

Rising trend in temperature,
Saham records 48 degrees

North Al Batinah experienced the hottest day in months as Saham touched 48 degree Celsius at midday on Wednesday. The high temperature was recorded in other areas of North Al Batinah, such as Suhar, Al Khabourah, and Al Suwaiq. Muscat Governorate also recorded high temperature of 44 degrees by late afternoon and coming down to 42. Bausher in Muscat experienced 46 degrees Celsius, but Al Amerat recorded 46 to 47 degrees Celsius. **DETAILS ON P4**



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OMAN EDGE
THAILAND IN
FRIENDLY



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THE FAST-RISING
STAR AMONG
OMAN'S WADIS



P20

BANGLADESH JOINS
OTHES IN BAILING
OUT LANKA



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICES AT
\$66.85 A BARREL

Oman oil price for July delivery reached \$66.85, comprising a rise by 31 cents from the price of Tuesday, which was \$66.54. The average price of Oman oil for May delivery has stabilised at \$64.43, thus \$3.58 per barrel higher than April delivery. Global benchmark Brent crude was up little changed at \$68.62 and US crude slipped 0.2 per cent to \$65.94 per barrel. Spot gold added 0.34 per cent to \$1,905 an ounce.

DAMASCUS

SYRIA'S ASSAD VOTES IN
FORMER REBEL TOWN

Syrian President Bashar al Assad cast his vote on Wednesday in an election expected to win him a fourth term, choosing the former rebel stronghold of Douma where a suspected chemical weapons attack in 2018 prompted Western air strikes. The government says the election shows Syria is functioning normally despite a decade-old conflict. The fighting has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven 11 million people - about half the country's population - from their homes. "Syria is not what they were trying to market, one city against the other and sect against the other or civil war, today we are proving from Douma that the Syrian people are one," Assad said after voting. **DETAILS ON P6**

Quest for peace does not warrant killing, destruction: Sultanate

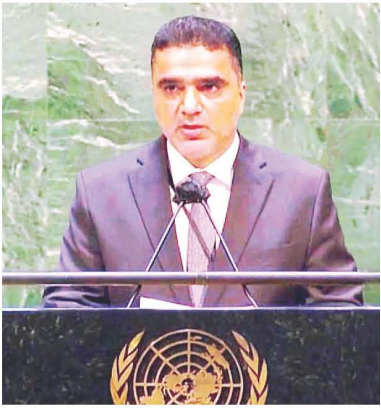
NEW YORK: The Sultanate has said that the road towards peace does not follow a course of killing and destruction, but rather comes through dialogue and negotiations that seek to preserve the supreme interests of the parties concerned.

This was stated in Oman's speech before the UN General Assembly's emergency session on Palestine, following the recent developments in the region. The speech was delivered by Adviser Ahmed bin Dawood

al Zedjali, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate at the United Nations (UN).

Al Zedjali pointed out that Palestinian lands held by Israel since 1967 in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza are, from the point of view of the international law, "occupied lands" and that the escalation, which has been taking place until recently, occurs on occupied lands.

The Sultanate said that the incidents in the Palestinian lands



Ahmed bin Dawood al Zedjali

are typical forms of occupation, a fact affirmed by more than 700 UN General Assembly resolutions and more than 80 decisions issued by the Security Council.

"None of the resolutions have been implemented by the Israeli occupation authorities. To maintain the credibility of the Security Council — this major institution in the international relations system, it is time the resolutions were put to action," said the Sultanate.

Speaking on the occasion, he said it is indicated that as long as there is occupation, there has been resistance, and the Palestinians have affirmed that their resolve will not relent until their legitimate rights are achieved, foremost among which is their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He added that the Arabs and the Palestinians have affirmed their desire for peace. **TURN TO P5**



VACCINATION
FOR GRADE 12
STUDENTS BEGINS

The Covid-19 vaccination campaign for Grade 12 students in government and private schools began on Wednesday. The main centres for vaccination included Sultan Qaboos Youth Compound for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, and public schools. Doctors educated students about the importance of taking the Covid-19 vaccine before starting the vaccination process.

DETAILS ON P4

1,000 jobs every
month in civil,
military services

RECRUITMENT AT SAF
BEGINS TODAY

MUSCAT: The government is pressing ahead with its "Appointment and Replacement Programme", which generates as many as 12,000 jobs for Omanis as specified in the "Employment Plan 2021", said a government official on Tuesday, noting that the placements will be made at a rate of 1,000 jobs a month, till the end of this year, in the government sector's civil and military services.

In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on expediting the execution of employment initiatives, the Ministry of Defence will today begin to receive job-seekers who meet conditions set for recruitment at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). The jobs will be announced in succession by the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Navy of Oman and other administrations of the Defence Ministry.

DEFENCE JOBS

Earlier, the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) has already provided jobs to a number of young Omanis.

Among these, the Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy employed Omani youth, who joined the Academy to receive training and join the ranks of defence. The step comes as part of plans and programmes to accommodate job-seekers.

The academy has finalised the recruitment of new batches

with an emphasis on maintaining precautionary measures set for protection against Covid-19.

The Port of Salalah has announced 60 vacancies in coordination with the Directorate General of the Ministry of Labour in Dhofar Governorate.

TRAINING

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has urged SME owners and entrepreneurs to take advantage of the on-the-job training initiative signed by ASMED with the Ministry of Labour.

The business owners are encouraged to register their establishments' data and benefit from training programmes to help support their establishments.

The initiative provides training for 3,000 Omani job-seekers.

The initiative's subsidy, offered through the Labour Ministry, includes bearing the monthly training dues.

Accordingly, the first year covers 100 per cent of the bursary payable to trainees as follows: Bachelor's degree holders will receive RO 500 a month, university diploma holders RO 400 a month and general education diploma (GED) holders RO 300 a month. In the second year, the ministry bears 50 per cent of the training grant.

ASMED said on-the-job training packages offered to SMEs have been launched in the Sultanate in response to SMEs demands to receive subsidised-pay manpower. — ONA

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INSIDE



IRAN BANS BITCOIN MINING
OVER POWER OUTAGES

P6



AMAZON SNAPS UP
MGM FOR \$8.45 BILLION

P8

Citizens reject sabotage, call to respect law

MUSCAT: A number of Omani citizens on Wednesday expressed their rejection and dismay over actions by some persons who joined youth gatherings in Suhar, North Al Batinah Governorate.

The sit-ins were organised with the purpose of tackling the issue of employment, but some of those who participated in the gatherings assaulted policemen, by-passers and road users. They blocked roads and vandalised

public and private properties in a flagrant violation of the Basic Law of the State, which states that "Safe life is a guaranteed right for every human being and that the State has a duty to establish law and order and provide tranquillity for all".

The citizens affirmed that the action of saboteurs contradict the benign values of Omani society and constitute a breakaway from the state of calm and commitment that prevailed over the past days.

Similar views and pleas for calm and respect for the law echoed across social media networks, requesting the gathering youth not to get involved in actions that target those tasked with maintaining law and order or transgressing properties or hampering public liberties of citizens and residents.

"Such actions are an unacceptable means of staging demands or attaining goals," said citizens on social media. — ONA

No impact on residences
from Ja'alan earthquake

MUSCAT: The earthquake monitoring centre at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Wednesday reported a low magnitude earthquake, measuring 3.4 on the Richter Scale, in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.

The tremor, which hit a depth of 10 km in the sea, occurred at 11:23 am.

Dr Issa al Hussain, Director of the SQU Earthquake Monitoring Centre, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the epicentre of the earthquake is located 250 km from Muscat city, about 260 km from Duqm and 125 km from the Wilayat of Sur. He described Wednesday's earthquake as "a minor shock that had no impact on residences or inhabitants there".



Earlier, tremors were recorded twice near Dibba in Musandam Governorate on Monday.

The first one measured 2.9 on the Richter Scale at 4:54 am in the Sea



of Oman, 19 km away from Dibba, while the second one measuring 2.1 was recorded at 7:24 am in the Sea of Oman, 18 km away from Dibba.

— ONA

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 44°C Min 35°C SALALAH: Max 31°C Min 27°C NIZWA: Max 42°C Min 27°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:21 FAJR: 03:55 DHUHR: 12:09 ASR: 15:29 MAGHRIB: 18:52 ISHA: 20:13

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa here on Wednesday Maria Luisa, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries and exchanged views on matters of common concern. – ONA

Sports walkway for Seeb soon

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A sports way cum cycling park is being developed in Wilayat of Seeb, initial measures for which have already been taken, according to the Muscat Municipality.

This longitudinal park coming up in Mabela will be a perfect mix of sports, leisure and utility so that every single individual visiting the park can have something for them.

According to a senior official at the civic body, the park includes several elements and facilities designed according to principles that consider the standards of quality and sustainability and serve persons with disabilities as part of the CSR initiatives.

Some of the facilities include, a sports walkway and a bicycle path of 3.2 km long, games for children, physical sports equipment, and adding elements of afforestation, green spaces and lighting distributed over the garden. The park will also include multi-use sports fields, cafes, sites for mobile vehicles, toilets, a prayer room, and public parking.

“This ambitious project aims to provide sustainable services to community members, and to provide a healthy outlet that encourages the practice of physical activities and sports in a way that contributes to raising the level of happiness of the population,” the official told *the Observer*.

“As part of our plans to make

Muscat a green city with a lot of vitality and activities,” he added.

A memorandum of cooperation (MoC) to this effect was signed between the Muscat Municipality and Occidental Oman to establish the park and the walkway cum cycling track with a total area of (152,400 square meters) in the South district in the Wilayat of Seeb, which lies in the urban area with residential facilities and close to commercial areas.

“We are thankful and offer our gratitude to Occidental Oman for this community initiative that enhances vital facilities and constitutes an enriching qualitative addition in the Governorate of Muscat,” said Eng Essam bin Saud al Zadjali, the Chairman, Muscat Municipality.

Register to deal in lobster as season ends on Monday

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The lobster fishing season for the current season in the waters of the Sultanate is ending on Monday. The three-month season began in early March in the coastal states of the governorates of South Sharqiyah, Wusta and Dhofar.

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources has invited all fishermen who practice lobster fishing and all the companies, institutions, hotels, restaurants and individuals who deal in buying, selling, trading and exporting lobster to register

their stocks, noting that it will not be allowed to trade or export of it after the end of the season, which is May-end, unless registered with the ministry.

The season began in March with many awareness-raising activities organised by the ministry, represented by the directorates and fisheries departments in the governorates of South Sharqiyah, Wusat and Dhofar.

The ministry stressed the importance of adhering to fishing according to the specified season and using the authorised fishing methods to preserve this vital wealth from the risk of extinction.



Fish control teams were active on the coasts of the three governorates during the season.

The preliminary indicators indicate high productivity, especially in some wilayats of Dhofar, Wusta and South Sharqiyah. Production reached

one tonne per day with the beginning of the season. At the same time, prices stabilised between RO 3 and RO 5 per kilogram of lobster.

The lobster is an arthropod animal of crustaceans because it has a hard shell and ten legs. It is one of the marine resources that the Sultanate's water abounds and rich in protein, potassium, zinc, nicotine and iron. Lobster contains an appropriate amount of calcium, magnesium, sodium and several vitamins. This wealth is located on the coasts of the Sultanate overlooking the Arabian Sea in the governorates.

IN BRIEF

SME Authority plea to entrepreneurs

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has urged SME owners and entrepreneurs to take advantage of the on-the-job training initiative signed by ASMED with the Ministry of Labour. The business owners are encouraged to register their establishments' data and benefit from training programmes to help support their establishments. The initiative provides training for 3,000 Omani job seekers. The initiative's subsidy, offered through the Labour Ministry, includes bearing the monthly training dues.

Accordingly, the first year covers 100% of the bursary payable to trainees as follows: Bachelor's degree holders will receive RO 500 a month, university diploma holders RO 400 a month and general education diploma (GED) holders RO 300 a month.

Disabled Persons Welfare Committee endorses GCC law

MUSCAT: The National Committee for the Disabled Persons Welfare (NCDPW) discussed, during its first meeting for 2021, the decision on the integrated education programme for persons with mental disabilities who are about to complete their 9th grade and the integrated occupational programme for persons with disabilities in the vocational colleges, as well as the media awareness plan for people with disabilities.

The meeting was chaired by Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and head of the committee. The meeting discussed the NCDPW activities for 2022, and the status of people of disabilities in the Basic Law of the State, Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Plan, in addition to their training and employment in the Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP).



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 21/100	Inspection and Maintenance Contract for Marine Assets.	RO 262.500
2	SIPC 21/120	Sub Sea Inspection & Maintenance Contract for Sohar Ports Waterfront Assets.	RO 262.500
3	SIPC 21/130	Construction of Drainage system at IMCO, Port Exit, Port City R/A (SIP Area) & Drainage System and Hill Slope Stabilization at Shell plot (SFZ)	RO 262.500
4	SIPC 2021/140	Sampling of Seawater, Sediment and Rock Oyster in SOHAR Port	RO 262.250

The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Thursday, 27/05/2021 until 4:00 pm on Thursday, 10/06/2021. Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:
A request for the electronic tender documents
Scanned bank transfer
The firm's commercial registration documents
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents.
The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone
Bid Opening Committee
Tender Reference No. **2021/**
Tender Name:
• SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
• All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
• For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
sipc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

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Artists join hands to extend support to Palestine

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Artists have joined hands to support Palestine in the time of crisis by putting up their artworks at an art gallery in Muscat. The exhibition-cum charity event began on Sunday and continue till June 5.

The event organisers are Dar al Atta'a and Art & Soul Gallery, while the event is being held at Art and Soul's Water Front venue in Muscat.

The exhibition was inaugurated by His Highness Azzan bin Qais al Said. He lauded the artists and organisers for taking up the cause of Palestine and using art as a motivational factor to gather like-minded people at one forum and eliciting their support for the people of Palestine.

Many national and international artists, who are currently in Oman, have shown interest in joining the solidarity event, while works of many others are already on display at the gallery.

The artists were enthusiastic about their participation in the event and called it an opportunity that they were able to support a noble cause through their artworks.

“The fund raising exhibition has works of some 50 artists, who have agreed to showcase their art for a cause,” said Kethki Ambedkar, Director of Art & Soul.

More than 90 artworks are on display



at the exhibition-cum- charity event.

She lauded the support of the Water Front management for the event, which according her, has evoked very good response from the artists, art lovers and visitors who felt like supporting the cause of Palestine.

“Art & Soul is happy to partner with Dar Al Atta'a, a major charity organisation

in the Sultanate, as we hope to continue with more such events for the welfare of the society, community and the country,” she said.

