are used, it actually affects us all. It is a global impact, whether that is in terms of contamination or temperature effects on the planet."

KIEV

Merkel calls for Ukraine gas transit pact

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Sunday for an agreement to extend Russian gas transit through Ukraine, and said that Germany wanted to help Ukraine transition to renewable energy.

She made the statement just days after pressing the Russian president to extend Moscow's gas transit deal with Ukraine that expires in 2024 as Ukraine fears losing transit fees once Nord Stream 2 comes online.

"Gas should not be used as a



geopolitical weapon," she said after a meeting in Kiev with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"It is important that Ukraine remains a transit land."

STOCKHOLM

Swedish PM to step down in November

Sweden's beleaguered Social Democratic Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said on Sunday he would step down in November to allow a successor time to prepare for the country's September 2022 general election.

Lofven was reinstated as prime minister by parliament in early July just weeks after being ousted in a historic vote of no confidence.

He told a political rally on Sunday he would "leave my position as party chairman at the



party's congress in November and thereafter also resign as prime minister."

Lofven, 64, has served as party leader for almost 10 years and as prime minister since 2014.

Afghans face race against time to flee Kabul

DAVID FOX

Tens of thousands of Afghans were racing on Sunday to flee their country as the United States warned of security threats at Kabul's chaotic airport and the European Union said it was "impossible" to evacuate everyone at risk from the Taliban.

In the week since the militants took back power in Afghanistan, the Taliban have vowed a softer version of their brutal rule from 1996-2001, and taken steps towards forming a government.

But terrified Afghans continue to try to flee, deepening a tragedy at Kabul airport where the United States and its allies have been unable to cope with the huge numbers of people trying to get on evacuation flights.

A journalist, who was among a group of other media workers and academics lucky enough to get to the airport for an evacuation flight, described desperate scenes of people surrounding their bus on the way in.

"They were showing us their passports and shouting 'take us with you... please take us with you'", the journalist said.

"The Taliban fighter in the truck ahead of us had to shoot in the air to make them go away."

Britain's Sky News on Saturday aired footage of at least three bodies covered in white tarpaulin outside the airport. It was not clear how they had died. Sky reporter Stuart Ramsay, who was at the airport, called the deaths "inevitable" and said people were being "crushed", while others were "dehydrated and terrified".

The footage was the latest image of utter despair, after video of a baby being lifted over a wall at the airport and horror scenes of people hanging onto departing planes. The United States, which has thousands of troops trying to secure the airport, has set a deadline to complete the evacuations by August 31. But there are up to 15,000 Americans and 50,000 to 60,000 Afghan allies who need to be evacuated, according to the Biden administration. There are countless others who fear repression under the Taliban and are also trying to flee.

US President Joe Biden has described the evacuation operations as "one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history". — AFP



SOLIDARITY WITH AFGHANS

Protesters hold banners during a rally in support for Afghanistan following the take over of the country by the Taliban, at Place de la Republique in Paris on Sunday. The rally is to protest the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and show solidarity with Afghans opposed to the new regime in Kabul. — AFP

“They were showing us their passports and shouting ‘take us with you... please take us with you.’ The Taliban fighter in the truck ahead of us had to shoot in the air to make them go away

A JOURNALIST



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

HAVING A SATISFIED EMPLOYEE WOULD DEFINITELY REFLECT ON THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTION

Human beings have no choice on what they do or have in life; it is merely the Creator, the Almighty Allah, who blessed people with different fortunes and fates. With no distinction to certain origins, religions, languages or cultures, all have been granted what is good and serves them better during their lifetime! Fortunes and blessings are fairly bestowed to people, but it is sometime human's desire and greediness to get more and more! Though, everyone likes to be self-satisfied, praised and respected too.

That is why regardless of what each person does as a profession, he/she would love to be appreciated and get his work valued, either by a boss or colleagues! Of course, it is not something abnormal that one looks for others' compliments and acknowledgement. This marks an essential part for self-motivation and encouragement to feel as a person of value.

Weather at work or home, one would always need to be admired and motivated to keep a good spirit and attitude.

However, the motivation should be even more at workplace, so employees shall become inspired at all times. Thus, their spirit and devotion is always high. Having a satisfied employee

would definitely reflect on the overall performance and production. Eventually, it ensures getting outstanding outcomes and happy customers too. That is way the world is observing various occasions for workers and others of specific professions too. This signifies the importance of the different occupations and efforts of diverse professionals.

Such celebrations mark a gesture of honour and tribute to all those people for their great determinations and important roles in serving humanity in different characters and assignments. However, all organisations should express their tribute and appreciation to their employees all year-around and not only in certain occasions, which most are designated in specific days of the year.

Accordingly, employees will undoubtedly feel how valuable they are to the organisation and nation overall.

Appreciating employees' devotion, hard work and commitment shall never be designated on a particular day of the year. Rather, a boss shall commend employee's daily performance, so their spirit and dedication remain positive all times. In fact, all what really counts to employees is just a little of appreciation and respect. Mostly, this costs nothing

more than having confidence on them and believing in their capabilities. As it has been said, it costs \$0.00 to be a kind human being; a merit being looked for in the character of all bosses!

Having confidence on employees and colleagues would certainly mark a dose of encouragement to them. Likewise, it brings a push to open up their minds towards creativity and aiming high. This will also instill the belief of work as not a man's punishment, but a reward, source of strength and a pleasure of course. Generally, all employees' assignments are significant. Otherwise, they would have not been hired in that particular job. Regardless how simple is the role or an impact of a certain job, it should not be undervalued; we all complement one another in life and at work too.

Dear employees, whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working is for the Lord, not for men. As the Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran: "And say, Do as you will, for Allah will see your deeds, and so will His Messenger and the believers". Bruce Lee, a famous Chinese martial artist and movie star, was right to say, "Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one".

Hard imagery and sharp language

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

THE MANNER WITH WHICH SAIF AL RAHBI PAINTS BRIEF FLASHES AND PROVIDES LITTLE COMMENTARY IS ARGUABLY REMINISCENT OF IMAGISM

I've already introduced the pioneering contemporary Omani poet Saif al Rahbi in an article published on Tuesday (July 13), in these columns. I stressed the idea that Al Rahbi elevates the common and glorifies everyday. The manner with which he paints brief flashes and provides little commentary is arguably reminiscent of imagism, the Anglo-American twentieth century poetic school championing hardness of imagery and sharpness of diction. A manifestation of this can be seen in the following excerpts and poems taken from his collection titled *A Man from the Empty Quarter* published in Beirut in 1994.

Excerpts

(1) Adam's children and (before them) Satan

Both were born of fault's storm.

(2) Today I heard no news News of myself.

(3) I'm not optimistic I'm not pessimistic I just feel pain in my teeth Unbearable pain.

(4) A man with eyesight Leads his flock To the maze.

(5) Like rabbits Enemies jump Like rabbits They eavesdrop.

(6) Ah The pain flairs up Before the fountain.

(7) The sea blocks the whales with its voracity No longer can they move For other generations.

(8) A plane flies in desolate

space Man floats in the light of his earthly cage Strewing his dreams between planets.

Meanwhile a Bedouin whips his donkey on a mound.

(9) We'll arrange our enemies' ideas As required.

(10) The mourning women will trill tomorrow At the killer's wedding Just for pennies.

(11) We feel guilty for faults We didn't commit.

(12) The woman trotting before us With a flower and saliva Carried her death for a century.

(13) Scientists say that the sun possesses enough hydrogen to shine for another ten billion

years... How many billions does man need To wash off the mud of his history?

(14) The young lady artist in the Parisian café On hearing about the carnage in her country And the wild dogs Said repeatedly With a show of delicacy: "O haraam, O haraam".

(15) Nothing remains on its feet Save an injured ibex In a jungle on fire.

(16) Pay heed to the wolf's advice Before it's too late. Indians in the Dawn's Light This moment rolled upon itself Like ruins of a decayed body

As usual I can't glance at the morning's face (It has lagged behind.) Before the window Out flow Indians Carrying Buddha's coffin Washed in the Ganga Waiting like me For another day But with peace and a sacred death. Indians Strangers, without shadows or faces The pain of search for bread and song. They'll soon rest from the funeral In the neighbouring tavern Where a dancer wriggles, feeding her bosom With an imaginary lover They dream till the end.



SULTANATE LOSE TO URUGUAY IN BEACH SOCCER WORLD CUP

Oman suffer second defeat



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Oman beach soccer team suffered a 4-2 loss against Uruguay in the second match for the team at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021 on Sunday at the Luzhniki Beach Soccer Stadium.