Apart from sale of art and craft, the event organisers are expecting support from individuals and corporate houses. The proceeds of the event will be routed through Dar Al Atta'a.

Beware of misinformation on Covid-19

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Even as the new waves of coronavirus pandemic have put additional pressure on the health system worldwide, an intentional or unintentional misinformation campaign needs to be checked to ensure any further damage to the ongoing efforts to check the spread of the virus pandemic.

The common man is flooded with information on social media. Some are genuine, while many others are mass messages. They are generated to achieve the maximum number of clicks or just copy or pastes for the sake of passing them from one group to another.

These unverified messages are causing lots of misinformation. Many of them are suggesting self-medication even if someone catches the Covid-19 virus. Others offer the herbal way to treat the virus, as it is nothing but a mild symptom that can be treated easily with herbals.

"In one of the viral videos, I found someone suggesting to put lemon drops in the nostrils to get rid of the disease. It is an unsafe practice that can damage vital nose



In one of the viral videos, I found someone suggesting to put lemon drops in the nostrils to get rid of the disease. It is an unsafe practice that can damage vital nose nerves and cause major health or breathing issue

DR JOHN

ENT specialist

nerves and cause major health or breathing issue," Dr John, ENT specialist.

A clinical psychologist suggested

people look only for authentic news, as many are victims of too much information that is affecting their mental health.

She suggested people be well informed and not over-informed, as the brain has its limits, and anything in excess can cause

mental stress. Too much of it may lead to psychiatric issues and medication.

"I see people talking against

vaccination, use of mask and social distancing even though there are beneficiaries of the vaccination and steps taken by the government has resulted in the reduced number of cases. Why there are fewer positive cases after every lockdown? Because the lockdown breaks the chain, and there is an automatic social distancing," said Mini Joseph.

Some other experts called for immediate measures to counter any misinformation. "Like, local media should take note of misinformation that is becoming viral and come out with right information contradicting the viral message."

This, according to them, would lead to spreading the right information among all sections of people and updating them with new developments to manage the pandemic.

"The traditional media has an added responsibility to update the medical specialists, clinicians, patients and caregivers, who are constantly busy with the new strains of the pandemic and offering the patients the best possible treatment", said Abdul Qadir, an expert in media management.



FARMERS ELATED AS RAINWATER REPLENISHES

WADI DAYQAH DAM



TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

For nearly a week, Wadi Dayqah dam has been filled with water from the recent rains much to the joy of tourists and photography enthusiasts. The dam, which is located in the village of Al Mazarie in Wilayat of Qurayat (90 km from Muscat) is the largest water project in the Sultanate with a maximum capacity of 100 million cubic metres. It is also a marvellous feat of engineering.

Wadi Dayqah dam is one of the largest on the Arabian Peninsula and a source of irrigation and

offers flood protection for the surrounding villages.

Statistics indicate that this picturesque site attracts nearly half a million tourists annually, and the tourist traffic is growing, especially after the rains.

The dam provides water for drinking and farming to Muscat and nearby villages including Hail Al Ghaf and Dagmar. Within a week, approximately 17 million cubic metres of water was discharged for the purpose of groundwater recharge. The dam is divided into two sections over a wadi to impound rainwater. Next to the site is a

recreational park and facilities including restrooms and restaurants.

The dam water feeds artesian wells and 'aflaj' that deliver water over long distances for drinking and irrigation, even when the temperature rises to 45 degrees Celsius.

The farmers expressed their joy and happiness over the authorities' decision to release the dam water as it coincides with the harvest season of many local fruits like dates, mangoes and lemons. Citizens expect bumper crops of local farm produce this summer.



Mega vaccination drive in June to boost economy

■ Inoculation of Grade 12 students begins ■ Sultanate reports 866 new Covid-19 cases, 9 deaths

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With businesses and the economy, especially the travel and hospitality industry, keen to get back on track before the advent of another peak season, the focus is on the mega vaccination drive that will begin in June.

The urgency of the vaccination stems from the fact that the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 866 new cases and nine deaths on Wednesday. Ninety-one people were admitted to the hospital, bringing inpatients to 731, including 248 in intensive care units.

According to MoH, in the first phase, 30 per cent of the target population will be vaccinated by the end of August 2021, while the



second phase will cover another 40 per cent of the targeted population.

Many private companies have started registering their employees for vaccination as part of the national efforts to combat

the pandemic.

The ministries of Health and Education commenced vaccination of general education diploma students in all governorates of the Sultanate.

It is estimated that a total of



75,725 people will be vaccinated under this phase of the campaign.

In the Governorate of Muscat, vaccinating students began at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex apart from centres at Seeb, Muttrah, Bausher, Al Amerat

and Qurayat.

A total of 47 private schools with 2,230 students will also be vaccinated before their GED exams.

The Sultanate is expected to receive some 200,000 doses of

the Covid-19 vaccine per week starting from June.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, had confirmed that vaccine shipments would continue to arrive in the Sultanate, expressing hope that the vaccination rates will cross 35 per cent up from 30 per cent of citizens and residents by the end of August.

The mass vaccination drive will be conducted at centres in all governorates of the Sultanate, including the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, sports complexes and schools.

Mobile teams will be formed to immunise all workers in government institutions. The private sector can conduct the campaign through their in-house clinics or private health institutions.

PASI promotes digital transformation of e-services

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) seeks to have a fundamental and effective role in achieving national visions and strategies, including the Digital Oman Strategy and Oman Vision 2040. The government is committed to improving the standard of living of the insured, family and society.

To support this strategic direction and achieve national priorities, it has become important to focus on the services provided to customers and beneficiaries, especially electronic and digital transformation, in line with the rapid development witnessed by the world in the use of modern technologies, and to facilitate the community members to access services at any time and place.

Hashim bin Muhammad al Hashimi (pictured), Director of Insurance Service at PASI, speaks about what PASI has achieved concerning the insurance services it provides to customers, in addition to the progress we have achieved in digital and electronic transformation in general, and what they did during the Covid-19 pandemic.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Hashim al Hashimi spoke about PASI's efforts in the digital aspect and said, "PASI aspires to upgrade the services it provides to beneficiaries. This initiative is clearly reflected in PASI's strategic direction to improve the services system and achieve its vision to be one of the top 20 social insurance institutions in the world. In pursuit of this approach, PASI uses all its capabilities in the digital and electronic transformation of the services it provides, exceeding 80 per cent by the end of 2020."

Quality services

Regarding the available channels to provide the insurance service provided by the PASI to the beneficiaries, Al Hashimi said, "PASI provides its insurance services through nine branches, including the main branch at the headquarters of PASI, in addition to the electronic portal and the application of smart phones (TAMINATOMAN).

"It is important to mention that PASI launched its outlet in Muscat Mall at the beginning of this year, which operates over two periods, in the morning and evening, so



that customers can benefit from the outlet at different times, in addition to obtaining insurance advice or any inquiries."

So in the context of providing services through PASI branches, and in the interest of PASI to regulate the process of receiving customers, and confirmation of commitment to the precautionary measures, it launched the appointment reservation system last February. Therefore, customers can book an appointment through an easy link linked to the website, with the assurance that the appointments related to providing services do not exceed two working days.

Moreover, from time to time, PASI evaluates customer satisfaction through regular customer opinion surveys and what supports providing high-quality services in a short time frame, linking some government and private agencies through electronic linking to get and exchange the necessary data from its primary sources, to facilitate the completion of services and transactions provided to customers.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

As for the exceptional circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and PASI dealings with it, Al Hashimi elaborated PASI efforts. "PASI was able to keep up with the situations in the country as a result of the consequences of the pandemic. The precautionary measures that been have taken, such as reducing the number of staff in the service-providing halls, and the lockdown that was implemented during the past year." The PASI, according to him, has improved and expanded the channels of providing insurance services through the electronic portal and opening a communication channel through the application of WhatsApp

- The digital transformation rate for internal and external services reached 80 per cent in 2020

- PASI launched TAMINATOMAN smartphone application at the end of last year in its first phase

- Electronic link with government and private agencies; To fetch data from its official sources

- Multiple channels to provide insurance services and advice

- Applying a system for booking appointments in advance

to provide some services and tracking some transactions, in addition to the toll-free number (800777600).

It also used social media channels to respond to customer inquiries and to provide insurance advice. In addition, PASI has implemented online work for its staff and provided all the necessary resources for the continuation of the business and meeting the needs and interests of customers at any possible time.

Digital and e-transformation

have a significant role in pushing business continuity and enhancing the quality and ease of access to services. It has been able to continue providing its services through its dedicated service delivery channels.

IMPROVING INSURANCE SERVICES SYSTEM

As for the measures taken by PASI to improve the use of electronic services for users, Al Hashimi said, "As I mentioned earlier, it has great eagerness and interest in improving the system of insurance services, and to confirm this approach, PASI has updated its website with a new look in addition to improving the e-services portal. In addition, PASI launched the application of the smartphone (TAMINATOMAN), which is considered one of the most important strategic projects of PASI to expand the channels of providing services and making it easier for customers to access the services of PASI at any place and time."

The application will be continually developed during the upcoming stages with the aim of adding more services and features.

"PASI has a department specialised in customer service that linked to the free number (800777600) and receives calls throughout official working hours. Though the number of queries are answered, consultations are provided, in addition to following up the clients' transaction."

STATISTICAL INDICATORS

As for the number of electronic services provided by PASI to customers and the statistics related to the user, the number of e-services provided by the authority, according to Al Hashimi, reached 84 services through the electronic portal, and the number of users of the portal increased to more than 272,000 users.

The phone application (TAMINATOMAN) contains 16 services in its first stage, and the number of active users has exceeded 930 users.

"The application will continue to be developed in its next stages to add more services and features. Accordingly, PASI affirms its continuous commitment to developing and improving the system of its provided insurance services for dealers, and this is considered among the priorities of its strategic plans," he said.

Rising trend in temperature; Saham records 48 degrees C

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

North Al Batinah experienced the hottest day in months as Saham touched 48 degrees Celsius at midday on Wednesday.

The high temperature was recorded in other areas of North Al Batinah, such as Suhar, Al Khabourah, and Al Suwaiq. Muscat Governorate also recorded high-temperature cooling down to 44 degrees by late afternoon and coming down to 42. Bausher in Muscat experienced 46 degrees Celsius, but Al Amerat recorded 46 to 47 degrees Celsius. Sur and Wadi Al Maawil reached 46 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, but Suhar and Al Suwaiq were forecast to touch 50 degrees.

The exceptionally high temperatures are being experienced even before the official beginning of summer in Oman.

There is a warning for moderate to rough sea conditions across the Arabian Sea coasts with a wave height of 2.5 to 3 metres. "The sea condition is expected to be slight to moderate along the east coast of Musandam, but the

west side will be moderate because of the south westerly wind," explained the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office. Oman Sea is also expected to be slight to moderate with a wave height of 1.5 metres.

Along the coastal areas of the Oman Sea, winds will be northeasterly light to moderate during the day, becoming southwesterly light at night. Along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea, it will be southwesterly moderate to fresh. In the rest of the Sultanate, winds will be southerly to southeasterly, light to moderate and fresh over the desert and open areas.

Dust rising wind is expected over the desert and open areas.

There is a slight chance for local cloud formations over Al Hajar Mountains.

The weather forecast states that it could be mainly clear skies over most of the Sultanate with a chance of convective clouds developing over the Al Hajar Mountains towards the afternoon.

There are chances of late night to early morning low-level clouds or fog patches along parts of the coasts of the Arabian Sea.





Forum for IT teachers focuses on learning systems

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Private Schools, began the first virtual forum for teachers of information technology in private schools on Wednesday under the patronage of Dr Ali bin Salim al Shukaili, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Private Schools, in the presence of Dr Khadija bint Ali al Salamiyah, Assistant Director-General for Educational Affairs at the Directorate-General of Private Schools. The two-day forum targets information technology teachers in private schools in all the governorates, of whom about 100 participants attended the first day's session.

This virtual forum was organised with the aim of presenting scientific papers on e-learning, blended learning and distance education, in addition to presenting the most important initiatives, programmes and applications employed by teachers

of information technology for private schools. This is aimed at raising the students' achievement level, harmonising the current educational work, exchanging technical expertise and skills, and spreading the culture of self-learning.

The forum also seeks to keep pace with the skills of the 21st and the fourth industrial revolution and raise the efficiency of information technology teachers in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The programme of the first day included the speech of Dr Ali al Shukaili, in which he said: "This forum comes in line with the current stage of education, which witnessed a qualitative shift in the use of many and varied technological and digital mechanisms and tools during the distance education process. This type of education has imposed itself as a result of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic but contributed to developing the technical knowledge aspects of the student, the teacher and the parent alike in a large and



remarkable manner. This forum abounds with many rich and varied working papers that offer strategies, tools and multiple programmes that contribute to supporting the teacher with the necessary knowledge in various aspects of distance education. These initiatives also express

the sincere efforts made by the teacher in the educational field to provide enjoyable interactive learning for the student, and to overcome the challenges that accompanied this type of e-learning."

Ahmed al Mayahi, a supervisor of an information technology

course at the Directorate-General of Private Schools, spoke about the goals of this forum.

The first day consisted of four sessions where the first session contained three papers. The first paper, titled 'Distance Education Strategy' was presented by Maha bint Abdul Hafeez al Wahaidi, a teacher of information technology at Al Mawhiba Private School. The second paper, titled 'Types of e-Learning', was presented by Ahmed Fikri Attia from Sarh Al Elm Private School.

The third paper came under the title 'Technology Strategies for Classroom' presented by Jawaher bint Hilal al Handaliya from Oman Private School. The second session contained two papers, the first was titled 'Technology Applications in Active Learning' presented by Safaa bint Obaid al Zuabiya, a teacher supervisor of individual skills in the North Al Batinah Governorate, and the second was titled 'Explanation of the Socratic Programme for Electronic Tests', presented by Moza bint Saeed al Yaqoubia

from Ajyal Al Dhahirah Private School.

The third session included two papers, the first entitled 'Educational platforms' and was presented by Jamila bint Abdullah al Malikiyah from Baraem Al Iman Private School, and the second paper, titled 'Distance Education Strategies', was presented by Suad bint Abdullah al Shehia from Dar Al Maaref Private School.

The first day of the first virtual forum concluded with the fourth session, which included three papers. The first paper came under the title 'Class Point Tool' and was presented by Thuraya bint Nasser al Maamariah from Al Buraimi Private School. The second paper, titled 'Distance Education Strategies in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic', was presented by Shamsa bint Abdullah al Fahdia from Al Baynah Private School, and the third paper, titled 'Class Management in Distance Education', was presented by Jihad bin Mahmoud Shebel from Al Ghubra Private School.

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No	DESCRIPTION	Last Date of purchasing	Last Date for Submission	DCRP Grade	TYPE OF PARTICIPATION	Tender Price R.O
MZEC/23/2021	Construction of 3X20 MVA PSS (Sultan Qaboos Academy College for Police science) With 33kv feeders at Nizwa in Dakhiliyah Governorate. THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 06/06/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN NIZWA OFFICE	02/06/2021	22/06/2021	A	Local	1,300
MZEC/24/2021	Construction of 11kv Feeders Related to Suwaiq Hospital at Suwaiq in Al Batinah North Governorate. SITE VISIT ON (07/06/2021) AT (10:00 AM) IN SUWAIQ MZEC OFFICE.	02/06/2021	22/06/2021	B	Local	385
MZEC/25/2021	Construction of 3x20 MVA Primary Substation (Sinaw-C) with 11kv Feeders at Sinaw in Al Sharqiyah Governorate. SITE VISIT ON (08/06/2021) AT (10:00 AM) IN MUDHAIBI MZEC OFFICE.	02/06/2021	22/06/2021	A	Local	698
MZEC/26/2021	Construction of 3x20MVA primary substation (Hay Asem) with 33kv & 11kv feeders At at Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate. SITE VISIT ON (09/06/2021) AT (10:00 AM) IN BARKA MZEC OFFICE.	02/06/2021	22/06/2021	A	Local	905
MZEC/27/2021	Replacement of Energy Meters at Consumer Premises in all MZEC Governorates.	02/06/2021	22/06/2021	D	Local	2,500

- Interested companies registered with DCRP and Tender Board and having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through som.tenders@mzec.co.om.
- Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- The offers and related documents should be submitted in a sealed with red wax envelope addressed to the chairman of the (Internal Tender Committee).
- On the top of the envelopes bidder should write the tender number and the subject only and no other marks or any reference thereto should be written outside the envelopes.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and **any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.**
- The completed tenders should be deposited in the tender box at main head office building in Al Saih Al Hmer - BidBid before 10:00 am on the assigned closing date for submission of the tender.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- The related parties only are invited to attend the tender opining meeting based on the assigned date.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om. and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications will be on 15/06/2021.**
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices do no include VAT 5% and it will be chaged if purchase invoice issued.

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TENDERS & CONTRACTS SECTION : (+968) 72722787 / 97292777 / 92858543



Hotel guests decline 7.3pc by April

MUSCAT: The total number of guests in the 3-5 star category in the Sultanate fell by 7.3 per cent till the end of April 2021 to stand at 373,035 guests compared to 402,581 guests for the same period of 2020, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total revenues of these hotels also fell to RO 27.409 million by April 2021, compared to RO 55.174 million during the same period of the previous year, comprising a decline by 50.3 per cent.



Meanwhile, the occupancy rate went down by 16.4 per cent as it reached 35.9 per cent compared to 42.9 per cent during the same period in 2020.

Among the nationalities, the

Omani guests constituted the highest number of visitors with an increase rate of 109.2 per cent to stand at 254,466 guests compared to 121,648 guests last year. This was followed by Asian guests who reached 60,646 compared to 40,911 guests in 2020. The number of Europeans stood at 16,590 guests, Arab guests (excluding GCC countries) with 15,802, American guests with 6,605, GCC guests with 4,749, Oceanian guests with 2,346, African guests with 1,446, and 10,384 guests from other nationalities. — ONA

Quest for peace does not warrant killing: Sultanate

FROM PAGE 1

These calls are falling on deaf ears. So it is time for Palestinians like other peoples, to enjoy their right to establish their independent state, and it is time for the international community to say with one voice to the occupying state, stop killing innocent people. In the conclusion of his speech, the Sultanate called on the parties concerned to move towards peace and to renounce violence and fighting, and the Security Council in particular called on the parties concerned and sponsors of the peace process to assume responsibility for what is happening, and to undertake tangible efforts to urge the Palestinian and Israeli parties to move towards peace, and move away from all what would fuel the conflict, and take practical and concrete steps towards a two-state solution. — ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 22/2021

specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated abelow.

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/21/028	(28/2021/HQ-25)	Maintenance of Official Government of Muscat Website, Muscat Municipality Website and Muscat Municipal Council Website (E-Tender)	Rial 25	19/06/2021	05/07/2021	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the Ground floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before **10:00** am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

UN rights council to mull probe after Gaza conflict

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council will consider launching a broad, international investigation into abuses in the latest Gaza conflict and also into “systematic” abuses, according to a proposal tabled on Tuesday.

The draft resolution will be discussed during a special session of the council on Thursday, requested amid 11 days of deadly violence between Israel and armed Palestinian groups in Gaza this month.

The text, presented by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, calls for the UN top rights body to “urgently establish an ongoing independent, international commission of inquiry... in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and in Israel.”

The investigators, the text said, should probe “all alleged violations and abuses” of international law linked to the tensions that sparked the latest violence.

Before a truce took hold last Friday, Israeli air strikes and artillery fire on Gaza killed 253 Palestinians, including 66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 people in 11 days of conflict from May 10, the health ministry in Gaza says.

Rocket and other fire from



A man sits in a damaged shop at a building partially destroyed in recent Israeli air strikes, in Gaza City, on Wednesday. — AFP

Gaza claimed 12 lives in Israel, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, an Israeli soldier, one Indian national and two Thai workers, medics say. Some 357 people in Israel were wounded.

But the draft text goes far be-

yond the most recent conflict, also calling for investigators to probe “underlying root causes of recurrent tensions and instability, including systematic discrimination and repression based on group identity”.

The investigation should focus on establishing facts and gather evidence and other material that could be used in legal proceedings, and as far as possible should identify perpetrators to ensure they are held accountable, it said.

“Long-standing and systemic impunity for international law violations has thwarted justice, created a protection crisis and undermined all efforts to achieve a just and peaceful solution,” the draft text said.

It remains unclear whether there will be enough support at the Human Rights Council to pass the resolution.

Twenty of the council’s 47 members were among the 66 countries that backed holding Thursday’s special session, which was requested by Pakistan and the Palestinian authority.

The rights council holds three regular sessions each year, but can hold special sessions if at least a third of members support the idea.

Thursday will mark the 30th extraordinary meeting of the United Nations’ top rights body since its creation 15 years ago, and it will be the ninth focused on Israel.

When the special session was announced last week, Meirav Eilon Shahar, Israel’s Ambassador in Geneva, urged member states to oppose it.

“The convening of yet another special session by the Human Rights Council targeting Israel is testament to the clear anti-Israeli agenda of this body,” she said on Twitter. Israel is in fact the only country that is systematically discussed at every regular council session, with a dedicated special agenda item. — AFP

Assad votes in former rebel town

AMMAN: Syrian President Bashar al Assad voted on Wednesday in an election certain to extend his rule over a country ruined by war, casting his ballot in the former rebel stronghold of Douma where a suspected chemical weapons attack in 2018 prompted Western air strikes.

The government says the election shows Syria is functioning normally despite the decade-old conflict. The fighting has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven 11 million people — about half the country’s population — from their homes.

“Syria is not what they were trying to market, one city against the other and sect against the other or civil war. Today we are proving from Douma that the Syrian people are one,” Assad said after voting.

However, in the southern city of Deraa, cradle of the uprising against Assad in 2011 and an opposition bastion until rebels there surrendered three years ago, local leaders called for a strike.

The election went ahead despite a UN-led peace process that had called for polls under international supervision that would help pave the way for a new constitution and a political



President Bashar al Assad and his wife Asma greet supporters after casting their votes in the country's presidential elections at a polling station, in Douma, on Wednesday. — Reuters

settlement.

Dismissed as fraudulent by his enemies, it is set to deliver Assad seven more years in power and extend his family’s rule to nearly six decades. His father Hafez al Assad led Syria for 30 years until his death in 2000.

The opposition is boycotting the vote and says Assad’s presidential rivals are deliberately low-key: former deputy cabinet minister Abdallah Saloum Abdallah and Mahmoud Ahmed Marei, head of a small, officially sanctioned opposition party.

Addressing his critics, Assad said Syrians had made their feelings clear by coming out in

large numbers. “The value of your opinions is zero,” he said.

At Damascus University’s Faculty of Arts, hundreds of students lined up to vote, with several buses parked outside.

“With our blood and soul we sacrifice our lives for you Bashar,” groups of them chanted before the polls opened, in scenes repeated across the 70 per cent of Syria now under government control.

“We came to elect president Bashar al Assad...without him Syria would not be Syria,” said Amal, a nursing student, who declined to give a second name for fear of reprisals. — AFP

Iran bans bitcoin mining for 4 months over power cuts

DUBAI: Iran has banned the energy-intensive mining of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin for nearly 4 months, President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday, as the country faces major power blackouts in many cities.

“The ban on the mining of cryptocurrencies is effective immediately until September 22... Some 85 per cent of the current mining in Iran is unlicensed,” Rouhani said in a televised speech at a cabinet meeting.

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are created through a process known as mining, where powerful computers compete with each other to solve complex mathematical problems. The process is highly energy intensive, often relying on electricity generated by fossil fuels, which Iran is rich in.

As next month’s presidential election approaches, the blackouts have been widely criticised by Iranians.

The government has blamed the power cuts on cryptocurrency mining, drought and surging



The prospect of cheap power has attracted miners, particularly from China, to Iran. Generating the electricity they use requires the equivalent of around 10 million barrels of crude oil a year

electricity demand in summer.

According to blockchain analytics firm Elliptic, around 4.5 per cent of all Bitcoin mining takes place in Iran, allowing it to earn

hundreds of millions of dollars from cryptocurrencies that can be used to lessen the impact of US sanctions.

Iran’s economy has been hit hard since 2018, when former president Donald Trump exited Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with six powers and reimposed sanctions.

US President Joe Biden’s administration and other global powers have been in talks with Iran to revive the deal.

Iran has accepted crypto mining in recent years, offering cheap power and requiring miners to sell their bitcoins to the central bank. Tehran allows cryptocurrencies mined in Iran to be used to pay for imports of authorised goods.

The prospect of cheap power has attracted miners, particularly from China, to Iran. Generating the electricity they use requires the equivalent of around 10 million barrels of crude oil a year, or 4 per cent of total Iranian oil exports in 2020, according to Elliptic. — Reuters

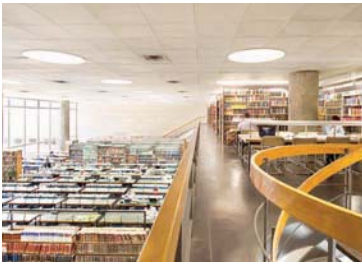
SHORT TAKES

JERUSALEM

Library puts Kafka texts online for first time

The National Library of Israel has published a collection of manuscripts, personal letters and drawings by the Jewish writer Franz Kafka online for the first time. The collection is now online after “an intensive years-long process,” the library said on Wednesday, adding it was one of the largest of its kind.

The documents come from the estate of Kafka’s best friend Max Brod. Before his death in 1924, Kafka had asked Brod to burn his works; however, Brod instead got



them published, bringing Kafka posthumous world fame. After years of bitter litigation tying up courts in Germany, Switzerland and Israel, Brod’s estate has finally ended up with the library in Jerusalem.

JUBA

South Sudan starts to draft its constitution

South Sudan began on Tuesday to draft a final constitution in the aim of cementing a fragile peace almost a decade after it won independence.

President Salva Kiir presided over a ceremony that launched the process, part of a peace deal reached with rival Riek Machar in 2018.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan has been governed by provisional constitutions during the years of civil war that followed independence in July



2011.

“This workshop is to develop a roadmap for the permanent constitution of the Republic of South Sudan,” Kiir noted.

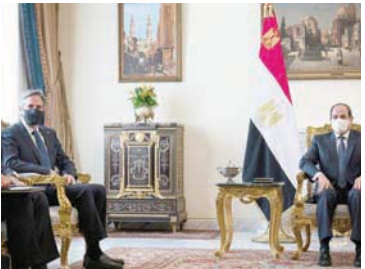
CAIRO

US seeks to secure Gaza ceasefire

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met top officials in Cairo on Wednesday during a Middle East tour aimed at shoring up a ceasefire that ended the worst fighting in years between Israel and Palestinian militants.

Egypt has longstanding relations with both sides in the conflict and played a key role in brokering the ceasefire after 11 days of violence, in coordination with the United States.

In a brief visit, Blinken met Egyptian President Abdel



Fattah al Sisi, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and general intelligence head Abbas Kamel at the presidential palace in Cairo. He made no comments to media ahead of the meeting.

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN OPENS VACCINATION DRIVE TO ALL ADULTS

Pakistan on Wednesday opened up its coronavirus vaccination campaign to everyone aged 19 or older as it scrambles to protect more of its 220 million people.

Pakistan initially had to deal with vaccination hesitancy and a shortage of vaccine supplies and had limited shots to people aged 30 or over.

But with purchases and donations from China and allocations from the World Health Organization and the GAVI Vaccine Alliance, it has now secured more than 18 million doses and is keen to get them out into the population.

■ KATHMANDU



CHINA TO GIFT 1 MILLION VACCINE DOSES TO NEPAL

China has announced that it will give 1 million vaccine doses to Nepal, the latest international assistance to the impoverished Himalayan nation reeling from the impact of Covid-19.

Chinese President Xi Jinping made the announcement during a telephone conversation with his Nepali counterpart, Bidya Devi Bhandari, said Hou Yanqi, China's ambassador to Nepal, in a tweet.

"Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China will provide 1million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to Nepal under grant assistance", Hou tweeted on Wednesday. Earlier, China had gifted 800,000 doses of Sinopharm jabs to Nepal.

■ GENEVA



MYANMAR EXCLUDED FROM WHO ANNUAL MEETING

Faced with the dilemma of who to recognise as Myanmar's legitimate representative following February's coup, World Health Organization members opted on Wednesday to exclude the country from their annual assembly.

The 74th World Health Assembly had received requests from both Myanmar's ousted civilian authorities and the military junta that seized power nearly four months ago to represent the country.

This year's gathering of the WHO's main decision-making body, which began Monday and lasts through June 1, is considered one of the most important ever as the Covid-19 pandemic rages on.

Powerful cyclone destroys homes in eastern India

BHUBANESWAR: A powerful cyclone destroyed tens of thousands of mud houses in eastern India on Wednesday, forcing the closure of the busiest regional airport in the city of Kolkata as it brought storm surges to coastal areas, the second such event within a week.