The second consecutive defeat dimmed the Sultanate’s chances to advance into the second round of

the showpiece event. Red Beach boys commenced the campaign at the global championship with a 5-3 defeat against holders Portugal in the opening match.

Oman head coach Talib Hilal began Uruguay fixture with a line-up featuring Mundher al Orami, Abdullah al Souti, Nouh al Zadjali, Jalal al Sinani and Said al Farsi.

Cabrera put opponents Uruguay

ahead as he netted the opening goal in first period. Uruguay’s Gaston added the margin as he scored the second goal in the second period.

Oman bounced back strongly in the following period as Nouh al Zadjali and Abdullah al Souti equalised the score 2-2.

Prior end of the third period, M Guerrero and L Quinta managed to score third and fourth goals respectively to earn three points

for Uruguay.

The concluding fixture for the Sultanate beach soccer team in Group D is against Senegal on Tuesday. Oman’s chances to move into quarterfinals are difficult as the national players should register a victory in their encounter against African representatives Senegal tomorrow provided Portugal beat Senegal in a match late on Sunday.

On the other hand, Asian representatives Japan became the first team to advance into the quarterfinals after they edged USA 4-3 to enhance their lead at the top of Group A. Other Asian nation, the UAE commenced their campaign in the Beach Soccer World Cup with a significant victory against Tahiti and suffered a 4-2 defeat against Mozambique in the second match.



Liverpool's Sadio Mane celebrates scoring their second goal with Diogo Jota. — Reuters

Liverpool, Brighton joint top

MAN CITY REBOUND TO DEMOLISH NORWICH CITY

LONDON: Liverpool welcomed a full house back to Anfield and rewarded them with a 2-0 victory over Burnley to move top of the Premier League with Brighton and Hove Albion also showing impressive early form to post a second win on Saturday.

Juergen Klopp's side started slowly with Burnley hitting the post inside the opening five minutes but goals by Diogo Jota and Sadio Mane eased them to a comfortable win.

Brighton joined them six points later with a comfortable 2-0 win over Watford — Shane Duffy and Neal Maupay on target.

Champions Manchester City rebounded from their opening day defeat at Tottenham Hotspur to demolish promoted Norwich City 5-0 with record signing Jack Grealish scoring on his home debut. Brentford maintained their impressive start to their first top-flight campaign for 74 years as they fought out a 0-0 draw away at Crystal Palace while Everton and Leeds United also shared the points in a 2-2 draw at Elland Road.

Newcastle United suffered a second consecutive loss as they



Manchester City players celebrate their first goal after Norwich City's Tim Krul scores an own goal. — Reuters

went down 2-0 at Aston Villa.

It was an emotional day at Anfield where the first capacity crowd since March 2020 paid a tribute to lifelong fan Andrew Devine, the 97th victim of the Hillsborough tragedy who died in July, 32 years after suffering life-changing injuries. If anything the atmosphere hampered Liverpool early on and Dwight McNeil hit the post for Burnley. But Jota settled the nerves in the 18th minute, heading in the opener past Nick Pope.

Burnley had a goal by Ashley Barnes disallowed for offside but Liverpool dominated after the break with 17 goal attempts but

had to wait until the 69th minute to make the points safe when Mane pounced for his 50th Liverpool goal from an assist by Trent Alexander-Arnold. "Everybody was really looking forward to this football festival, to this game, and I think nobody leaves this place today with any kind of a disappointment because I think all of our dreams were fulfilled today, atmosphere-wise," Klopp said.

Brighton claimed back-to-back wins at the start of a top-flight season for the first time in their history with Duffy powering in an early header and Maupay seizing on a mistake to make it 2-0 shortly before halftime.

RUTHLESS CITY

Manchester City were off the pace last weekend against Tottenham but were ruthless against a Norwich side dealt a cruel fixture list to launch their return to the top flight.

City took the lead in the seventh minute when Gabriel Jesus's cross forced a panicky clearance that rebounded into the net off Norwich keeper Tim Krul before 100 million pounds man Grealish bundled in a Jesus cross in the 22nd minute.

Aymeric Laporte made it 3-0 in the 65th minute before substitutes Raheem Sterling and Riyad Mahrez completed the rout.

— Reuters

EPL RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Aston Villa 2 (Ings 45+3, El Ghazi 62-pen) Newcastle 0
Brighton 2 (Duffy 10, Maupay 41) Watford 0
Crystal Palace 0 Brentford 0
Leeds 2 (Klich 41, Raphinha 72) Everton 2 (Calvert-Lewin 30-pen, Gray 50)
Liverpool 2 (Jota 18, Mane 69) Burnley 0
Manchester City 5 (Krul 7-og, Grealish 22, Laporte 64, Sterling 71, Mahrez 84) Norwich 0

Zverev books Cincy final with Rublev



Alexander Zverev returns a shot against Stefanos Tsitsipas. — USA Today Sports

CINCINNATI: Alexander Zverev came from two breaks down in the third set to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) on Saturday and reach the final of the WTA and ATP Cincinnati Masters.

The German, who briefly left the court to vomit in the final set as he stepped up his fightback in front of a full crowd, will take a 4-0 record into Sunday's final with Andrey Rublev.

The Russian fourth seed surprised world number two compatriot Daniil Medvedev 2-6, 6-3, 6-3.

World number seven Rublev had never won so much as a set in four previous losses to Medvedev, top seed in the prestigious hardcourt tournament that serves as a tuneup for the US Open.

Zverev also turned a corner this week, having never won a match in six previous Cincinnati editions.

The German said he'd begun to feel his stomach trouble coming on in the second set, and he was seen briefly by a doctor who gave him some tablets in the third.

Immediately, things began to jell for the Tokyo Olympic gold medalist.

"After I got the first break (of the third set) back I thought I had chances. He was not serving bombs and I was always in the rallies. I started to play more aggressively."

Zverev got worked up at the end of the first set when Tsitsipas — as now seems to be his habit — left the court with his full bag of gear, presumably to change

clothes. His absence lasted an infuriating eight minutes as Zverev complained to the chair umpire, indicating he thought Tsitsipas could use the break to receive coaching via text.

BARTY IN FINAL

In the women's draw, world number one Ashleigh Barty reached her sixth final of the season with a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Angelique Kerber.

The top-seeded Aussie, who has led the rankings for the past 82 weeks, needed an hour and a quarter to move into Sunday's title match, surpassing her semi-final showing from 2019.

Barty will play for the trophy against Swiss wild card Jil Teichmann — who beat Czech fifth seed Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 6-4 to reach a fourth career final but her first at the elite Masters 1000 level.

She needed 84 minutes to continue an outstanding week in which she beat Naomi Osaka in the third round and Olympic gold medalist compatriot Belinda Bencic in the quarters. After ousting fourth-ranked Pliskova, Teichmann stands 4-0 this season against top 10 players. — AFP

ATP/WTA CINCINNATI RESULTS
MEN (SEMIFINALS) Andrey Rublev (RUS x4) bt Daniil Medvedev (RUS x1) 2-6, 6-3, 6-3; Alexander Zverev (GER x3) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x2) 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4)
WOMEN (SEMIFINALS) Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Angelique Kerber (GER) 6-2, 7-5; Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Karolina Pliskova (CZE x5) 6-2, 6-4

Easy wins for Renaissance, Yalla Shabab in Premier Division

MUSCAT: A magnificent 101 studded with 7 sixes by Abdul Rauf powered Renaissance to a 69-run victory against AER International Trading and Contracting. In a 50-over Premier Division match at Oman Cricket ground 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Sufyan Mahmood's 41 was the only other notable score as Renaissance was dismissed for 236. Syed Amir Ali was brilliant with the ball, taking 4 for 36 whereas Arjun Suresh and Muzahir Raza bagged two wickets each.

Reduced to 88 for 4 in 25 overs, AER could not recover well and was bowled out for 167 in the 46th overdue largely to brilliant bowling by Bilal Muhammed (3 for 21) and Ajay Lalcheta (3 for 35).

In the day's other Premier Division game, Oman all-rounder Muhammed Nadeem struck a superb 83 to help Yalla Shabab to a vital 43-run win over Majees at Oman Cricket ground 2.

Opting to bowl first, Majees did well to dismiss Yalla Shabab for 216 in the 50th over. Mohammed Naseem's 37 and Jitenkumar Ramanandi's 33 were the other main scorers. Ahmed Fayyaz Butt picked up 3 for 34 while Nester Dhamba claimed 2 for 34.