Cyclone Yaas was packing gusts of up to 140 kph (87 mph) as it hit land, authorities said, days after Tauktae tore up the western coast, triggering mass evacuations and piling pressure on authorities battling a deadly second wave of the coronavirus.

Authorities said more than a million people had been moved out of the storm's path, while television broadcast images of rough seas, strong winds and rains lashing the state of Odisha, with shops and homes boarded up.

Weather officials said the "very severe cyclone" was expected to hit Odisha and adjacent West Bengal, with some effects felt even in Bangladesh, although the neighbouring country is not in the storm's direct path.

West Bengal's Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, told reporters that about 20,000 mud houses and temporary shelters had been damaged in the state.

"I have not seen anything like this before", said another state minister, Bankim Hazra, after seawater gushed into the low-lying areas of Sagar island in the Bay of Bengal and the tourist town of Digha, where a police station was flooded.



Army soldiers evacuate people from a flooded area to safer places as Cyclone Yaas makes landfall at Ramnagar in Purba Medinipur district in West Bengal on Wednesday. — Reuters

"Successive high tides battered the coastline", he added. "It is inundation all around and villages are cut off."

The state's Kolkata airport was closed to flights until Wednesday evening.

Cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are common at this time of year, and often roar ashore, bringing death and destruction to the coastal areas of both India and

neighbouring Bangladesh.

Police said they had rescued 10 people after their boat capsized near shore in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district on Tuesday. Naval base Chilka is monitoring ships in the area and is ready for rescue operations, the Indian Navy said.

The devastating wave of virus infections complicated storm preparations. Odisha officials

said they had suspended testing, vaccination and a door-to-door health survey in the three districts in the storm's path.

Weather officials in Bangladesh said the storm was likely to swamp low-lying areas of 14 coastal districts, bringing tides three feet to four feet higher than normal, and advised fishing boats and trawlers to stay in shelter. — Reuters

China braces for floods as 71 rivers exceed warning levels

SHANGHAI: China is bracing for a heavy flood season with 71 rivers already exceeding warning levels, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Tuesday, as meteorological authorities warned that global warming is fuelling more extreme weather.

Rain in some parts of central and southern China has hit record highs in recent weeks even though overall precipitation is about 10 per cent lower this year compared with last year, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

Water levels on the Yangtze and its tributaries were expected to rise further over the next week, the ministry said, and it warned of major floods throughout the country from June to August.

Some monitoring stations are issuing alerts, with the Wuhan city section of the Yangtze river in central China more than two metres higher than the normal at this time of the year as a result of heavy rain upstream.

— Reuters

Boss fired after joke response to train crash

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's finance ministry said on Wednesday it had terminated the services of the chairman of the public transport operator amid an outcry over his response to a train accident in which more than 200 people were injured.

On Monday, 47 commuters were severely hurt and 166 sustained minor injuries when two light rail metro trains collided head-on in an underground tunnel near the centre of Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Tajuddin Abdul Rahman, chairman of Prasarana Malaysia, appeared to joke about the collision in response to a question from a reporter on the situation in the tunnel.

"Normal... only the two cars are together. They kissed each other", Tajuddin said laughing during the televised news conference.

Malaysian social media users lambasted Tajuddin's comments as insensitive, with thousands signing an online petition calling for him to be sacked.

"Normal... only the two cars are together. They kissed each other", Tajuddin said laughing during the televised news conference

In a letter dated on Wednesday and circulated on social media, Finance Minister Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz said Tajuddin's services would be terminated, effective immediately.

The letter did not specify the reason.

A ministry spokeswoman confirmed to media that the letter was authentic. Tajuddin did not respond to calls from Reuters seeking comment.

Tajuddin, who is also a government lawmaker, was appointed as Prasarana chairman in May last year. Authorities have pledged to carry out a thorough investigation into the train collision, the first major accident in the metro system's 23 years of operation.

After 7 years, trial in downing of MH17 to start on June 8

AMSTERDAM: Almost seven years after the downing of passenger flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine, the main trial is now due to begin on June 8 in the Netherlands, presiding Judge Hendrik Steenhuis announced in the southern town of Gilze-Rijen on Wednesday.

The court had inspected the reconstructed wreckage of the plane at an air force base at the site.

The Malaysia Airlines plane was shot down over contested territory on July 17, 2014, presumably by a Russian Buk anti-aircraft missile. All 298 people on board were killed.

The presiding judge spoke of an emotional moment for the families. "This is about the plane their loved ones were travelling on to a destination they never reached", he said. Relatives were able to watch the local court hearing via a live stream.

International experts had reconstructed the Boeing from the wreckage, which showed that the missile had exploded on the left side.

Four men, three Russians and one Ukrainian, are accused of shooting down the plane and killing 298 people. All are fugitives.

Since most of the victims were



Judges inspect wreckage of flight MH17 as part of criminal trial of four suspects at the Gilze-Rijen military airbase, southern Netherlands, on Wednesday. — AFP

from the Netherlands, the trial is taking place in that country. After years of investigation, the trial had initially started last year, with involved parties working out procedural issues.

The Netherlands, citing the use of a Russian missile launcher brought from a Russian military base, holds Moscow responsible for the deaths. Russian denies involvement.

The remains of the plane were recovered from the crash site and

reconstructed in a hangar at an air base in the Netherlands, where they were viewed by judges, lawyers, prosecutors and relatives of the victims.

Arlette Schijns, a lawyer representing the families, stressed the importance of giving the court a first-hand impression of the extensive damage.

"We cannot get closer to the death of the 298 victims than this," she said.

— Agencies

EU seeks large AstraZeneca fine for alleged contract breach

BRUSSELS: A lawyer for the European Union accused AstraZeneca on Wednesday of failing to respect its contract with the 27-nation bloc for the supply of Covid-19 vaccines and asked a Belgian court to impose a large fine on the company.

The EU took the Anglo-Swedish firm to court in April after the drugmaker said it would aim to deliver only 100 million doses of its vaccine by the end of June, instead of the 300 million foreseen in the supply contract.

Brussels wants the company to deliver at least 120 million vaccines by the end of June. AstraZeneca had delivered 50 million doses by the beginning of May, just a quarter of the 200 million vaccines foreseen in the contract by then.

“AstraZeneca did not even try to respect the contract,” the EU’s lawyer, Rafael Jafferli, told a Brussels court in the first hearing on the substance of the legal case.

He said the EU was seeking 10 euros (\$12.2) for each day of delay for each dose as compensation for AstraZeneca’s non-compliance with the contract. This penalty would apply from July 1, 2021, if the judge accepted it.

Jafferli said the EU was seeking an additional penalty of at least



Lawyers for the European Commission attend a hearing at a Belgian court in the legal case against AstraZeneca in Brussels on Wednesday. — Reuters

10 million euros for each breach of the contract that the judge may decide. A verdict is expected next month.

“This is not a contract for the delivery of shoes or T-shirts,” AstraZeneca’s lawyer Hakim Boularbah told the court later on Wednesday, stressing the complexity of manufacturing a new vaccine.

The EU accusations were “shocking”, Boularbah said, noting the company had formulated its delivery targets based on early estimates of production capacity. He added that the vaccine was sold at

Brussels wants the company to deliver at least 120 million vaccines by the end of June. AstraZeneca had delivered 50 million doses by the beginning of May, just a quarter of the 200 million vaccines foreseen in the contract by then

cost. AstraZeneca has repeatedly said the contract was not binding as it only committed to make “best reasonable efforts” in delivering doses.

Jafferli said that principle had not been respected because the drugmaker had not delivered to the bloc 50 million doses produced in factories that are listed in the contract as suppliers to the EU, including 39 million doses manufactured in Britain, 10 million produced in the United States and 1 million in the Netherlands. — Reuters

Quarantine for UK visitors in France

PARIS: France on Wednesday declared a mandatory quarantine period for people coming from Britain due to the increasing prevalence there of a highly contagious coronavirus variant first detected in India.

France follows Austria, which on Tuesday said it was banning direct flights and tourist visits from Britain, and Germany which on Friday said anyone entering from the United Kingdom would have to quarantine for two weeks on arrival.

“There is a new situation with the progression of the so-called Indian variant in the United Kingdom,” said government spokesman Gabriel Attal. “(France) will set up compulsory isolation for people coming from the United Kingdom.”

Attal did not say how long the quarantine period would last. There would be more details in the next few hours, he added.

Coronavirus infections in Britain have been rising again but the overall incidence is still low in a

country with one of the world’s fastest vaccine rollouts, and the number of hospitalised Covid-19 patients fell last week to its lowest since September.

Clusters of the B.1.617 Indian variant have, however, grown quickly, to some 3,424 as of May 20, up by 2,111 compared to similar numbers the previous week. The Indian variant has been reported in at least 17 countries.

The French government’s announcement will be a blow to a beleaguered tourism industry that is desperate for a return to normal business ahead of the peak summer season.

British tourists had been due to be allowed to visit France without restrictions from June 9 if they carried a certificate of vaccination against Covid-19 or a negative PCR test.

Some 13 million Britons visited France every year before the coronavirus crisis began in early 2020, more than any other nationality, according to official data.

— Reuters

FULL GLORY IS UP



A Super Flower Moon rises over the Makapuu lighthouse in east Oahu, Honolulu, Hawaii on Tuesday. — Reuters

Amazon snaps up MGM for \$8.45 bn

NEW YORK: Amazon.com Inc said on Wednesday it is buying MGM, the fabled US movie studio home to the James Bond franchise, for \$8.45 billion, giving it a huge library of films and TV shows and ramping up competition with streaming rivals led by Netflix and Disney+.

Privately-held MGM, or Metro Goldwyn Mayer, was founded in 1924, owns the Epix cable channel and makes popular TV shows including “Fargo”, “Vikings” and “Shark Tank”.

The deal is designed to help Amazon supercharge its Amazon Prime Video service by keeping customers engaged and paying an annual subscription that also guarantees rapid delivery of purchases from its online store.

“The real financial value behind this deal is the treasure trove of IP in the deep catalogue that we plan to reimagine and develop together with MGM’s talented team. It’s very exciting and provides so



The deal is designed to help Amazon supercharge its Amazon Prime Video service by keeping customers engaged and paying an annual subscription that also guarantees rapid delivery of purchases from its online store

many opportunities for high-quality storytelling,” said Mike Hopkins, senior vice president of Prime Video and Amazon Studios.

Amazon’s Prime Video faces a long list of competitors including

Netflix Inc, Walt Disney Co’s Disney+, HBO Max and Apple Inc’s Apple TV+. The companies are increasing spending and expanding in international markets, aiming to capture the pandemic-led shift to binge-watching shows online.

Amazon has also made big bets courting fans of live sports and has picked up lucrative licenses to stream games, including a long-term deal with the National Football League that was estimated to cost about \$1 billion per year.

The proliferating streaming services are also scrambling for brands that they can expand and libraries of older shows and movies.

Analysts have said this is a big motivation for another round of consolidation of media properties after a brief hiatus during the pandemic.

Underscoring the trend, AT&T Inc announced a \$43-billion deal last week to spin out its

WarnerMedia business and combine it with Discovery Inc, one of the most ambitious yet in the streaming era.

The acquisition is Amazon’s second-biggest after Whole Foods Market, which it bought for \$13.7 billion in 2017.

The price represents a lofty premium relative to other deals. The price is about 37 times MGM’s 2021 estimated EBITDA - or almost triple the enterprise value-to-EBITDA multiple that Discovery’s deal implied for AT&T’s content assets - according to Reuters Breakingviews.

MGM started a formal sale process in December.

The deal can be viewed as a doubling down on a business strategy that Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s CEO, articulated at a conference in 2016: “When we win a Golden Globe, it helps us sell more shoes,” he had said, referring to Amazon’s diverse business divisions.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LOS ANGELES

Harry, Oprah reunite for mental health show

Prince Harry and Oprah Winfrey are to revisit their documentary about mental health with a follow-up, Apple TV+ said on Wednesday, adding that the series had brought a 25 per cent increase in new viewers to the streaming platform.

“The Me You Can’t See: A Path Forward,” will be a virtual Town Hall airing on Friday that reunites health experts and celebrities and others who spoke about their struggles with depression.

Apple TV+ said the docu-



mentary, in which Harry spoke at length about the trauma of his mother’s death, his concern for his wife, Meghan, saw a more than 40 per cent increase in average weekend viewership.

PIETERMARITZBURG

Zuma pleads not guilty in graft trial

South Africa’s former president, Jacob Zuma, pleaded not guilty on Wednesday in a much-postponed corruption case dating back more than two decades.

The 79-year-old faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rands, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion.

Zuma — who at the time was



president Thabo Mbeki’s deputy — is accused of accepting bribes totalling four million rands from one of the firms, French defence giant Thales.

MILAN

Berlusconi’s trial won’t be suspended

An Italian judge on Wednesday rejected a request by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to suspend a corruption trial involving him because he is seriously ill.

However, Judge Marco Tremolada set the next hearing for all defendants for Sept. 8, giving the 84-year-old billionaire more than three months to recover from his latest bout of illness.

Berlusconi, a four-time prime minister, has been in

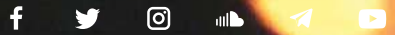


and out of hospital this year after contracting Covid-19 last September, and speculation has mounted in recent days about a deterioration of his health.

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Oman edge Thailand in friendly

ABDULAZIZ NETS LONE GOAL OF MATCH IN DUBAI

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 26

Oman's Abdulaziz al Maqbali netted the winner in the first preparatory match of the team against Thailand on Tuesday as part of the 'Red Warriors' camp in Dubai which will conclude on May 30.

The only goal in the game came through Al Maqbali four minutes before ending the first half.

The Red Warriors were the better side in the first 45 minutes of the game as they created many scoring attempts.

The Thais tried to bounce back in the second half but all the opportunities saved by the Oman national team players.

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic substituted eight players during the match, bringing in Jameel al Yahmadi, Essam al Subhi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Yazeed al Mashani, Khalid al Hajri, Yaseen al Shiyadi, Arshad



Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic

al Alawi and Saud al Habsi.

The Croatian coach preferred to start with Al Maqbali and Mohsin al Ghassani in the forward line-up, while Al Mundher al Alawi did not take part in the match. It is expected that the 67-year-old coach will have a different starting list

in the friendly game against Indonesia on Saturday and will provide equal chances for the faces who did not join in the first preparatory match.

The underway preparatory external camp is part of the team's preparation for the joint qualification of the 2022 Fifa



World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Championship which will be hosted in Qatar from June 7 at Al Sadd club's Jassim bin Hamed Stadium.