Majees failed to exhibit the same flourish with the bat, slumping to 65 for 5 in 22nd over before being bundled out for 173 in the 47th over. Khurram Khan top-scored with a solid 54 while Nester Dhamba and Sultan Ahmed contributed 32



Yalla Shabab team

and 30 respectively. Kaleemullah, Muhammed Nadeem and Sanuth Ebrahim claimed two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division
Renaissance 236 all out in 50 overs (Abdul Rauf 110 – 3x4, 7x6, Sufiyan Mehmoood 41 – 1x4, 1x6, Syed Amir Ali 4-36, Arjun Suresh 2-33, Muzahir Raza 2-63) beat AER International Trad. & Contg. 167 all out 45.4 overs (Aamir Kaleem 42 – 4x4, Bilal Muhammed 3-21, Ajay Lalcheta 3-35, Flourry Mathunny 2-17) by 69 runs.
Yalla Shabab 216 all out in 49.1 overs (Muhammed Nadeem 83 – 7x4, 1x6, Mohammed Naseem 37 – 3x4, 1x6, Jitenkumar Ramanandi 33 – 2x4, 2x6, Ahmad Fayyaz 3-34, Nester Dhamba 2-34) beat Majees 173 all out in 46.5 overs (Khurram Khan 54 – 2x4, 2x6, Kaleemullah 2-16, Muhammed Nadeem 2-17, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-27) by 43 runs.

OMANI DUO SET FOR UTMB RACE

H A M D A N , H A M E D T O C O M P E T E I N 1 7 0 K M T R A I L R U N N I N G I N F R A N C E

MUSCAT: Hamdan al Khatri and Hamed al Harthy, Oman's two best trail runners, will soon be taking their place on the start line in Chamonix, France, for the 2021 UTMB Mont Blanc 170km trail running race. Having been forced to postpone last year's attempt, Hamdan and Hamed are determined to make the most of the opportunity when the race kicks off on 27 August.

UTMB is described as 'a mythical race, a unique experience', and it is one of the most prestigious trail-running events on the circuit. Starting around the foothills of Mont-Blanc, the 170km race course will take the athletes up to 10,000 metres of total ascent where each participant must rely on their strength and push their mental and physical capabilities to the limit. The event attracts up to 10,000 runners each year and is considered an essential event for trail-runners around the world.

31-year-old Hamdan and 62-year-old Hamed have dedicated the past few years to running, both competing in the inaugural Oman by UTMB in 2018 and completing a variety of ultra-marathons around the world. Hamdan has raced at UTMB Mont Blanc before, in 2019, when he was the first and only Omani in the CCC 100km race. Hamed Al Harthi competed in the Oman by UTMB, in 2019, as well as Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina the same year. His crowning glory, however, was reaching the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro earlier this year.



Hamdan al Khatri



Hamed al Harthy

This return to action could not present a bigger challenge. Having to cancel my race plans last year and train under pandemic circumstances has not been easy but I am determined to give this race my all. Given the stature of the UTMB Mont Blanc race, it is definitely the biggest challenge in my running career to date

**HAMDAN
AL KHATRI**
Omani trail runner



Speaking from his training camp in Chamonix, Hamdan al Khatri said, "This return to action could not present a bigger challenge. Having to cancel my

race plans last year and train under pandemic circumstances has not been easy but I am determined to give this race my all. Given the stature of the UTMB Mont Blanc

race, it is definitely the biggest challenge in my running career to date."

Hamed al Harthy agreed and is looking forward to the test. He

said, "We know this is a difficult race, but we have prepared as best we can and will be supporting each other. I love this sport and I am looking forward to proudly waving the Omani flag at the finish line."

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sultanate had become known as one of the world's best emerging sports and adventure destinations, with ultra-trail marathons in particular becoming incredibly popular. The rugged landscape and well-designed routes, which follow traditional trails between villages in the mountains, had been largely undiscovered by marathon runners but proved popular in 2018 and 2019 with the international athletes competing at Oman by UTMB and have remained open for locals to use in between events.

Hamdan al Khatri, Hamed al Harthy and other talented Omani runners have caught the attention of the national and international media with their achievements. After the conclusion of UTMB Mont Blanc, the pair are hoping to support an Omani team to take part in Thailand by UTMB in October.

The training is intense and requires supreme dedication and concentration, but Oman's trail running runners have become the symbol of perseverance and strength. Their mission to explore and conquer nature has been an inspiration to others looking to test themselves, push past their self-imposed limits and discover the great outdoors.

Oman Racing wrap up Le Mans with 5th place in Race Two

MUSCAT: Aston Martin Vantage GT3 racer Ahmad al Harthy once again delivered a fantastic drive during Road To Le Mans race two in France on Saturday, 21st August, to put Oman Racing firmly in contention for race victory – before a spin for team-mate Michael Dinan led to an eventual finish of fifth position.

Running as the key support race to this year's Le Mans 24 Hours, on Saturday lunchtime's encounter got off to a great start for Al Harthy who, having qualified second fastest in GT3, ran in second place throughout his stint and actually moved into the lead as the mandatory mid-race pit-stops began.

Looking incredibly strong, the Omani served up a terrific

showing as he set his sights on claiming a double Road To Le Mans podium – having finished second in race one at the Circuit de la Sarthe on Thursday, 19th August – but in the end it unfortunately wasn't to be.

"It was a good first stint for me, a cautious start and then I pushed as hard as I could", reflected Al Harthy, "The track was a bit different from race one on Thursday, but I was really happy with my stint and then delighted to give the car over to Michael in a very strong position.

"We got out in the lead and all was good but, unfortunately, Michael was on the dirty side of the circuit as they went into the chicane battling side by side and there was a spin. It's a real

shame as we had the pace for the podium again, but P5 it was in the end."

He added: "Overall I am very happy to have come back to Le Mans and stood on the podium in race one, and we were just as competitive in race two – I'm happy with the progress we made. I must say a big thank you to all of my incredible partners and it was great to share the car with Michael. I look forward now to announcing the remainder of our season in the next few weeks as well."

Omantel, OQ and Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth supported racer Al Harthy made a good launch at the beginning of the race, although the No.95 Aston Martin did slip to third after a

It was a good first stint for me, a cautious start and then I pushed as hard as I could. The track was a bit different from race one on Thursday, but I was really happy with my stint and then delighted to give the car over to Michael in a very strong position

**AHMAD
AL HARTHY**
Omani race driver

chaotic start among the LMP3 cars just ahead.

Neatly avoiding contact as the packed field threaded through the Dunlop Chicane, the Omani quickly hit back to re-take second position from the No.2 Porsche 911 GT3 R and he then set about trying to get on terms with the leading No.8 Ferrari 488 GT3.

Running just three seconds shy of the Ferrari into lap two, with an LMP3 prototype car between them, the Omani pressed on but the LMP3 car did hamper his efforts to close down Rory Penttinen in the Ferrari. As in Thursday's race, a number of yellow flag cautions and slow zones interfered with the action and Al Harthy remained second throughout the first half of the

55-minute race.

At the end of lap six, with just over 25 minutes elapsed, the Ferrari pitted but Al Harthy remained on track for one further lap and so moved into the lead of GT3. Pushing hard to try and gain time before pitting the next time around, he handed the car over to Dinan at the mandatory stop.

Joining the race in the lead after another strong pit-stop by the Aston Martin Racing mechanics, Oman Racing was well placed to fight for back-to-back Road To Le Mans podiums. Dinan, though, was under intense pressure immediately with the Ferrari – now with Logan Sargeant at the wheel – right with him, and the No.2 Porsche swarming too.



Major Omani abalone farming project to come on stream in Q4

PROMISING POTENTIAL:
Government task force inspects suitable sites along Oman’s coastline for future aquaculture projects

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The first phase of a major abalone farming project is set to come into operation at Mirbat in Dhofar Governorate later this year – an initiative that will showcase the enormous potential for aquaculture farming in general and commercial-scale abalone farming in particular.

In a tweet on Sunday, the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Oman Vision 2040 welcomed the imminent launch of the project, stating: “The Sultanate has great potential to become an investment destination for aquaculture. For instance, Mirbat Abalone Farming is one of the leading projects in the sector. It targets to operate the first phase during Q4 of 2021.”

The Unit, along with its predecessor—the Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit (ISFU) — has been instrumental in facilitating speedy approvals for this project, as well as scores of other strategic ventures and initiatives deemed imperative to Oman’s economic development.