AI MAQBALI 'KEY PLAYER'

On the other hand, the AFC website selected the national

football star, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, as the key player of the team.

"Striker Abdulaziz al Muqbali brings considerable experience to the Omani front line, with the 32-year-old making his third appearance in the Asian Qualifiers, having also played in

the preliminaries for 2014 and 2018. He has already scored twice in the current campaign – both goals coming against Afghanistan – and he lends physical presence to the attack, particularly with his impressive ability in the air," the website adds.

'Red Warriors' will have three more games in the joint World Cup and AFC Asian qualifiers. Oman will resume joint qualifier with a top clash against Qatar on June 7 at Al Sadd club's Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha. They will take on Afghanistan on June 11 and will face Bangladesh in the concluding match on June 15 at the same venue in Doha.

The Sultanate are currently positioned second in Group E with 12 points while Asian champions Qatar are topping the group with 13 points from five games. Afghanistan are placed third with four points. India (3 points) and Bangladesh (1 point) are in the third and fourth positions respectively.

Bangladesh break Lanka jinx

MUSHFIQUR TON SETS UP MAIDEN SERIES VICTORY OVER SRI LANKA IN ALL FORMATS

DHAKA: Mushfiqur Rahim hit a gritty 125 to set up Bangladesh's maiden series victory over Sri Lanka across all formats with an emphatic 103-run win in the rain-hit second one-day international on Tuesday.

The wicketkeeper-batsman lifted Bangladesh from a precarious 74-4 to 246 all out after they elected to bat first at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

Sri Lanka managed just 141-9 in the tourists' revised chase of 245 in 40 overs as Bangladesh took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Mustafizur Rahman claimed three wickets each while Shakib Al Hasan took two key scalps.

"Lucky to win two games. We haven't played the perfect game yet", said Bangladesh skipper Tamim Iqbal.

"We lost a lot of wickets in the middle, and 200 was looking difficult, but Mahmudullah and Mushy played very well."

Mushfiqur remained the hero as he recorded his eighth ODI century and put on a crucial 87-run fifth-wicket stand with Mahmudullah Riyad, who made 41.

Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera struck twice in his first over to send back Tamim for 13 and Shakib Al Hasan for nought.

Chameera wrapped up Bangladesh's innings in 48.1 overs after sending back the in-form Mushfiqur, who completed his eighth ODI hundred following a second rain interval.

Mushfiqur, who scored a match-winning 84 in the previous match, stood firm with Mahmudullah to take the attack to the opposition.

Mahmudullah kept up his form after hitting 54 in the opening ODI, but fell short of his



SCOREBOARD	
BANGLADESH	Sri Lanka (D/L revised target 245 in 40 overs)
Tamim lbw Chameera13	Danushka c Shakib b Mustafizur24
Liton c Hasaranga b Sandakan25	Kusal c Tamim b Shoriful14
Shakib lbw Chameera0	P Nissanka c Tamim b Shakib20
Mushfiqur c A Bandara b Chameera125	Kusal lbw Mehidy15
Mosaddek c Perera b Sandakan10	Dhananjaya lbw Shakib10
Mahmudullah c Perera b Sandakan41	A Bandara c Mahmudullah b Mustafizur15
Afif Hossain c Nissanka b Udana10	Dasun c Mahmudullah b Mehidy11
Mehidy Hasan b Hasaranga0	Wanindu b Mehidy6
M Saifuddin run out11	Ishuru Udana not out18
Shoriful c Perera b Udana0	Lakshan c Tamim b Mustafizur4
Mustafizur not out0	Dushmantha not out4
Extras: (b1, lb4, w3, nb3)11	Total: (9 wickets; 40 overs)141
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-15, 3-49, 4-74, 5-161, 6-178, 7-184, 8-232, 9-246	Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-53, 3-71, 4-77, 5-89, 6-104, 7-114, 8-116, 9-122
Bowling: Udana 9-0-49-2, Chameera 9.1-2-44-3, Hasaranga 10-1-33-1, Shanaka 7-0-38-0, Sandakan 10-0-54-3, De Silva 3-0-23-0	Bowling: Mehidy Hasan 10-0-28-3, Shoriful 6-0-30-1, Taskin 8-0-27-0, Mustafizur 6-1-16-3, Shakib 9-0-38-2, Mosaddek 1-0-2-0

fifty when Lakshan Sandakan, who returned figures of 3-54, got him caught behind.

Mushfiqur put on another defiant stand of 48 with Mohammad Saifuddin, who was run out on 11, for the eighth wicket.

Saifuddin, who got a hit on

the helmet during his knock, was later replaced by Taskin Ahmed as concussion sub — the first for a game held in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, who won Sunday's opener by 33 runs, were always on top once debutant pace bowler Shoriful Islam dismissed skipper Kusal Perera for 14 in the sixth

over of innings.

Opener Danushka Gunathilaka made highest 24 runs while one-down Pathum Nissanka made 20 for Sri Lanka, who had never lost to Bangladesh in eight bilateral series.

Sri Lanka were 121-9 in 38 overs when rain halted the game for more than half an hour, forcing the match officials to give them a revised D/L target — reducing two runs and 10 overs.

Ishuru Udana hit Shoriful for two sixes to add 20 runs in the last two overs to only reduce Sri Lanka's margin of defeat.

"It's very disappointing. Both matches, the middle-order collapsed and lack of experience cost us. We need to have a serious talk", said Sri Lanka captain Perera.

The third and final match is on Friday at the same venue. — AFP

England play for time with 33-man provisional Euro squad

LONDON: Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold earned a recall in a 33-man provisional England squad for Euro 2020 on Tuesday as Manager Gareth Southgate played for time before whittling the numbers down.

The right-back was dropped in March for World Cup qualifiers but he made the cut in a squad that will be reduced to 26 players ahead of a June 1 UEFA deadline.

The June 11-July 11 championship is being held across Europe, with semi-finals and final at London's Wembley Stadium as well as some group stage games.

The delay in naming a final squad gives Southgate time to factor in those still playing European club matches, but also opened a guessing game about which seven would be dropped.

"I think our situation is more complicated than any other country at the moment," the manager told a news conference.

"We've got... 12 players still to play in the European finals this week so we were always going to need some additional players for the first part of our camp.

"We felt more time is going to help us to make better decisions. I've always said my preference would be to name the squad as a clean 26... but we have not got an ideal hand of cards this time."



Manchester United play the Europa League final against Villarreal on Wednesday while Chelsea and Manchester City meet in Saturday's Champions League final.

Southgate named four uncapped players — Brighton & Hove Albion defender Ben White, Everton's Ben Godfrey, West Bromwich Albion goalkeeper Sam Johnstone and Sheffield United's Aaron Ramsdale.

Liverpool's Jordan Henderson, Manchester United's Harry Maguire and Leeds United's Calvin Phillips, all with lingering injury concerns, were included.

So too were three teenagers — Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham, Manchester United's Mason Greenwood and Arsenal's Bukayo Saka.

Leeds United striker Patrick Bamford misses out, as do injured Burnley goalkeeper Nick Pope, Tottenham's Eric Dier and Southampton forward Danny Ings.

Southgate said dropping Dier had not been easy but his season had not been good enough to warrant a place.

He defended the decision to name four right-backs, saying: "People feel I have an obsession with right-backs. I just see four good footballers. — Reuters

Davis scores 34 as Lakers beat Suns, Nets thump Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis and LeBron James delivered down the stretch on Tuesday as the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers bounced back to beat the Phoenix Suns 109-102 and knot their playoff series at one game apiece.

Davis had said he blamed himself after scoring just 13 points in the Lakers' 99-90 defeat in game one of the best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series.

He wasn't about to let it happen again.

Davis scored 34 points with 10 rebounds, seven assists and three blocked shots. "I wanted to make sure I made a statement in this game, come out with more energy, more effort on both ends of the floor", he said.

LeBron James added 23 points, pulling down four rebounds and handing out nine assists as the Lakers gained the split of two games in Phoenix.

The star duo scored 16 of the Lakers' final 18 points and Los Angeles turned back a late charge from a Suns team again largely deprived of veteran point guard Chris Paul — who was still clearly feeling the effects of a right shoulder injury suffered in game one and exited early.



James's basket with 2:55 to play put the Lakers up 95-92 and Davis followed with a three-pointer and a pair of free throws to stretch the lead to 100-92 as the Suns' challenge dimmed.

The Lakers got off to a determined start and led 30-24 after the first quarter and 53-47 at halftime.

With a 10-1 run to open the third period — launched by James's three-pointer — the Lakers threatened to run away with it.

But Phoenix fought back. Deandre Ayton's dunk put the Suns up 88-86, though James and Davis made sure the Suns couldn't hang on to their first lead since the first quarter.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 31 points and made all 17 of his free throws. Ayton connected on 11 of 13 shots from the field to score 22 points with 10 rebounds.

"That's playoff basketball", Lakers coach Frank Vogel said of the Suns' late push. "That's the team with the second-best record in the NBA, so it's not going to be

a situation where it's easy to knock them out in any game.

"But our guys came out strong and were able to hold on."

DONCIC POWERS MAVS

Elsewhere, the Dallas Mavericks and Brooklyn Nets seized 2-0 series leads.

Star Mavs guard Luka Doncic scored 39 points as Dallas put themselves in a commanding position with their second straight victory over the Clippers in Los Angeles, 127-121.

The Mavericks made 18 three-pointers and connected on 58.5 percent of their shots from the field as they withstood a 41-point performance from Clippers star Kawhi Leonard supplemented by 28 from Paul George.

Tim Hardaway Jr. added 28 points and Kristaps Porzingis chipped in 20 for the Mavs, who host game three on Friday.

In Brooklyn, the Nets ran roughshod over the Boston Celtics, leading by as many as 33 points in a 130-108 victory that put them 2-0 up.

Kevin Durant headed another strong showing for the Nets' "big three" and Joe Harris excelled from three-point range to power

the Nets to an early lead they had no trouble maintaining.

Brooklyn seized control in a first quarter in which they out-scored the Celtics 40-26.

They led 71-47 at halftime with Harris providing plenty of fireworks.

The forward connected on six of eight shots from three-point range in the first half, when his 22 points were already a career playoff high.

He added one more three-pointer in the second half to tie the franchise playoff record.

Durant led the Nets with 26 points, eight rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots.

Harris finished with 25 points, James Harden added 20 and Kyrie Irving 15.

The listless Celtics, meanwhile, never threatened.

Marcus Smart recovered from a slow start to lead the Celtics in scoring with 19 points.

Kemba Walker had 17 but star forward Jayson Tatum had just nine before departing early after taking a poke in the right eye.

The Celtics will try to get into the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series when they host game three on Friday. — AFP

New era for ailing Germany as Flick appointed to succeed Loew



BERLIN: Outgoing Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick will succeed his former boss Joachim Loew in the Germany dugout after Euro 2020, the German Football Association (DFB) announced on Tuesday, heralding a new era for an ailing giant of world football.

"It's all gone surprisingly quickly, but I am very happy to be Germany coach from the autumn," said Flick, 56, after signing a three-year contract to succeed Loew.

Flick, who was Loew's assistant coach when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, will now be charged with reviving a national team which has struggled in recent years.

The new boss will take over after the European

contract ends.

Other potential candidates such as Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp quickly ruled themselves out of the running, and the DFB made no secret of their interest in Flick.

"He was top of my wish list from the very start," said national team director Oliver Bierhoff.

"Together we have one aim: to get back to the top of world football," he added.

Flick, who was Loew's assistant coach when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, will now be charged with reviving a national team which has struggled in recent years

GLORY WITH BAYERN

Flick, who also worked as DFB sporting director between 2014 and 2017, has made a name for himself as one of Europe's top coaches in two glittering years at perennial Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich.

Championship, and is expected to take charge of his first game in a World Cup qualifier against Liechtenstein on September 2.

The 56-year-old has long been the favourite to take over from Loew, who will leave the job after 15 years in charge, a year before his

over from predecessor Niko Kovac with the club in a mid-season crisis, he led Bayern to only their second ever treble in 2020.

The following year, he took the club to a ninth successive Bundesliga title, his seventh trophy in just 18 months in the Munich dugout. — AFP



Japan official media sponsor joins Games cancellation chorus

TOKYO: Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, an official Tokyo Olympics sponsor, called for the Games to be cancelled on Wednesday, in the latest sign of opposition less than two months before the opening ceremony.

The call comes with public opinion in Japan firmly against holding the Games this summer, and after prominent business leaders voiced their concern in recent weeks.

Organisers insist however that the Games are on, saying an extensive rulebook will keep athletes and the Japanese public safe.

The *Asahi* daily's editorial urged Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to "make a calm, objective assessment of the situation and make the decision to cancel this

summer's Olympics".

The paper said it "cannot accept the gamble" of holding the event, despite organisers' assurances it will be safe.

It also accused International Olympic Committee leaders, including vice-president John Coates, of being "self-righteous" and "clearly out of step" with the Japanese public.

When asked last week if the Games could be held even during a virus state of emergency, Coates said "the answer is absolutely yes".

Tokyo and other parts of Japan are currently under a state of emergency, which is expected to be extended this week until June 20.

"Saying 'yes' without demonstrating any clear grounds for it once again drove home the

self-righteous image of the IOC," the *Asahi* editorial said.

Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto said it was "natural" that "different media organisations have different views", but acknowledged that people are "anxious".

"The national and local governments have put stringent measures in place to contain the spread of infections, and we believe the situation will improve as a result," he said.

Muto added that executive board members had discussed cancellation and postponement, but none had "explicitly called" for it.

Two prominent figures in Japanese business have also voiced opposition to the Games in recent weeks.

Masayoshi Son, head of tech

investment behemoth SoftBank Group, tweeted on Sunday: "Do the IOC have the right to decide if it's held or not?"

"If you think about what people have to put up with, we might have a lot more to lose" if the Games go ahead, he added.

And earlier this month Hiroshi Mikitani, CEO of e-commerce giant Rakuten, called the Games "a suicide mission".

"The risk is too big and... I'm against having the Tokyo Olympics this year," he told CNN.

Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto acknowledged organisers face "considerable" opposition.

"There are a considerable number of Japanese people who are concerned," she told an executive board meeting. — AFP

Djokovic battles to victory as he warms up for French Open

BELGRADE: Novak Djokovic edged to a straight-sets win over German lucky loser Mats Moraing on Tuesday in his opener in Belgrade where the world number one is warming up for the French Open.

The clay-court Grand Slam starts in Paris on Sunday, and Djokovic opted for extra match practice on home soil this week.