Set up with an investment of around RO 5.7 million, the Mirbat Abalone Farming project has been developed by Oman Aquaculture Company – part of Muscat-based Al Jazeera Investments, a well-diversified Omani business house.



The Unit has been instrumental in facilitating speedy approvals for this project, as well as scores of other strategic ventures and initiatives deemed imperative to Oman’s economic development



The project exemplifies a successful effort to commercially produce Golden Abalone (*Haliotis Mariae*), a high-value locally occurring species which is billed as the third most valuable species of abalone in the world.

Together with similar private-led farming and hatchery ventures under various stages of development on Oman’s Al Wusta and Dhofar coasts, the projects aim to sustain the farming of Omani abalone for local consumption and export as well.

Construction work on the farm

was completed last November, according to a report issued by the Implementation Follow-up Unit. Annual output from the facility is estimated at 200 tons of abalone, with the first harvest expected in 2023.

Abalone production is projected to treble to around 600 tons per annum from 2025.

Separately, another subsidiary of Al Jazeera Investments is setting up a hatchery and 50-ton-capacity grow-out farm for abalone broodstock at Al Lakbi on Oman’s Wusta coast. Constructed

on land leased by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the hatchery will use both flow-through and recirculating systems.

With the Omani government banking on aquaculture to dramatically boost its fisheries output for a number of factors — food security, value-addition through processing activities, employment generation and export revenues — a task force has been set up by authorities to allocate suitable land for future aquaculture projects.

Set up by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the task force also has representatives from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and the Environment Authority.

As part of its remit, the task force has already inspected proposed sites in the governorates of Muscat, Musandam, North & South Al Batinah, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar, according to the Oman Vision 2040 report.

300 young Omanis to be nominated for hotel sector jobs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 22

Following the remarkable turnout witnessed by ‘Midhyaf’ programme in the registration phase with 2,031 applicants, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, concluded the interviews and evaluation phase of the programme at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

In the coming weeks, 300 people will be nominated for the final evaluation phase, and hence selecting 148 talents to join the training programme at Oman Tourism College (OTC) in early September. Upon completion of the training at OTC, participants will get the opportunity to commence on-the-job training in various hotels of the Omran Group.

As part of its efforts to provide professional training experiences following international standards to the participants of ‘Midhyaf’ programme, Oman Tourism College has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the British

Butler Institute and a training agreement with ZADK Culinary Academy, aiming to implement intensive training courses in specialised areas covered in the programme, including, Culinary, Food & Beverage, Front of House Operations, Hotel Operations Management, Accounting and Procurement, Sales and Marketing, and Housekeeping.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said: “The extensive interest of Omani youth in joining Midhyaf programme reflects their passion towards their future in the tourism and hospitality sector.

During the coming period, we look forward to having all these passionate talents onboard, to be trained and developed comprehensively through a set of specialised courses at Oman College of Tourism in cooperation with a number of prestigious international institutes in this field.

The programme will work on enhancing the participants’ practical and professional competencies and capabilities, along with providing them with in-depth on-the-job training in different hotels of Omran Group.”



Salalah Port’s general cargo volumes jump 20% in H1

STRONG GROWTH: Exports of limestone, gypsum, methanol and cement buoy throughput volumes at General Cargo Terminal

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 22

Salalah Port recorded a 20 per cent increase in volumes handled at the General Cargo Terminal (GCT), which climbed to 8.798 million tons during H1 2021, up from 7.308 million tons for the corresponding period of 2020.

Major commodities handled at the terminal were limestone, gypsum, methanol and cement, exported from Salalah to nearby markets, Braik bin Musallam al Amri, Chairman, Salalah Port

Services Co SAOG, said in the Director’s report for the first half of the year.

Container volumes, however, dipped 3 per cent to 2.142 million TEUs for H1 2021, down from 2.199 million TEU for H1 2020.

Consolidated net profit for H1, 2021 was recorded at RO 2.619 million, as compared to the corresponding period last year at a profit of RO 11.076 million. Consolidated EBITDA was recorded at RO 8.239 million during H1, 2021, as compared to RO 18.427 million during the same period last year. This includes an insurance claim amount of RO 11.250 million.

The underlying net result of H1 2020 excluding insurance settlement was RO 2.818 million, the report noted.

Total revenue from operations



increased by 3 per cent compared to the same period last year mainly due to the strong volume development of the general cargo business.

The general cargo revenue for volumes handled at Berth 31 has

been included in the container terminal financials, as in the previous year, due to the historic conversion of the berth into a container terminal facility.

Direct operating cost increased by 5 per cent as compared to the

corresponding period last year mainly due to an increase in systems and communication costs and costs related to Covid-19. Other operating costs decreased by 27 per cent compared to the corresponding period last year

mainly due to payment of higher franchisee fees in 2020 resulting from the insurance compensation received.

“The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact our business environment and we all are facing uncertainty in fast-changing circumstances,” said Al Amri.

“Containment measures including restricted domestic and international flights, cancellation of events, closure /suspension of public services and remote working arrangements are having a worldwide impact.

Our priority continues to protect the health and wellbeing of our employees, clients and communities and the management is taking appropriate measures in this regard whilst keeping the business going,” he added.

Excellent response to Meethaq’s feature-rich credit cards

MUSCAT: In line with the bank’s vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat invites everyone to take advantage of the numerous features and benefits of its credit cards.

Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in Oman, operating based on the principles of Transparency, Trust and Partnership while ensuring the comfort of remaining true to Islamic values. Currently Meethaq offers 4 different types of Shari’a compliant credit cards to its customers which include the Hafawa Visa Signature credit card, Titanium MasterCard credit card, Meethaq-LuLu co-branded credit card and the Standard MasterCard credit card.



Customers can also avail up to 5 supplementary cards for each primary card they hold

enabling supplementary card holders to enjoy the benefits available to primary card

holders. For a limited period, Meethaq is offering a full waiver of the annual fees on both the

primary and supplementary card for the first year to promote cash free digital transactions and to encourage customers, including their family members, to experience the benefits of its credit card offering.

Meethaq credit cards are based on the Shari’a contracts of Ujrah and offers benefits which include wide acceptance across POS and ATM location across the world, contactless payments, 24/7 customer service, One Time Pin (OTP) service for secure online transactions, SMS alerts for transactions and up to 52 days of payment grace period.

Meethaq credit cards are an attractive payment solution for customers who seek banking products based on Islamic principles and at the same

time seek convenience and flexibility in making day-to-day transactions at shopping malls, restaurants or at international destinations.

Additionally, Meethaq credit cards also offers an Easy Payment Plan (EPP) which allows Meethaq customers to purchase a wide range of goods and services and make payments for the purchases over a period of 12 months conveniently with no additional costs, in accordance with Shari’a principles.

Earlier this year, Meethaq also launched the first-ever Shari’a-compliant Corporate Purchase Cards in Oman for the benefit of its Corporate Clients to make all their Business to Government payments using these corporate purchase cards.



Toyota Corolla touches 50m global sales milestone

MUSCAT: Toyota Corolla — the world’s favourite sedan has scaled heights to be recognised as the best-selling car of all time across the world.

Further strengthening the 55-year legacy of its best-selling vehicle, Toyota recently announced that the iconic Corolla has surpassed sales of 50 million units worldwide. The incredible milestone underlines the enduring appeal of the much-loved model, which is globally renowned for providing low operating costs and reliable, trouble-free motoring stemming from quality engineering, together with outstanding comfort levels.

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor

Corporation, commented: “We are proud to have achieved this fantastic milestone, which demonstrates the huge impact the Corolla has had on people’s lives around the world. Being the world’s best-selling car speaks volumes about the satisfaction and loyalty our customers have towards the Corolla and the Toyota brand. The Corolla’s legendary reputation for quality and reliability, combined with its exceptional comfort and efficiency, has led to cumulative sales of more than 50 million units. I would like to thank all of our past, present, and future customers for placing their trust in us and taking the Toyota Corolla to their hearts, which provides further inspiration on our journey to make ‘ever-better’ cars.”

Huawei nova 8 now in Oman

MUSCAT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) introduced today in Oman the new stunning camera phone Huawei nova 8, the latest nova family member that empowers people to explore and share.

Engineered for everyday use, Huawei nova 8 packs a versatile 64MP AI quad-camera, a 66W Huawei SuperCharge, a gorgeous 90Hz curved OLED display in addition to Super Device and EMUI 12 features for an ultimate intelligent smartphone experience.

Huawei nova 8 blends technology with stunning aesthetics. At both the front and rear, Huawei nova 8 uses a curved glass design, while retaining the physical buttons on the side for functionality and aesthetics. By using a sophisticated glass grinding process, the curved edges from the front and back perfectly fit into the metal mid-frame, making it feel smooth and sleek.

Inside the Nebular Camera System is a powerful quad-camera consisting of a 64MP HD Main Camera, 8MP Ultra-Wide angle Camera,



2MP Macro Camera and 2MP Bokeh Camera, which lets users capture when exploring. Using 4-in-1 light fusion technology, the 64MP Main Camera makes it easier for people at all skill levels to take pictures in crystal-clear quality. The night can’t stop people from exploring. The Super Night Mode makes photos sharper, brighter and ready to share.

Huawei nova 8 also makes wide-angle photos look more natural with its 120° Ultra Wide Angle Camera and anti-distortion AI algorithm. To help people create artful photos, the Bokeh Camera creates natural Bokeh effects for portraits, while the Macro

Camera takes up-close shots in clear, minute details, with a focus distance of just 4cm.

Dual-View video is here to help loggers record HD 1080p videos in a playful way. The display will split in two, with one showing a close-up shot captured by the Ultra-Wide Angle Camera, and the other displaying the whole picture seized by the Main Camera, great for shooting events or locations, such as visiting a park. The 32MP High-res Front Camera makes everyone look amazing in selfies. Even at night, the Super Night Selfie 2.0 has it taken care of, and the built-in AI algorithm removes flares reflected from glasses for ready-to-share selfies.

Ahlibank reports 6.5% growth in profit for Q2

MUSCAT: Ahlibank has announced a 6.5 per cent growth in profit for the second quarter of 2021, a significant turnaround from the recorded numbers in the first quarter.

With market conditions gradually improving, the Bank as well recorded 14.1 per cent growth in total assets amounting to RO 2,848.3 million, while it’s operating income increased by 8.7 per cent to RO 39.47 million as of the end of June 2021.

Customer deposits increased by 20.0 per cent to reach RO 1,968.1 million compared with the same period in 2020. Net loans, advances and financing grew by 6.5 per cent, reaching RO 2,286.8 million. The Bank’s operating expenses also increased by 7.6 per cent.

Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO, ahlibank, remarks, “We are glad to see the positive developments in the market, the domestic banking sector and the

global financial sector as a whole. Whilst we experienced a particularly difficult and challenging time in the past year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have remained fully committed to continuously growing our asset portfolio, strengthening our market position, developing and launching new products and services and improving existing ones, at the back of building our digital infrastructure.”

“Ahlibank has always aligned itself with the goals set out in Oman Vision 2040 and has emerged as a key supporter of the Sultanate’s development efforts. These initiatives alongside the positive developments on both on the domestic and global economic front have greatly contributed to keeping customer confidence high.

These have also ensured increased value for our stakeholders. As we carry on



Ahlibank has always aligned itself with the goals set out in Oman Vision 2040 and has emerged as a key supporter of the Sultanate’s development efforts

SAID ABDULLAH AL HATMI
CEO, ahlibank

this resolute commitment to our customers and stakeholders and achieving a consistent high level of performance, we are confident that the Bank will remain on its present growth path,” he adds.

Keeping pace with the evolving market, ahlibank has taken a proactive step in adopting an integrated VAT-compliance solution that will ensure operational excellence and improve customer experience.

The Bank has been staunch in implementing the government’s and the Central Bank of Oman’s directives, proving itself a key supporter of the country’s development efforts.

It has remained focused on coming up with innovative products and services whilst boosting its technological capabilities and infrastructure in order to enhance its banking operations and ensure safety, reliability, and efficiency.

As part of its strategy and

corporate values to enhance the customer journey and deliver a unique experience to its customers, ahlibank has outlined its digital road map for the coming years.

It continues to improve on its existing products and services while introducing new practical and convenient banking solutions to all segments of society.

Alongside this is its contribution to the upskill of its local workforce in order to help fulfil the Bank’s vision and play a greater role in the social and economic growth and development of the Sultanate.

“We have been actively spearheading corporate social responsibility initiatives not only in the community but in the Bank as well, as we recently cooperated with the Ministry of Health to launch a full-fledged vaccination drive against Covid-19 for ahlibank employees and their families,” Al Hatmi further notes.

Sohar International receives ‘Best Employer Brand’ and ‘Managing Health at Work’ awards



MUSCAT: As a bank that focuses on the holistic wellbeing of its employees, Sohar International was recently awarded the ‘Best Employer Brand Award’ as well as the Award for ‘Managing Health at Work’ at the World HRD Congress — Oman Best Employer Brand Awards 2021 — a global body based out of India that has been recognising and highlighting exemplary branding, human resources, and leadership regionally.

Revered for recording superior levels of performance through all its operations, Sohar International believes investing in its staff and creating a conducive, positive and safe work environment is vital to its continued success.

“As an organisation that shares the national agenda of progress and prosperity, we take the welfare and development of our employees, our most precious assets, very seriously at all levels of our workforce.

We are indeed delighted to receive such coveted accolades that put us at par with international organisations. While this award is a testament to the commitment demonstrated by the bank, it also highlights the bank’s corporate culture and its focus on leadership, health and safety standards, and employee welfare.

Industry benchmarks and global recognitions like these are a testament to our efforts and various strategic initiatives,” said Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International.



Air Canada sees cargo advantage in Toronto hub as shippers avoid US crunch

TORONTO: Air Canada sees a “strategic advantage” for its cargo business in Canadian hubs like Toronto as shippers seek to bypass logjams at some US gateways.

Lifted by e-commerce demand, cargo-only flights emerged as a lifeline for carriers during the pandemic when commercial traffic slumped. Half of air cargo normally travels in the belly of passenger jets.

While North American airlines are reducing all-cargo flights as passenger traffic rebounds, that shift is more gradual in Canada due to a slower easing of travel restrictions.

Cargo remains important for Canada’s largest carrier, accounting for 43 per cent of second-quarter revenue, even as it restores passenger flights, a company executive said.

“We (cargo) were a single-digit piece of the business before Covid. We hope to be a bigger part of that in the future”, Jason Berry, Air Canada’s Vice-President for cargo, said in an interview, without providing a target.

Air Canada’s ambition comes as international air cargo volume hit its strongest first-half growth since 2017, airline trade group IATA said. But staffing shortages and space constraints have exacerbated congestion at hubs like Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport and at some US ports.

US railroad operator Union Pacific Corp recently warned that bottlenecks at West Coast ports have spread East, impacting some inland terminals, including Chicago.

— Reuters



An Air Canada Boeing 737 Max 8 lands at Toronto Pearson International Airport. — AFP

Nama Group joins ‘Eidaad’ programme to promote In-Country Value in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 22

Based on the Group Sustainability Policy, Nama Group signed a cooperation memorandum with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) to participate in the Internship Programme ‘Eidaad’. Nama Group intends to achieve integration with development institutions in the Sultanate to strengthen the national cadres’ potentials and involve them in the sustainable development to meet Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

The CEO of Nama Group, Eng Omar al Wahaibi, signed the memorandum on behalf of the Group with Dr Rahma al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, during the inauguration of a training programme for industrial and academic sectors.

The initiative aims to achieve the goals of the second edition of the national programme, which seeks to align higher education programmes with the requirement of the labour market, provide students with key skillsets and improve their workplace exposure for one full academic year.

The programme also aims to provide the students with new and appropriate knowledge and skills to support them in bridging



the gap between their capabilities and business sectors requirements. Nama Group will provide 46 on-the-job training opportunities within a ten-month training plan to improve the trainees’ talents and preparing them for the labour market.

Eng Omar al Wahaibi, CEO of Nama Group, said: “We are firmly on track in implementing the Group’s Sustainability Policy and giving priority to the In-Country Value. Our participation in this programme is an extension of

several projects and programmes, aiming at empowering the Omani youth in the electricity sector, through the following: Achieving Omanisation in the Group companies and their contractors; Presenting training programmes to students and graduates and preparing them for the labour market; and Supporting the youth in establishing and managing SMEs.”

Nama Group has achieved an Omanisation of 95 per cent in the electricity sector while all

Our participation in this programme is an extension of several projects and programmes, aiming at empowering the Omani youth in the electricity sector, through the following: Achieving Omanisation in the Group companies and their contractors; Presenting training programmes to students and graduates and preparing them for the labour market; and Supporting the youth in establishing and managing SMEs

ENG OMAR AL WAHAIBI

CEO, Nama Group

executive leadership positions have been Omanised. The “Ruwad” programme, a dedicated training for emerging leaders, contributed significantly to supporting the middle and senior leadership.