The 34-year-old was made to fight by the world number 253, winning 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) in an hour and 40 minutes.

It was Djokovic's first match since losing the Italian Open final

to Rafael Nadal nine days ago.

Spaniard Nadal will be the favourite to win a 14th French Open crown next month, although Djokovic will be chasing a 19th Grand Slam title to move within one of Nadal and Federer on the all-time men's list.

The Serbian star was in strong form in the opening set on Tuesday, but was broken twice by Moraing in the second before clinching the win in a tie-break.

"I was twice a break up in the second set so I maybe could have finished out the job earlier, but credit to him for fighting, for

playing really well, for playing very courageous, very bold tennis," Djokovic said.

"I felt pretty nervous from the start," said Djokovic. "I had an opponent that doesn't have much experience, but he played like he spent 10 years playing at top level."

"The second set was exhausting, I'm mentally spent. I have a day to recover and move on to the next match."

He will next face Argentinian Federico Coria, the younger brother of former Roland Garros runner-up Guillermo Coria, in the quarter-finals. — AFP



features



Wadi Mibam: The fast- rising star amongst Oman's wadis

From Wadi Tiwi, a rough road cuts through sleepy villages, barren mountains, rocky wadis and harrowing cliffs leading into the village of Mibam. From the village, the lush canopy of dates and green gardens of the villagers give way to stairs leading to a cascading waterfall. Further down, the hike opens up into one of Oman's most breathtaking of wadis hidden between imposing canyons. This is Wadi Mibam – the fast-rising star amongst Oman's wadis... **P16**

INSIDE STORIES

ART



ARTIST LEONORA CARRINGTON'S MEXICO HOME BECOMES MUSEUM

The Mexico City home of renowned British-born Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington will open to the public as a museum displaying some of her works and possessions, the managers announced Monday... **Story on P15**

FASHION



THROUGH FASHION, RWANDAN-BORN DESIGNER CHAMPIONS AFRICAN UNITY

Rwandan-born fashion designer and visual artist Eli Gold left his home when he was 13 as his country was wracked by civil war and genocide, a journey that took him across several African states... **Story on P15**

READ



THAT SUMMER BY JENNIFER WEINER

Daisy Shoemaker receives emails intended for a woman leading a more glamorous life and finds there was more to this accident.

ENTERTAINMENT



FAST & FURIOUS AND WWE STAR JOHN CENA APOLOGISES FOR CALLING TAIWAN A COUNTRY

Actor John Cena has apologised to China after referring to Taiwan as a country in a promotional interview for Fast and Furious 9. His apology came after speaking to Taiwanese television TVBS earlier this month... **Story on P15**

DISCOVERY



FOR DEEP-DIVING ELEPHANT SEALS, IT TAKES LOTS OF WORK TO STAY FAT

For elephant seals - one of the most distinctive of the 33 species that comprise the world's seal family - it is hard work to stay fat... **Story on P14**



Enjoy Kayaking, hiking and boating at Wadi Darbat

WADI DARBAT IS one of the most beautiful places in the Dhofar Governorate, due to its stunning views, greenery scenes, constant water flow and seasonal waterfalls flowing in streams and rocky curves.

It is located 7 kilometres to the east of Wilayat Taqah, where Sidr trees and many large shady trees are spread on its sides. Darbat is known to represent a natural garden due to its combined elements such as mountains, waterfalls, caves and flat plains on both sides, which allowed for the existence of different types of wildlife. It is the nest of endemic and migratory birds and various wildlife.

The flow of the Wadi Darbat waterfall called "Jaafar" attracts large numbers of tourists annually. Its link with Khor Ruri and the historic port of Samharam constitutes a beautiful sight. During the different climatic conditions, the wadi's inhabitants, including camel and shepherders, seek refuge in the caves, seeking safety for themselves and their animals.

A year-round canal runs throughout the wadi and that's what makes this place different from the rest of the places in Dhofar.

Sometimes, this canal is referred to as a lake as in some parts it is a bit wide and looks like a lake. There are a couple of activities on the canal for kids and adults.

For safety, the bright colour safety vest should be worn during boating. This vest is provided by the boating company. The visitor can also enjoy kayaking and other activities.

Dhofar Municipality has recently developed some facilities and created others, such as re-asphalting the road leading to the wadi and establishing a yard overlooking the wadi waterfall with parking lots and metal barriers overlooking the lakes on the road leading to the spring.



DISCOVERY

For deep-diving elephant seals, it takes lots of work to stay fat



FOR ELEPHANT SEALS — one of the most distinctive of the 33 species that comprise the world's seal family — it is hard work to stay fat.

Scientists have conducted the most thorough study to date of the unique feeding behaviour of northern elephant seals, focusing on the females of the species during arduous two-month post-breeding migrations in the northeastern Pacific Ocean.

The seals were found to spend upwards of 20 hours every day — and sometimes a full 24 hours — in continuous deep-diving to feed on multitudes of small fish, rather than the larger prey favoured by other deep-diving marine mammals, to gain the body fat essential for successful reproduction and insulation in the frigid depths. They fed 1,000 to 2,000 times daily.

"It is not easy to get fat," said marine biologist Taiki Adachi of the University of St Andrews in Scotland, who led the study published this week in the journal Science Advances.

The researchers tracked 48 female elephant seals from Año Nuevo State Park in California, site of an important breeding colony, as they covered vast ocean distances. Their round-trip migration was up to around 3,700 miles (6,000 km).

They based their findings on data obtained from 2011 and 2018 using three small removable devices: one attached under the jaw that counted the number of times they fed and measured their depth; a satellite tracker attached atop the head that provided location information; and a "smart" video camera with an infra-red LED light flash, motion tracker and another depth sensor, also atop the head.

Elephant seals get their name from the prominent noses of the males that resemble an elephant's trunk. There are two species — the northern elephant seal and the slightly larger southern elephant seal. The two are the world's biggest seals and the largest marine mammals other than whales.

Male northern elephant seals may reach 13 feet long (4 metres) and weigh up to 4,500 pounds (2,000 kg). Females are substantially smaller, getting up to about 10 feet (3 metres) in length and 1,300 pounds (590 kg). The males feed only in coastal waters.

Our goal is to create a safe and engaging place for users to connect over in coastal waters.

Some large marine mammals rely upon deep dives to forage for meals, with more food needed based on the animal's size. Sperm whales, perhaps the heavy-weight champions of the deep dive, hunt for large prey like giant squid.

The female elephant seals, also large but not on the scale of a sperm whale, have devised a different solution — eating huge amounts of small fish. But it is laborious to catch enough small fish to meet the energy needs of such a large animal.

"They continuously dive, for long periods of time — 20 minutes on average and about 100 minutes at maximum — and deep — 500 metres (1,640 feet) on average and about 1,500 metres (4,920 feet) at maximum — with only a few minutes breathing at the surface," Adachi said.

"During the two-month migration, they never come back to the land. The sleeping hours in at-sea animals is not fully understood. But, based on our record of extreme foraging, their available time for sleeping should be less than 20 per cent of the day," Adachi added.

The range of the northern elephant seal spans the Pacific coast of the United States, Canada and Mexico. They generally breed and give birth in California and Baja California, usually on offshore islands, from December to March, and fast during mating season, losing perhaps a third of their body weight. — Reuters



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ENTERTAINMENT



Fast & Furious and WWE star John Cena apologises for calling Taiwan a country

ACTOR JOHN CENA has apologised to China after referring to Taiwan as a country in a promotional interview for *Fast and Furious 9*.

His apology came after speaking to Taiwanese television TVBS earlier this month, where the 44-year-old said Taiwan would be the first "country" to see the latest movie.

But China regards Taiwan as its province, an assertion that most on the self-ruled, democratic island rejects.

"I made one mistake. I am very, very sorry for this mistake", Cena said in Mandarin in a video posted on



his account on Weibo, a Twitter-like microblog popular in China.

Cena is not the first to make this mistake. Companies have also come under fire in the past, with several airlines and hotels apologising to China in recent years for listing Taiwan as a country on their booking websites.

But his apology was not met with enthusiasm from some Chinese nationals and one person urged that he "use Mandarin to say Taiwan is part of China. Otherwise we won't accept the apology."

His video did not go down well in the United States either.

Matt Karolian, Manager of American news website Boston.com, tweeted: "Can someone please help John Cena locate his spine, please?"

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said: "On your bowing to the Chinese Communist Party... I don't see you."

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry declined to comment, reported Reuters. — **Reuters**

FASHION

Through fashion, Rwandan-born designer champions African unity



RWANDAN-BORN fashion designer and visual artist Eli Gold left his home when he was 13 as his country was wracked by a civil war and genocide, a journey that took him across several African states.

Gold lived in Tanzania, Burundi and Malawi among others after leaving Rwanda, before arriving in South Africa, where he is based.

Now 30-year-old Gold expresses his love of the continent through art and fashion.

"By living in those places I got to understand what Africa is about and I got to meet different cul-

ture... the inspiration that I use in my creativity all come from different African cultures", said Gold.



tures... the inspiration that I use in my creativity all come from different African cultures", said Gold.

His company, MasaMara, unveiled its latest fashion ranges at an event in Johannesburg on Tuesday to celebrate Africa Day, which commemorates the founding of the Organisation of African Unity.

Catwalk models showed off his collection of colourful African prints called "Migration Is Beautiful, Destroy All Borders", which is a call to embrace migration and, like much of Gold's work, was inspired

by his own experiences.

"I wanted to show that if we come together, understand and embrace one another, we can have a beautiful united Africa", he said of his work. "I always say, if the garments can correspond and show harmony and togetherness, we [as] people can also do that."

Gold is also known as Nyambo MasaMara. Nyambo, which means "a long-horned Rwandan cow", is a name he took after he styled his hair into the shape of bull horns.

His other projects include "Beyond Borders", a choreographed

show where a spirit travels through space and time to an Africa where borders and limits to creativity do not exist. His "Gift of Life" exhibition also combines visual art and design with movement.

"I come from a nation that was broken and now we're fixing ourselves and reuniting better than ever", said Gold.

"When I left (Rwanda) it was a country that I was not proud to be a part of", said Gold. "But when I went back (in 2017), it really made me proud to be Rwandan." — **Reuters**

ART

Artist Leonora Carrington's Mexico home becomes museum



THE MEXICO CITY home of renowned British-born Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington will open to the public as a museum displaying some of her works and possessions, the managers announced on Monday.

"This space contains the daily life of the Weisz Carrington family, who lived here for more than 60 years. We have cataloged more than 8,600 objects", said Alejandra Osorio, Cultural Director of the Autonomous Metropolitan University.

Pablo Weisz Carrington, son of the late painter and sculptor, sold the house to UAM for half a million dollars on the condition that it be converted into a museum.

In exchange, on May 19 he donated works of his mother valued at three million dollars.

The museum in Colonia Roma houses 45 sculptures and hundreds of objects that Carrington used while living there, including her food seasonings and make-up.



The intention is "to preserve the intimate character of the dining room, bedroom, kitchen and study with the idea of presenting them as closely as they were in the artist's daily life", Osorio said.

The opening date will depend on the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic in Mexico, she added.

Born in Lancashire, England into an aristocratic industrial family at the cusp of the Surrealist movement, Carrington moved to Paris aged 20 where she began a love affair with painter Max Ernst.

After Ernst was arrested by the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied France, Carrington fell into a deep depression before being committed to a psychiatric hospital in Spain.

She managed to escape, and in Lisbon married the Mexican poet and journalist Renato Leduc, who in 1942 took her to Mexico. She settled there permanently, befriending painter Frida Kahlo and future Nobel laureate Octavio Paz. Carrington died in May 2011 in Mexico City at the age of 94. — **AFP**



Wadi Mibam: The fast-rising star amongst Oman's wadis

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: yru_here

It's easy to miss Wadi Mibam. In fact, a lot of people still make the same mistake. After driving to Wadi Tiwi and reaching what seemed to be the end of the road that leads to a small village dotted with palms, many turn back disappointed that the pools are not even deep.

But Wadi Mibam is located more inwards into the heart of the Tiwi mountains, located at the far edge of Wadi Tiwi itself.

From the village in Tiwi that guards the entrance towards the mountains, the drive becomes even rougher and it is filled with different levels of thrill as the rough road cuts through other sleepy villages, barren mountains, rocky wadis and harrowing cliffs. From Wadi Tiwi, it's still another 30 minutes drive forward — covering a total of around 160 km from Muscat.

Wadi Mibam took a life of its own in the last five years and has now started to emerge as one of the must-visit, most beautiful wadis in Oman. It's a reputation well-deserved because, despite its barely 5 km stretch, it is packed with all the adventures and beautiful scenes you can ever imagine.

I first visited Wadi Mibam in

2016 and back then, there was no proper pathway in between the gardens. There were no stairs leading down the waterfall. There was no rope that you can climb down. It was a rawer experience — just nature with its intimidating canyon almost unnoticeable from a bird's eye view because of the lush canopy of date palms and vegetations. Back then, the adventure was unforgiving and abseiling was necessary. The rocks were slippery but it was also at its most pristine.

After five years, while the surrounding area nearly remains the same, Wadi Mibam itself has gone through dramatic improvements thanks to the combined effort of its villagers, the municipality, and the Ministry of Tourism who understand its potential as a tourist destination.

Owing its name from the village where one starts the hike, Wadi Mibam technically is still part of Wadi Tiwi. The villagers of Mibam rely on agriculture for their day-to-day living. They carved out their homes in cliffs and thanks to the abundance of water, managed to transform what has been a barren mountain into an oasis teeming with greenery. Other than the dates, they also plant different kinds of root crops and fruit-bearing trees and even the pathway leading to the waterfall is peppered with different varieties of citrus trees.

A visit to Wadi Mibam today would yield a friendlier adventure. You would still have to pass through

the gardens tracing edges of the falaj along the way but the hike eventually opens up to a paved pathway that takes you to concrete stairs directly into the wadi's highest waterfall. From this waterfall, a few meters down, you will find a rope that aids you as you abseil down. Several metres ahead, you would have to swim your first round of pool — already looking beautiful with its emerald crystal clear waters. There are a series of pools you have to swim on until you reach the last big pool — in itself the rediscovered paradise.

When I first saw Wadi Mibam in 2016, it took my breath away. Never have I seen such a pristine nature hidden in Oman's daunting canyon. From below, the cliffs serve as giant walls protecting the pools hidden in the middle from the harsh elements and the sun.

I said it then and I'll say it again now. Wadi Mibam is the most beautiful wadi in Oman. I stand by that claim. Not only is it shorter and easier to hike and venture to, it has everything you can ask for — a good place for a day tour.