Also, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and the Authority for Public Services

Regulation, the Group is supporting the Omanisation of 800 positions in 2021. Under the ‘Naqla’ programme, the Group aims to support electrical engineering graduates to obtain electrical licences to work in the electricity sector. So far, around 250 graduates out of 625 have been trained in a 5-year plan. The licence supports the job-seekers to obtain positions in several sectors, such as the oil Sector, in addition to the electricity sector. It also helps them to establish their own SME businesses.

In the environment area, Nama Group trained 600 university and college students from the architecture engineering field, school students, and job-seekers in the National Electricity Conservation Campaign, entitled: “Tadoom”. Participants were trained on modern design programmes related to eco-friendly homes. In addition, 95 male and female students from 24 universities and colleges in the Sultanate were trained in the Green Innovation Eco-Thon initiative. The programmes objectives also included spreading awareness of preserving the environment and promoting a culture of sustainability. The Green Innovation Eco-Thon initiative focused on various subjects like Waste Management and the use of Renewable Energy.”

Russia to retaliate after new US sanctions

MOSCOW: Moscow pledged retaliatory measures after a new set of sanctions imposed by the United States on a Russian ship and two companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, Russia’s foreign ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

The \$11 billion project, which will double the existing Nord Stream pipeline across the Baltic Sea and allow Russia to bypass Ukraine when piping gas to Europe, has been a focal point of tensions between Moscow and Washington.

Washington imposed the sanctions on Friday on a ship, its owner and a construction

company, but opponents of the project said the measures were insufficient to stop it. The United States and Britain also imposed sanctions on Friday on men they said were Russian intelligence operatives responsible for the poisoning one year ago of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

“We view such hostile actions by the Biden administration as dictated by a lack of political will and an unwillingness to build US-Russian relations on a partnership basis”, Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for Russia’s Foreign Ministry, said. — Reuters

Prices at pump soar by 70% in Lebanon after new subsidy cut

BEIRUT: Lebanese fuel prices soared by up to 70 per cent on Sunday after yet another subsidy cut, official figures showed, heaping more pressure on people struggling to make ends meet in the cash-strapped country.

The cost of hydrocarbon fuels in Lebanon has now roughly tripled in the two months since the central bank started decreasing its support for imports.

The latest cut, which is expected to cause price hikes for other key commodities, comes as the Mediterranean country is mired in one of the world’s worst economic crises since the 1850s.

Dire shortages have seen Lebanon’s people struggle to find enough fuel to drive to work or power back-up generators during near round-the-clock



A worker fills up a car with fuel, at a gas station in Beirut. — Reuters

electricity cuts.

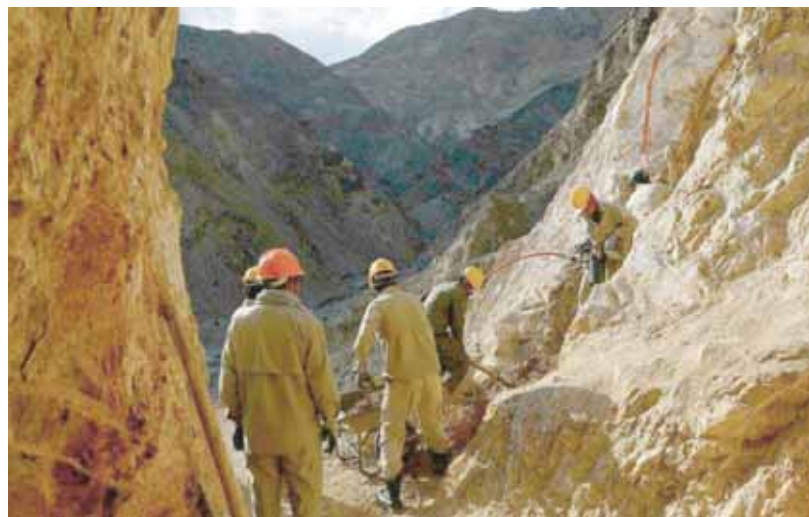
Motorists have become caught up in long lines outside the petrol stations that have remained open.

The refusal of many petrol stations to sell what they do have saw the army deploy this

month to seize hoarded fuel and distribute it to the needy.

Frustrations have boiled over in recent weeks, with scuffles repeatedly breaking out over scarce fuel, leaving at least three people dead. — AFP

Taliban inherit untapped \$1 trillion trove of minerals



Men work at a gold mine in Baghlan province in Afghanistan. — Reuters

PARIS: The Taliban now hold the keys to an untouched trillion-dollar trove of minerals including some that could power the world’s transition to renewable energies, but Afghanistan has long struggled to tap its vast deposits.

The Taliban are already in a financial bind since they returned to power 20 years after their ouster, as major aid donors halted their support for Afghanistan.

The resources include bauxite, copper, iron ore, lithium and rare earths, according to a January report by the US Geological Survey (USGS). Copper, which is needed

to make power cables, became a hot commodity this year as prices soared to more than \$10,000 per tonne. Lithium is a crucial element to make electric car batteries, solar panels and wind farms.

World demand for lithium is expected to grow by over 40 times by 2040, according to the International Energy Agency.

And Afghanistan “sits on a huge reserve of lithium that has not been tapped to this day”, said Guillaume Pitron, author of the book “The Rare metals War”.

Afghanistan is also home to rare earths that are used in the

clean energy sector: Neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium.

The country’s untapped mineral riches have been estimated at \$1 trillion by the USGS, though Afghan officials have put it three times as high.

Afghanistan has done better digging for precious stones such as emeralds and rubies as well as semi-precious tourmaline and lapis lazuli, but the business is plagued with smuggling to Pakistan.

The country also mines for talc, marble, coal and iron.

While the Taliban’s takeover may deter foreign investors, one

country that appears willing to do business with them is China.

China has said it was ready to have “friendly and cooperative” relations with Afghanistan after the Taliban entered Kabul.

The state-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation won rights in 2007 to lease the giant Mes Aynak copper ore deposit for 30 years and extract 11.5 million tonnes of the commodity.

The project to tap the world’s second-largest unexploited copper deposit has yet to start operations “due to safety issues”, according to *Global Times*. — AFP

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Emerging Omani fashion line mixes heritage with art

Launching the fashion line Blanca in 2019, fashion designer Khawla Abdullah aims to mix passion and art with Omani influence not just in the fabric or materials used but also with the design aesthetic hoping to create a brand and products with global appeal...**P20**

ART

READ



THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY

BY MATT HAIG

Nora Seed finds a library beyond the edge of the universe that contains books with multiple possibilities of the lives one could have lived.

Italian fugitive connected to stolen Van Gogh paintings arrested

A SUSPECTED ITALIAN drug trafficker who police believe may have bought two stolen Vincent Van Gogh paintings was arrested in the United Arab Emirates, a police statement said on Thursday.

Raffaele Imperiale, 46, was arrested in Dubai on August 4 by local authorities, who cooperated with the Italian police.

He had been on the run since 2016 and Italy had included him in the list of its most dangerous fugitives.

In 2016, two Van Gogh paintings stolen in Amsterdam in 2002 - "Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen" and "View of the Sea at Scheveningen" - were found by police in a villa

Imperiale owned near Naples. Each painting was worth an estimated 50 million euros (\$58 million), investigators said after recovering them.

Police said Imperiale is a key figure in international drug trafficking and money laundering and has a close relationship with the Camorra mafia gang centred around the southern Italian city of Naples.

"An excellent result which once again demonstrates the ability of our police forces to fight crime," Italy Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese said.

The Italian government is working to swiftly finalise the extradition of Imperiale, who is now under custody in the UAE, Italian media reported, citing police. — **Reuters**





The sea adventure company offering better look of Musandam

YOUNG OMANIS WHO are aware of the country's beauty had been riding the waves of expansive growth in the tourism sector as the government put more focus into the industry.

As a result, the country right now is experiencing a boom in youth-driven adventure and tourism groups giving travellers and tourists a deeper look into Oman as these youth have more knowledge of the inner working and beauty of the country.

Musandam Sea Adventures project is one example of tourism projects in which its Omani owner was able to prove its worth and efficiency. The company won several international awards, as it was classified in 2016 among the top five companies around the world and in 2017, it won the silver award among the top five companies in the Middle East.

About this success story, Abdulfattah al Shehi, shared he started his passion for sea activities in 1992 as he used to accompany his father during the tours that his father organised for visitors to Musandam Governorate to spend their vacation in the islands and sea bays in the governorate.

Al Shehi shared that he understood that he has knack for outdoor adventures and tourism when one day, he took one of the tourists on a cruise, and this tourist took several pictures of the tourist sites and distributed them to his friends, which made them want to get to know him and cooperate with him on their tours in the Musandam Governorate. The experience encouraged him to establish a project in which he employed his expertise in this field.

He adds, "After some tours,



the idea came to me to establish a cruise project for tourists coming to Musandam Governorate. I named the project Musandam Sea Adventures. The proper launching was in 2001 when I started using one ship that I purchased. That early beginning made the startup the second office specialising in tourism in the governorate."

Al Shehi said that in 2002, he received an invitation from a German company that had previously visited the governorate to participate in one of the exhibitions specialised in tourism promotion. He marketed and promoted tourism in Musandam Governorate and the most important products offered by the office to tourists wishing to visit the islands, bays and sea bays in the governorate.

He explained that in 2006,

he hired a German expert in the field of tourism to help him in the process of attracting tourists and promoting the project. He also employed several Omanis and over time, his venture grown into eight people left and thus continue to grow.

He said that the project witnessed a large turnout of tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate, as it was transporting 200 people per day, which prompted him to double the number of ships. In 2012, he designed a private yacht for the project, and it was launched in December 2014 to attract more tourists. As for the ship, it carries 60 people, and the yacht carries 80 people per trip, in addition to organising long trips for three to four days in Musandam and six trips to Muscat.

Regarding prices, Abdulfattah said that prices differ between ships and yachts. There is a special price for Omanis, so he set RO 15 for an Omani individual and RO 20 for a non-Omani for ships. As for the price of a yacht, it depends on the number of people, as prices range between RO 45 and RO 55.

He added that the monthly revenues during the winter season period, before the Corona pandemic, amounted to RO 70,000 and during the summer period to RO 30,000, but now the revenues do not exceed 5 thousand Omani riyals due to the pandemic conditions and the suspension of tourist movement.

LOCAL SCENE

Constant flow of Aflaj turns farms into green oases



The Ghaili-type Al Fath Falaj in the Wilayat of Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate, located 30 km away from the centre of the wilayat, is one of Oman's most enduring water irrigation systems that continues to bless farms in the area with water.



The falaj which main water source is Wadi al Fath usually increases in water size when heavy rains lash the area and when other wadis overflow and also feed the Falaj. The water is collected in a cistern and then runs up to one and a half kilometres to irrigate the farms particularly those in Al Fath farms.



The falaj is one of the water sources that the people depend on for seasonal agriculture, such as the cultivation of onions, garlic, vegetables, tomatoes, legumes, wheat, barley and corn, in addition to palm trees, lemons, grapes, bananas, pomegranates and some other trees for which the wilayat is famous.

The people and farm owners in the area are keen to pay attention to agriculture to take advantage of the agricultural seasons to achieve a degree of sufficiency from these varieties, preserving the old methods of agriculture that depend on organic fertilizers.

The plantations, palm trees and other agricultural trees irrigated by Falaj Al Fath between the high mountains surrounding the place, form a beautiful natural scene.



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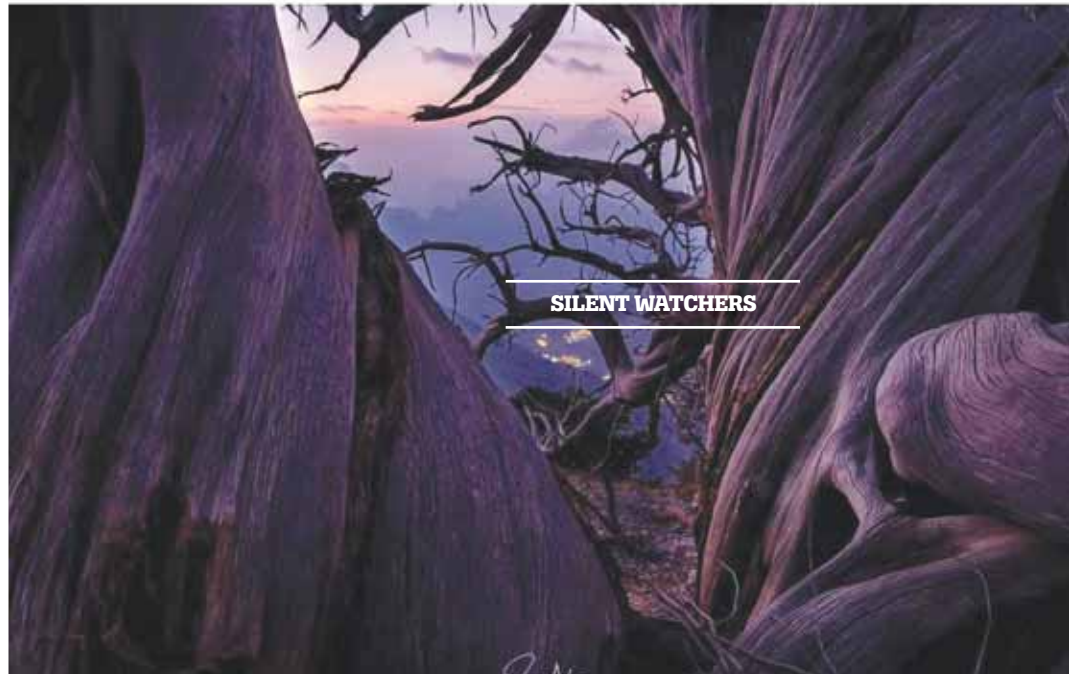
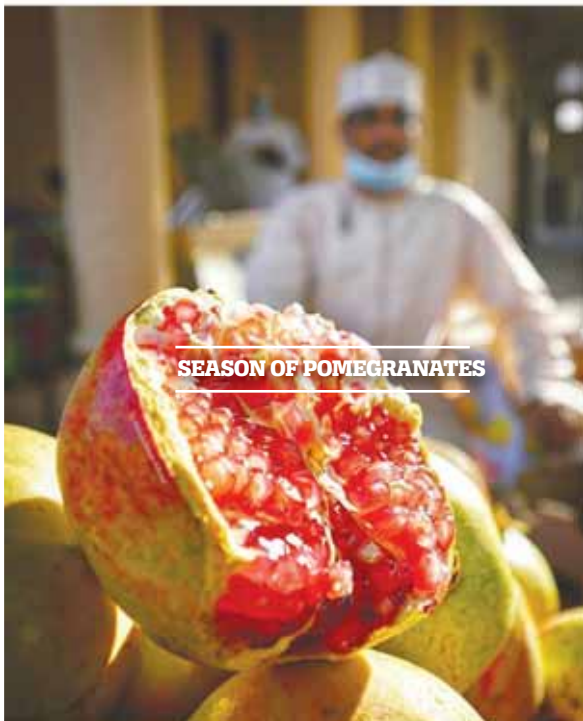


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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Arc de Triomphe to be wrapped up whole in Paris art installation



VISITORS TO PARIS may be in for a surprise when strolling up the Champs-Elysees in September, when the Arc de Triomphe monument will be enveloped in a shimmering wrapper in a posthumous installation by artist Christo.

Workers have already erected some of the scaffolding around the 50-metre high, 19th century arch to set it up for the silvery blue, recyclable plastic wrapping, which will be on view between September 18 and October 3.

Imagined decades ago in 1961 by the late Bulgarian-born artist Christo and his wife and fellow artist Jeanne-Claude, who died in 2009, "L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped" was finally brought to life by Christo's nephew, Vladimir Yavatchev.

"It's just keeping a promise to him. It's as simple as that," Yavatchev said, adding that a few years before his death in 2020, Christo, who spent part of his life in Paris and in New York, said the one thing he had wanted to do above all else was to complete this project.

Christo had once rented a small room near the famed Champs-Elysees avenue after moving to Paris in 1958, when he experimented with wrapping discarded crates and barrels with fabric and rope, according to an official site about the artist.

Christo, whose full name is Christo Javacheff, was known for his larger-than-life installations. He wrapped up a stretch of coastline in Australia and the Reichstag parliament building in Berlin, and strung up a huge curtain in part of a canyon in Colorado. He worked closely with Jeanne-Claude on the projects.

The pair covered Paris's Pont Neuf bridge in yellow cloth in 1985. — **Reuters**

DISCOVERY

Diving among ancient ruins where Romans used to party



FISH DART ACROSS mosaic floors and into the ruined villas, where holidaying Romans once drank, plotted and flirted in the party town of Baiae, now an underwater archaeological park near Naples.