As a word of caution, Wadi Mibam is still a wadi and comes with its unique challenges and risks so it's advisable to visit it the first time with experienced teammates.

I will personally urge you to take a trip and explore its many hidden wonders. By the time you're finished, you will probably come to share the same sentiment — that Mibam is the fast-rising star amongst Oman's wadis.





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Oman takes part in Tourism Recovery Summit



MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is taking part in the Tourism Recovery Summit, which opened in Riyadh on Wednesday alongside the formal inauguration of the Middle East Regional Office of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The two-day summit has been organised by the UNWTO Committee for the Middle East. Oman's delegation is led by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Taking part in the summit are the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization and the ministers of tourism in the Middle East representing Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Libya,

Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting will discuss several topics, including the report of the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, the coordinated standards for the Middle East region, nominations and elections for the basic organs and their subsidiaries, and reviews of WTO projects. During the Tourism Recovery Summit, the experiences of various countries in the tourism sector and the challenges facing the industry due to the pandemic will be reviewed and solutions will be developed. On the sidelines, Oman's Minister of Heritage and Tourism will also hold bilateral talks with a number of participants. — ONA

MEDC targets 15,000 kW of solar PV capacity in Muscat by year-end

AMBITIOUS GOALS: Oman anticipates around 30 per cent of its power requirements coming from renewable energy resources by 2030

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Grid-connected solar PV systems installed by various government, commercial and residential customers on their premises in Muscat Governorate are projected to offer a total of around 15,000 kW (kilowatts) of renewable generation capacity by the end of 2021. According to Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), the state-owned utility licensed to distribute and supply power to customers across the capital region, the figure represents a nearly four-fold increase from the 4,148 kW of capacity installed as of end-2020. A total of 48 solar PV systems — installed primarily on the rooftops of schools, corporate buildings, commercial blocks and residential buildings, as well as car-parks of government and oilfield establishments — have so far been connected to MEDC's network, the utility said in its Annual Report for 2020 released here on Wednesday. A sizable number of these installations have come in the wake of the launch of the Sahim initiative by the sector regulator, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), in 2018. Phase 1 of the Sahim programme has primarily focused on individual customers looking to install grid-connected solar rooftop capacity for their in-house consumption, with the surplus electricity output



“Since the beginning of the Renewable Energy Implementation by MEDC in circa 2017, a total of 86 applications (accumulated) for solar PV connections have been received by the company with a project implementation progress of more than 56 per cent in the year 2020

MEDC

injected back into the grid. MEDC says it is committed

to facilitating connections for customers investing in their own solar PV systems on their premises as part of a wider national effort to promote the use of renewable resources as a substitute to natural gas in power generation. “MEDC will facilitate and assist individuals as well as institutions who wish to connect their solar systems to produce electricity either individually or for commercial and industrial purposes via MEDC's Connection Application Process including workshops and other stakeholder engagement measures,” the company stated. “Since the beginning of the Renewable Energy Implementation by MEDC in circa 2017, a total of 86 applications (accumulated) for solar PV connections have been received by the company with a project implementation progress of more than 56 per cent in the year 2020,” it noted.

The Omani government is targeting a 30-per cent contribution from renewable energy sources by 2030, the bulk of it coming from solar photo-voltaic (PV) systems. In the capital region, a significant ramp-up in solar PV capacity is anticipated in the next few years when Phase 2 of the Sahim programme is implemented initially in Muscat before being rolled out across the country. Several hundred residential buildings and homes are proposed to be fitted with grid-connected solar PV systems financed by a developer under a proposed Private-Private-Partnership (PPP) model. As a first step in the delivery of this landmark programme via a competitive tender, the regulator issued a Request for Proposals (RfP) last December seeking offers covering the first tranche of residential buildings approved for grid connection.

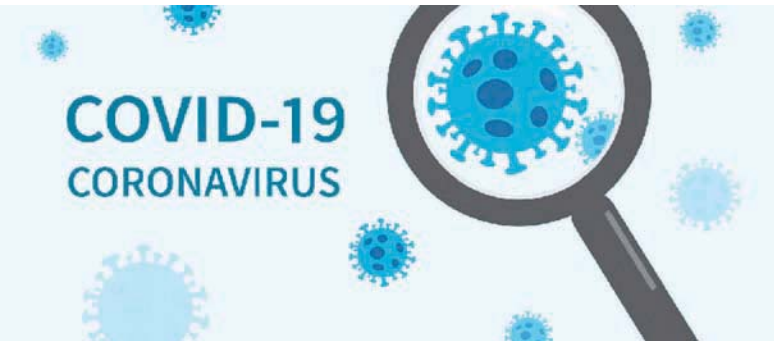
Covid-19 fuels increasing commercial insurance costs

RISING RATES: Insurers face challenge adapting to the 'new normal'

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic slowdown has adversely affected insurers globally and is contributing to commercial insurance pricing increases and reduced capacity across many lines of business. This is affecting the insurance markets across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) — at a time when companies are focused on reducing costs — according to the 'MENA Insurance Market Update' released on Wednesday

by Marsh, the world's leading insurance broker and risk advisor. The MENA region — which comprises Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and Qatar — has experienced rising commercial insurance rates over the last 12 months, including in the construction, cyber, trade credit, professional liability, and energy and power lines of business. According to Marsh's report, these increases are largely a consequence of the transitioning global insurance market and Covid-related claims. Findings of the report include: ■ Directors and officers (D&O) liability insurance rates continued to increase considerably across the region



(and globally), with insurers particularly concerned about Covid-19's impact on liquidity risk and future insolvencies. ■ Property rates across the MENA region are rising, especially for organisations with poor loss experiences, high asset values, or high-risk exposures. This is due to (re) insurers imposing more restrictions

on the risks they are willing to accept, reduced capacity, the resetting of underwriting requirements, and greater application of internationally accepted standards. ■ Cyber insurance rates continued to rise, due to an increase in frequency and severity of global ransomware claims.

Globally, commercial insurance prices increased 18 per cent in the first quarter of 2021

■ While the pandemic has increased demand for medical coverage, rates remain competitive. ■ Motor insurance rates in Oman, Saudi Arabia and UAE decreased due to a rise in competition among insurers. Globally, commercial insurance prices increased 18 per cent in the first quarter of 2021. The quarter is the first to show a moderation in the average rate of increase since the index

reported the first rise in global pricing since Q4 2017. It follows year-on-year average increases of 22 per cent in the fourth quarter and 20 per cent in the third quarter of 2020. Christos Adamantiadis, CEO, Marsh Middle East and Africa, said: “While there are signs that global insurance pricing increases moderated in the first quarter, we expect insurance markets across the MENA region to continue to be challenging throughout the remainder of 2021. “Therefore, it is vital that clients approach the risks they face and how they manage them with renewed vigor, as they reassess their business priorities, start to recover from Covid-19 pandemic, and shift their focus towards growth.”

Remittances in the time of the pandemic

Although the C o v i d - 1 9 pandemic has caused immense losses across many economic sectors around the world since the start of the crisis in early 2020, the remittances of foreign workers globally have remained high when compared with the disruption and unemployment it has unleashed.

Many institutions and companies, particularly those operating in the fields of tourism, hospitality and aviation have been severely impacted by the crisis.

Data released by the World

Bank Group in its report for 2020 indicate that remittance flows to low and middle-income countries reached about \$540 billion, a decrease of 1.6 per cent compared at \$548 billion recorded a year earlier.

This means that most workers in the world were able to transfer their savings and monthly benefits during the pandemic without any problems and difficulties.

The procedures followed by central banks during the pandemic facilitated the process of transferring money, in addition to establishing modern methods of transferring the funds at low cost during that the



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crisis.

This may have helped many foreign workers to send their remittances, which decreased slightly in 2020 from the level that was recorded during the financial crisis of 2009.

The World Bank Group expects some recovery in global economic growth in 2021, which will inevitably lead to an increase in remittances to low and middle-income countries, projected to grow by 2.6 per cent to \$553 billion during the current year, rising by a further 2.2 per cent to reach \$565 billion in 2022.

As is well-known, remittances from the GCC countries are largely due to the presence of

millions of foreign workers distributed across various oil and non-oil sectors.

Remittance services in these countries are widely available and affordable, although rates vary from country to country.

In view of the needs of developing countries for these annual transfers to support their economies and social projects, money transfer fees are moderate and in line with the sustainable development goals approved by international organisations and UN institutions that champion peoples' economic and social rights.

Remittances are a valuable lifeline to many poor and

developing countries that depend on this income stream to establish projects that support social development, education, health, clean water supply and other basic necessities.

The World Bank Group has revealed that the success of the flow of these remittances is due to several reasons, including the ability of the countries of the world to face all the economic challenges resulting from the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, on the one hand, despite the decline in global oil prices, and to the means of modern technologies that have been introduced in money exchange services.

CMA to hold training on basics of underwriting

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26



As part of its continued support for the professional development of Omanis working in the insurance sector, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) is conducting a training programme on the 'Basics of General Underwriting', in collaboration with OWS Training Consultancy Institute.

The five-day long programme, which began earlier this week, i part of the CMA Tamkeen initiative, which aims to empower the national cadres working for the insurance sector.

'The Basics of General Underwriting' is a significant training programme and aims to acquaint the participants with the basics of underwriting, such as the roles of insurance underwriters with the participation of the employees of operational departments in insurance companies.

The participants will be

introduced to underwriting practices and procedures in addition to using statistical data in underwriting operations beside introducing pricing principles and practices, the factors affecting the underwriting profitability and the impact of employing information technology in underwriting.

The CMA has annual training plans comprising short term and long term programmes designed to achieve the goals of Tamkeen in the insurance sector. Omanisation in the insurance sector reached 79 per cent as of end-2020, including 51.7 per cent in senior positions, 72.4 per cent in mid-level positions, and 85.7 per cent in operational roles.

Toyota accelerates hydrogen engine technologies through motorsports

MUSCAT: Toyota has been leading the way in environment-friendly technology for a long time. The Hybrid Electric Vehicle paved the way for lesser dependence on petrol, with the increased use of the electrical motor.

Now, underlining its commitment to achieving a carbon-neutral mobility society, Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) has announced that it is developing a new hydrogen engine. The engine has been installed on a racing vehicle based on Toyota's Corolla Sport, which will participate in competitive motorsports under the ORC ROOKIE Racing banner.

The vehicle is powered by a 1.6 litre in-line 3-cylinder turbo engine that uses compressed hydrogen as its fuel source. Its first race event will be the Round 3 NAPAC Fuji Super TEC 24 Hours Race, which takes place on May



21-23 as part of the Super Taikyu Series 2021 Powered by Hankook.

By honing its hydrogen engine in the challenging environment of motorsports, Toyota aims to contribute to the realisation of a sustainable and prosperous mobility society.

"We are excited to put our new hydrogen engine technologies to the test during this year's Super Taikyu Series," commented Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation. "Our

participation underlines Toyota's commitment to achieving carbon-neutral mobility by exploring diverse technology options. I am especially excited as I believe there is a huge opportunity for the uptake of hydrogen in the Middle East.

The region has a strong potential to produce clean hydrogen from both renewable energy and fossil fuel through the technology of Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS)."

Fuel Cell Electrified Vehicles (FCEVs) such as Toyota's Mirai use a fuel cell in which hydrogen chemically reacts with oxygen in the air to produce electricity that powers the motor.

Meanwhile, hydrogen engines generate power through the combustion of hydrogen using fuel supply and injection systems that have been modified from those used with gasoline engines, emitting zero CO2 in the process.

Perfect season to own the high-class driving experience Renault Megane

MUSCAT: As part of the ongoing Ramadan promotion, Renault Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced unlimited benefits on its popular models Renault Megane. Renault Oman is offering attractive value benefits such as special interest rate (0% up to three years or 1.99% for four years or 2.49% for five years or 2.99% for six years), assured cash gift, free periodic vehicle service package, free insurance, digital promotion, assured OMR 100 gift voucher and free registration on Renault Megane. Social media users who participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

The Renault Ramadan promotion which has already begun will go on till June 6, 2021. All retail customers purchasing Renault Megane are entitled to the special offer. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. Combining striking good looks and head-turning performance, Renault Megane, the vibrant and chic saloon, is appreciated for its daring expressive design and assertive style. Acclaimed for its performance credentials, Renault Megane is extolled for its best-level low fuel consumption and CO2 emissions. Its energetic lines and substantial proportions add to its increasing popularity with car aficionados in Oman. Recognised worldwide for its performance excellence and looks, head turner Renault Megane has a style of its own, which is both lively and elegant.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "We are pleased to offer great benefits to the customers who want to own a Renault Megane. The car presents a high-class driving experience, thanks to its technologies, design, and roominess. Renault Megane, which is available in 2.0 litres engine configuration along with 1.6 litres variant, is a popular car and much-loved car in the Sultanate."

Special Interest Rate
All customers purchasing any variant of

20MY Renault Megane will be eligible for 0% (Rate of Interest) up to three years or 1.99% (rate of interest) for four years or 2.49% (rate of interest) for five years or 2.99% (rate of interest) for six years. Customers can opt for only one of the interest rates options. The special interest rate benefit will be applicable for customers opting to avail vehicle loan through select finance companies.

Customers opting for automotive loan other than above will be financed as per terms of respective bank/finance company. Customers purchasing in cash, LPO, credit will not be eligible for special interest rate benefit. For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates (as per existing bank/finance company scheme) will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to finance/credit approval.

Assured Cash Gift
Customers who purchase Renault Megane will be entitled to receive assured cash gift of OMR 1800. The cash gift can be adjusted in the down payment of the car if customer opts for it.

Free Insurance
Customers purchasing Renault Megane during the promotion period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman and UAE only). The insurance amount is applicable for private registrations only. For commercial registration, additional amount including passing needs to be borne by customer.

Free Registration
Customers purchasing Renault Megane during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration. Applicable to the extent of private registration only. For commercial registrations, additional amount including passing needs to be borne by customer.

Free Periodic Vehicle Service Package
All customers purchasing Renault Megane during this scheme period will be eligible for free periodic maintenance service package for three years/60,000 kms (whichever is earlier), limited to six services. This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000 kms.

Three years/ 100000 Kms Manufacturer Warranty

All customers purchasing Renault Megane during this scheme period will be eligible for three years/ 100,000 kms manufacturer warranty (whichever is earlier).

Assured OMR 100 gift voucher

All customers purchasing Renault Megane during this scheme period will be eligible for OMR 100 worth gift vouchers. These vouchers can be redeemed for Nexfil Window Film or Renault Ceramic Glass Coat at SBA Service Centres. The vouchers are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash.

Digital Promotion

Social Media users who participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign and other online challenges on Renault Oman Instagram will get a chance to win fuel voucher worth of OMR 50 (three numbers), PSS wireless headphone (one number) and Moulinex blenders (four numbers). Kindly follow Renault Oman Instagram page on @Renaultoman for all the exciting contests and prizes to be won.

Renault Megane: Aesthetic appeal

Renault's designers have drawn upon their acclaimed expertise to seamlessly incorporate 503 dm3 VDA of boot storage capacity without compromising the vehicle's aesthetic appeal. Its generous dimensions (4.63m long and 1.81m wide, with a record wheelbase in its class of 2.71m) underscore its status-enhancing credentials and provide additional room for occupants. Its sleek profile is the result of painstaking work on the proportion of glass to metal (one-third / two-thirds), as well as its low height (1.44m) and ground clearance (13cm).

Fitted as standard either across the range or in the higher-end versions, chrome detailing (grille, side mouldings, door window strips, door handles and exhaust tailpipes) point to the model's quality and reinforce its status-enhancing appeal. Its 1.57m front and rear track – the widest in its class – and its range of wheel sizes up to 18 inches imbue it with a striking stance. Its broad, sculpted shoulders express its sportier style.

Styling features

The Megane shares many styling features with its larger sibling Renault Talisman, including its lighting signature which is visible night and day: The front C-shaped lighting signature features LED 3D-effect light guides. Available as option on the top version of the Megane are full LED (LED Pure Vision technology) head lights. The rear LED lights form a unique horizontal 3D-effect signature featuring Edge Light technology. The slender brush stroke-like lines emit a deep red light.

'Cockpit' feeling

The carefully appointed 'cockpit'-feel cabin exudes an unmistakable 'cockpit'-feel thanks to sculpted, enveloping seats and features such as a configurable colour 7-inch TFT data display, or a portrait-format 8.7-inch multimedia tablet, R-LINK 2 which supports Apple carplay and Android Auto. Furthermore, the positioning of all the vehicle's technological features has been thought through to facilitate their everyday use.

Travelling comfort is further enhanced by the careful attention that has been paid to the interior finish, to the quality of the soft-to-the-touch materials, which are within easy reach of the driver and passengers. Materials found in Renault's higher-end models. Plush foam-backed covering selected for the dashboard, upper door panels, door inserts and armrests, Satin-effect chrome instrument, air vent and centre console surrounds, Full-grain Nappa leather-trimmed steering wheel, available on the top trim level.

Class leading comfort

The precision-designed seats promise and provide class-leading comfort and support thanks notably to the use of dual-density foam. The frames are the same as those employed for Koleos and Talisman. Leather seats available as option on the top version offer massage function for the driver plus electrically-adjustable lumbar support.

The cabin offers a generous level of space for the driver and passengers alike: Shoulder and elbow room are amongst the best in the class (1,441mm shoulder room



in the front and 1,377mm in the rear, with 1,492mm elbow room in the front and 1,413mm in the rear). 216mm knee room in the rear. The angle of the rear-seat back (27 degrees) optimises head room for taller passengers and improves postural comfort.

Innovative technology

The Megane is based upon the Renault-Nissan Alliance's CMF-C/D modular architecture which it shares with other high-end Renault models, including the Talisman and the Koleos. The Megane comes with a wide range of features more commonly associated with the next segment up and unique in the segment: a configurable 7-inch TFT colour screen instrument display and the R-LINK 2 multimedia tablet available in two formats (7-inch landscape format, or 8.7-inch portrait format), as well as Multi-sense (supports Apple carplay and android auto)

Digital surround

Higher-end versions of the Megane come with R-LINK 2 with a 7-inch landscape format or 8.7-inch portrait format (22cm), identical to that available for the Koleos and the Talisman. Unique in the segment, it benefits from a capacitive 'pinch & zoom' screen for simplified use, much like that of a smartphone or tablet computer.

R-LINK 2 is a control centre that manages the vehicle's various functions: multimedia, navigation, telephone, radio, driving aids (ADAS). Driving data (speed, RPM, fuel

consumption, etc.) is displayed on a personalisable 7-inch colour screen situated behind the steering wheel, in the driver's line of sight.

Unique machineries

In addition to these technologies from Renault's high-end models – unique in the segment – and depending upon the version and market, the Megane offers the following features from the next segment up, designed to make life easier:

Easy Trunk Access (ETA): a hands-free boot opening system that works by detecting movement underneath the rear bumper. This is a unique feature in the compact saloon segment. Hands-free entry card and starting (with automatic vehicle locking). The electronic parking brake immobilises the vehicle when the engine stops and frees up space on the centre console. Automatic dual-zone climate control.

SBA commitment

SBA is largely committed to supporting Renault Oman's growth in the Sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of 9 showrooms, 15 service centres and 23 spare parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

Ooredoo CFO named one of GCC's best financial leaders

MUSCAT: Ooredoo is proudly celebrating its Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Abdulrazzaq al Balushi, who, for the second year in a row, has been named on the *Khaleeji Times'* New-Age Finance and Accounting (NAFA) CFO Powerlist.

The list, which identifies 30 of the GCC's top performing industry leaders, recognises CFOs' instrumental roles in the strategic operations of organisations, especially in today's complex economic environment. Its latest in a string of awards that have been received by members of the Ooredoo family, as it continues to transform the telecoms landscape and nurture a forward-thinking and future-ready workforce.



Bank Muscat holds Al Mazyona monthly draw for April

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, recently conducted a number of draws under its Al Mazyona scheme



2021 for the month of April at the head office. The draws were live-streamed on the bank's social media channels on Twitter, YouTube and Instagram keeping in mind the great public interest in the various prize draws conducted by Al Mazyona.

As many as 451 winners won more than RO 600,000 in the draws, which included the monthly mega draw as well as the Asalah, Al Jawhar and governorate draws.

US escalates dairy trade complaint against Canada

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday escalated its complaint objecting to Canada's treatment of US dairy products under the revised North American free trade agreement.

After talks failed to resolve the issue, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai called for the creation of a dispute settlement panel under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA, or CUSMA in Canada), the trade agency said.

The action could lead to punitive tariffs if the neighbouring countries cannot reach an agreement. A preliminary decision would be expected in four months under the terms of the pact's conflict resolution terms.

USTR filed the first-ever complaint under the USMCA in December, calling for consultations over Ottawa's practice of dictating who can access American dairy exports, "reserving access to the largest



Fresh hay is distributed to cows in the exhibition hall during the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin. — Reuters

pool exclusively for processors." Those actions "undermine the ability of American dairy exporters to sell a wide range of products to Canadian consumers", the statement said.

A USTR official told reporters the policies prevent US dairy

producers from shipping higher-value products to Canadian retailers.

In response, Ottawa said it was

"disappointed" that Washington called for the dispute settlement panel.

"Under CUSMA, Canada agreed to provide some additional market access to the United States for dairy while successfully defending our supply management system and dairy industry", Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng said in a statement.

"We are confident that our policies are in full compliance with our CUSMA TRQ (tariff rate quota) obligations, and we will vigorously defend our position during the dispute settlement process", she said.

The USMCA, which took effect on July 1, 2020, sets a quota of products that receive duty-free access, known as "tariff rate quotas" or TRQs, and President Joe Biden's officials agreed with his predecessor that Canada has violated the agreement.

"A top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration

is fully enforcing the USMCA and ensuring that it benefits American workers", Tai said.

"Launching the first panel request under the agreement will ensure our dairy industry and its workers can seize new opportunities under the USMCA to market and sell US products to Canadian consumers."

Canada's treatment of dairy products was a key sticking point in the talks after President Donald Trump ripped up the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1994 and insisted on a replacement deal.

The USTR official said the current complaint is limited to the TRQs on 14 dairy products — including cheeses, butter, ice cream, milk powders and yogurt — and does not extend to the country's broader supply management of the dairy sector, which is a hot-button issue in Canada. — AFP

Oil gains as demand optimism offsets fears of supply glut



TOKYO: Oil rose on Wednesday as worries about an increase in supplies from Iran were offset by optimism about improving US fuel demand that was reinforced by a drop in weekly inventory estimates.

Brent crude oil futures for July rose 44 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$69.09 a barrel by 0710 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude for July was at \$66.35 a barrel, up 28 cents, or 0.4 per cent.

Both benchmarks had edged higher on Tuesday amid hopes for higher demand during the northern hemisphere's summer season and a lifting of coronavirus curbs.

US crude oil and fuel inventories fell last week, said two sources.

Crude stocks fell by 439,000 barrels in the week ended May 21. Gasoline inventories fell by 2 million barrels and distillate stocks fell by 5.1 million barrels, the data showed.

"The API data was good", said Kazuhiko Saito, chief analyst at commodities broker Fujitomi Co, predicting oil prices to rise toward \$70 a barrel on expectations of recovering fuel demand.

— Reuters

US cuts Mexico's air safety rating, bars new routes

NEW YORK: US regulators on Tuesday downgraded Mexico's air safety rating, a move that bars Mexican carriers from offering new service or routes in the United States.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said the action also means US carriers cannot market and sell tickets with Mexican partner airlines, but it does not affect any existing service.

"The FAA will increase its scrutiny of Mexican airline flights to the United States", the agency said, adding that it found "several areas" where the country fell short of international air safety standards.

The US regulator lowered Mexico's safety rating to "Category 2" from "Category 1."

The downgrade means Mexico's laws or regulations do not ensure "minimum national international safety standards", or the "civil aviation authority is lacking in one or more areas such as technical expertise, trained personnel, record keeping, inspection procedures or resolution of safety concerns", the FAA said.



Passengers arrive at the Abelardo L. Rodriguez International airport in Tijuana, Mexico. — AFP

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday urged US regulators not to downgrade the air safety rating of his country, which is heavily reliant on tourism.

"We have been complying with all the requirements. We feel that this decision should not be carried out", he said when asked about reports that a downgrade was imminent.

Lopez Obrador said the move appeared to be aimed at helping US airlines win customers.

"They are the ones who benefit and the national airlines could be harmed", he told reporters, but added that since Mexican carriers were mainly focused on domestic flights the impact would be limited. — AFP

Bangladesh joins China, South Korea in bailing out Sri Lanka

DHAKA: Bangladesh has joined China and South Korea by approving a currency swap to bail out Sri Lanka, which is facing its worst foreign exchange crisis, officials said on Wednesday.

The central bank of Bangladesh on Tuesday approved a \$250 million deal — its first currency swap — after Sri Lanka appealed for help to shore up its foreign reserves and ease pressure on the exchange rate.

"The board of the Bangladesh Bank has decided in principle to lend \$200-250 million from Bangladesh's reserves to Sri Lanka for three months", Mohammad Sirajul Islam, a spokesman for the country's central bank, said.

Bangladesh has built up \$45 billion in reserves in recent years on the back of impressive garment exports and record remittances by its 10 million overseas workers.

But Sri Lanka's GDP per capita of \$3,852 is more than



A labourer works at a construction site of a bridge on the sea in Colombo, Sri Lanka — Reuters

double that of Bangladesh, according to the latest World Bank data.

"The fact that Bangladesh is the one providing the dollars is a big ego booster", Ahsan H. Mansur, a former senior IMF official and current executive director of the Dhaka-based Policy Research Institute, told a local daily.

Two weeks ago, Sri Lanka secured a \$500 million loan from South Korea, a month after a similar loan from China

was issued, as the island battles a dollar shortage and debt crisis.

China's central bank also granted a \$1.5 billion currency swap to finance imports from China in February as the rupee hit a record low of 202.73 to the dollar.

At the end of April Sri Lanka said its economy shrank 3.6 per cent last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, making it the worst downturn since independence from Britain in 1948. — AFP

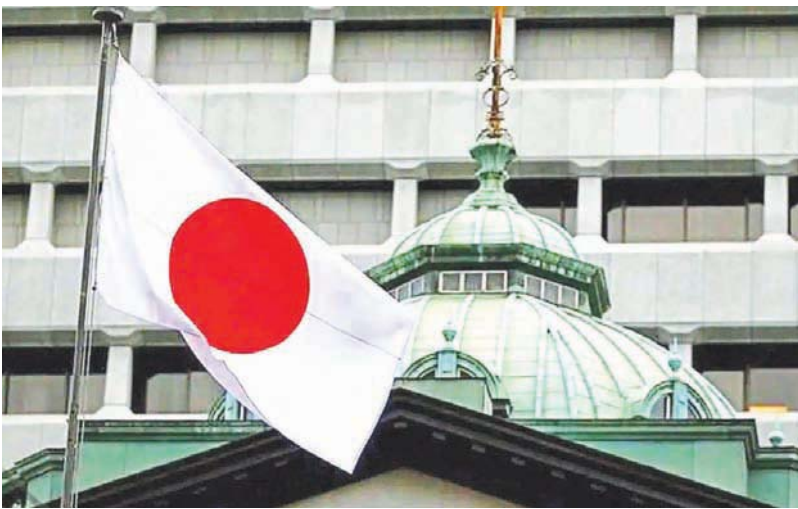
Japan cuts economic view on spending downgrade

TOKYO: Japan slashed its overall economic view for the first time in three months in its economic report for May due to the impact on consumption and business conditions from a coronavirus state of emergency in major areas of the country.

Authorities also repeated a warning to pay sufficient attention to the downside risk a resurgence in Covid-19 infections poses to the economic outlook.

"The economy shows increased weakness in some parts, though it continued picking up amid severe conditions due to the coronavirus", the government said in the report.

The government cut its assessment of the overall economy



A Japanese flag flutters atop the Bank of Japan building in Tokyo. — Reuters

for the second time this year, after also doing so in February, which was its first downgrade in 10

months.

Among its key economic elements, authorities lowered

their view of private consumption, which makes up more than half of gross domestic product (GDP).

The government said private consumption was showing weakness especially centred on services spending, which was a notch lower than the previous assessment, when it said it remained weak.

While sales of new cars and household electronics remained largely flat, average weekly spending was decreasing compared to 2017-2019 levels.

The government also lowered its view on business conditions, as a pickup showed signs of stalling, the economic report said.

Exports continued to increase

moderately, while production and capital spending were picking up, all unchanged from the previous month, it said.

The government was expected to compile an extra budget in October or November, a ruling party lawmaker said on Wednesday, calling for spending of around \$239 billion to offset the economic hit from the pandemic.

The world's third-largest economy likely grew at a slower-than-initially-expected pace in the current quarter due to ramifications of the coronavirus emergency curbs, following a sharp decline in the first quarter.

— Reuters