Statues which once decorated luxury abodes in this beachside resort are now playgrounds for crabs off the coast of Italy, where divers can explore ruins of palaces and domed bath-houses built for emperors.

Rome's nobility were first attracted in the 2nd century BC to the hot springs at Baiae, which sits on the coast within the Campi Flegrei — a supervolcano known in English as the Phlegraean Fields.

Seven emperors, including Augustus and Nero, had villas here, as did Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. The poet Sextus Propertius described the town as a place of vice, which was "foe to virtuous creatures".

It was where "old men behave like young boys, and lots of young boys act like young girls," according to the Roman scholar Varro.

But by the 4th century, the porticos, marble columns, shrines and ornamental fish ponds had begun to sink due to bradyseism, the gradual rise and fall of land due to hydrothermal and seismic activity.

The whole area, including the neighbouring commercial capital of Pozzuoli and military seat at Miseno, were submerged. Their ruins now lie between four



and six metres (15 to 20 feet) underwater.

- 'SOMETHING UNIQUE' -

"It's difficult, especially for those coming for the first time, to imagine that you can find things you would never be able to see anywhere else in the world in just a few metres of water," said Marcello Bertolaso, head of the Campi Flegrei diving centre, which takes tourists around the site.

"Divers love to see very special things, but what you can see in the park of Baiae is something unique."

The 177-hectare (437-acre) underwater site has been a protected marine area since 2002, following decades in which antiques were found in fishermen's nets and looters had free rein.

Divers must be accompanied by a registered guide. A careful sweep of sand near a low wall uncovers a stunning mosaic floor from a villa which belonged to

Gaius Calpurnius Pisoni, known to have spent his days here conspiring against Emperor Nero.

Explorers follow the ancient stones of the coastal road past ruins of spas and shops, the sunlight on a clear day piercing the waves to light up statues. These are replicas; the originals are now in a museum.

"When we research new areas, we gently remove the sand where we know there could be a floor, we document it, and then we re-cover it," archaeologist Enrico Gallochio said.

"If we don't, the marine fauna or flora will attack the ruins. The sand protects them," said Gallochio, who is in charge of the Baiae park.

"The big ruins were easily discovered by moving a bit of sand, but there are areas where the banks of sand could be metres deep. There are undoubtedly still ancient relics to be found," he said. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Impeachment' star says series aimed to 'redeem' Monica Lewinsky



A TELEVISION SERIES debuting next month delves into the impeachment of former US President Bill Clinton, and star Beanie Feldstein said she hopes it might "redeem" Monica Lewinsky in the eyes of some viewers.

Lewinsky had an unusual level of involvement in "Impeachment: American Crime Story," producers said on Friday ahead of the September 7 premiere on Walt Disney Co's (DIS.N) FX network. She provided feedback on scripts and approved dialogue recited by Feldstein, the "Booksmart" star who played the former intern.

Feldstein said she developed a friendship with Lewinsky, meeting once in person just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and exchanging texts and videos.

"She was incredibly giving, and I made it very clear to her when we started filming that I saw myself as her bodyguard," Feldstein said at a Television Critics Association event.

The actress said she told Lewinsky: "I'm going to protect you. I have your back. I know your heart."

Lewinsky began an affair with Clinton when she was 22. Clinton initially lied about the relationship before apologising. He was impeached by the US House of Representatives but acquitted by the Senate.

Feldstein said she was too young to have impressions from that time, but she has heard negative recollections and "it was deeply important to me to unravel that and redeem her."

Lewinsky had become a punch line and had her appearance and actions criticised, producers said, but was unable to speak freely because of an agreement that provided her immunity from prosecution. "Our culture sort of created a second Monica Lewinsky that doesn't bear any relationship to the real person," said writer Sarah Burgess.

The series also tells the story from the viewpoint of Lewinsky's friend Linda Tripp, who secretly recorded their phone conversations, and Paula Jones, who accused Clinton of exposing himself in front of her when he was governor of Arkansas.

"Impeachment" is part of the Emmy-winning "American Crime Story" series that examined the O J Simpson murder trial and the killing of designer Gianni Versace. The creators explore crimes that "we are guilty of collectively as Americans," executive producer Nina Jacobson said, "and I can't think of a story that fits the bill any better than this one."

"We are deeply implicated in the way we represented these women, treated these women," she said. "We are as guilty as the rest of them in many respects, minus the tape recording." — **Reuters**

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Emerging Omani fashion line mixes heritage with art

By Thekra Al Manji

FOR MANY OMANI designers, the country's culture, customs and history are an integral part of their identity which is why many of them have combined old and modern design in one piece creating styles that are not just unique but also have global appeal.

From old, storied patterns to beautiful organic textiles only produced locally, the result of these creations are designs that also have a touch of Omani identity.

"Our clothes are a source of non-verbal communication which send messages about who we are, where we come from, what we do etc. Overall, fashion is a way of expressing ourselves through our clothing and accessories", said Khawla Abdullah, 28, one of Oman's emerging talented designers who is trying to showcase the appeal of Omani designs.

Launching the fashion line Blanca in 2019, the fashion house's aesthetic is a mix of passion and art expression that is partly rooted in Oman's authentic past and culture but with the modern nuances that connect it to a fast-changing world.

Khawla chose the name "Blanca", which is Spanish in origin for her fashion brand. For her, this Spanish female name carries many meanings, and mainly it represents the frank, generous, cheerful and creative woman with good and kind intentions. The name is musical and carries an inner influence on people.

Khawla also explained that the fashion line Blanca is charming, lively, feminine and is created for the sensitive but empowered woman. A 'Blanca woman' has an intuitive sense and a special imagination. She has only one goal in life: Is to be her own version alpha type because she is ambitious, friendly, generous and very strong. Overall, the wearer of the line is modern and very classy.

When Khawla envisioned Blanca, she wanted it to provided clothing and accessories that spoke of passion and art.

"I believe one should either be an artist or wear something created by art", she said.

"Historically, fashion has rarely been elevated to the same stature as painting, music, sculpture or architecture. But fashion is one of the purest expressions of art because it is art that is experienced daily. It's a beautiful form of creative expression mixed with passion and desire carried out by the designer and specially made for canvassed bodies", she said.

"The main goal of Blanca designs is to support and enhance the national identity and the national heritage for all fashion lovers. I always design for women who are proud of their identity. my team and I make sure that our designs represent the identity of the customer in a contemporary and feminine way", she said.

She added, "Blanca is considered a more artistry brand than a fashion brand because we merge Omani heritage and environmental elements artistically in our designs using shiny threads and beads. We are proud of what we have achieved so far and looking forward to a brighter future in modest women's wear."

"My dream is to create a well-known brand worldwide and to start my own

fabrics factory. So far, I have noticed acceptance of my designs from all women in my country and Gulf countries and that gave me a push to give more and think outside the box", she clarified. One of Khawla's happiest moments is when she goes out and randomly notice women wearing her designs.

"Midas is my favourite piece, I worked hard on sketching the embroidery, I have been inspired by the craving of Omani mandos and I tried to showcase the geometric artwork beautifully on fabric."

Asked about the inspiration behind the brand, Khawla shared, "I was born in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and I was raised by powerful women. My mother has always been my biggest inspiration in fashion. She wears beautiful Omani clothes which are threaded beautifully in gold zari and flowery aesthetics. She taught me how to create fine garments for my dolls growing up and my grandmother taught me how to stitch using wool. My family has encouraged me to start my own brand and my friends supported me all the way", she narrated.

Khawla said that other than staying "in fashion", cultural forces and social factors are part and parcel of the Omani fashion industry but that for one to succeed, "the most important factor is the support that the designer gets from his/her friends and family." She said that if she has the community support behind her, it is for them to be confident and create something which comes naturally to them.

She also explained, "I've studied Oman weather, plants, mountains and went deeply on arabesque art in our forts and ancient houses. Our beloved Oman is rich in cultural art and heritage. I discover something new everyday. Omani traditional clothing has been always my biggest inspiration; also I am inspired mostly by the cravings on Omani khanjar and the mandos."

Blanca was established in 2019 after an intensive study of the market needs, acceptance of the project idea. Khawla and her team started online, and they are looking forward to opening their own shop after the pandemic is over.

Although her field of study (logistics and transport management) is far away from her current career choice, Khawla praises the role of her family and friends in encouraging her to launch her own fashion brand when they noticed that she had a good creativity in fashion.

