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ENGLAND
EDGE
CZECH TO
GO TOP



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OMANI WOMEN
ARE BREAKING
CULTURAL
BARRIERS



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AL FARDH MOSQUE IN
NIZWA IS PERFECT PLACE
TO START APPRECIATING
ISLAMIC ART



Decree on System of University of Technology

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 47/2021 on promulgating the System (Bylaw) of University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

Article (1) stipulates that the provisions of the System of University of Technology and Applied Sciences, attached to this Decree, shall be enforced.

Article (2) states that the Chairman of the Council of University of Technology and Applied Sciences shall issue the organisational regulation of the university, as well as other regulations and decisions necessary for the application of the System attached. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of the System attached (to this Decree).

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publishing. — ONA

TEST POSITIVE RATE SHOWING UPWARD TREND

Sultanate sees 1.42 Covid deaths per hour

KABEER YOUSUF
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Oman has reported an average of 1.42 deaths per hour due to Covid-19 in the past 24 hours, while all-round appeal to follow preventive measures has gained momentum.

Thirty-four deaths were reported in 24 hours as the number of new registered cases touched an average of 86 per hour as 2,047 new cases were registered in the past 24 hours, two days after the Supreme Committee reimposed night lockdown from 8 pm to 4 am.

The TPR (Test Positive Rate) of

Covid-19 cases is showing an upward move, and experts say the trend is on a dangerous shift.

The report further suggests that 203 were hospitalised over the past 24 hours taking the total number of current hospitalised patients to 1,531, and 445 are in intensive care units (ICUs).

“We are experiencing higher rates of casualties and cases. ICUs are packed to capacity and general treatment options are reduced to minimal as cases of the new mutant increased since weeks,” medical director of a private hospital, has

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A MEDICAL DIRECTOR
Private Hospital

said.

Wednesday’s figures brought the total number of positive Covid-19 cases to 254,656, while the total number of deaths reached 2,816, the Ministry of Health said. According to official sources, a total number of 222,344 patients have recovered as 1,094 new cases recovered on Tuesday.

“This is the time we need to double our care against the deadly disease, and all citizens and residents, please stay indoors and don’t step out unless it’s really necessary. Also, follow hygiene standards as well as continue

wearing masks,” the ministry has advised.

IMMUNISATION

The Ministry of Health is continuing to vaccinate people aged 45-year-old and above against Covid-19 in all governorates of the Sultanate as part of the National Immunisation Campaign.

On Wednesday, vaccination centres in all governorates witnessed excellent turnout from the target group, which reflects the great societal awareness of immunisation against Covid-19. **SEE PAGE 3**

Extended residency status for investors

MUSCAT: Come September 2021, foreign investors in the Sultanate of Oman have an option to get extended residency visa as part of the incentives that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion announced on

Wednesday.

“The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announces an Investors’ Residency Programme aimed at backing up the investment environment in the Sultanate. **DETAILS ON P2**



BRIDGE TO A FARM

Muhana bin Said al Zaidi, a young man from the Wilayat of Dhank, managed to build a 40-metre-long, 13-metre high suspension bridge between his family’s home and his farm. Al Zaidi said the bridge, made of rust-resistant steels, can withstand 35-tonne weight. One-km length of wires are used to ensure the rigidity of the bridge, which was built with high engineering standards. The total cost of the bridge was RO 2,000. **DETAILS ON P3**

UFO buffs await release of Pentagon report

CHICAGO: Chicago-area UFO aficionados are buzzing in anticipation of a Pentagon report into strange aerial phenomena, but not T J Japcon. He doesn’t need the government to validate what he recorded hovering above Tinley Park almost 17 years ago.

“I don’t think it makes a difference,” he said. “I know what I saw.”

Japcon, who still lives in the southwest suburb, is the foremost chronicler of what has come to be known as the Tinley Park Lights — a trio of colour-shifting orbs, seemingly connected, that slid across the horizon before a crowd of witnesses.

Some experts have dismissed the images he captured on video cassette as a prank, but such scepticism is facing new pushback. The military has released videos of flying objects it can’t explain, and the upcoming report, according to journalists who’ve been briefed on its contents, doesn’t rule out extraterrestrial technology.

— dpa

A NOBLE SALUTE

RAY INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF COMPANIES deeply values the long association with **Mr. Raoul Restucci, Managing Director, PDO**, for his unconditional and abiding support that paved the way for the growth and development of the local companies.

We extend the very best wishes to **Mr. Raoul Restucci** for all his future endeavors.

We shall treasure the valuable business lessons acquired through the professionally conducted business contracts.

In honour of his veteran services we offer a NOBLE SALUTE.





Extended residency status for investors

A NEW INVESTMENT RESIDENCY PROGRAMME FOR EXPATRIATE TO BE LAUNCHED IN SEPTEMBER

KABEER YOUSUF

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Come September 2021, foreign investors in the Sultanate of Oman have an option to get more extended residency visa as part of the incentives that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) announced on Wednesday.

“Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP) announces an Investors’ Residency Programme (IRP) aimed at backing-up the investment environment in the Sultanate and enticing typical investments, creating job opportunities, and supporting the domestic economy with feasible projects compatible with Oman Vision 2040 goals,” an official statement from the ministry said.

Accordingly, those who have already invested in Oman, or have plans to become future investors, will be granted residency ranging from 5 years to 10 years with a



The announcement of the investment residency programme came during a meeting held at the MoCIIP on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

provision to extend it further, according to the authorities.

“This initiative to provide long-term residency for foreign investors is an incentive measure taken to stimulate the business and investment environment in the Sultanate at a time like this,” Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) told the *Observer*.

Investors will have to submit a request to benefit from the long-term residency programme through the Ministry’s Investment Services Center electronically after completing all the procedures

related to the project.

Dr Saleh further said that decision in accordance with specific controls and conditions will be announced later after completing their consideration by the Council of Ministers said an official statement.

The IRP is a clear demonstration

of Oman’s strong commitment under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to opening up new routes for investment in the wealth of opportunities presented by Oman Vision 2040.

Alongside other enhancements to the Sultanate’s

commercial environment such as the provision of quality digital services and the streamlining of procedures and processes, this landmark programme shows Oman’s determination to become ever more globally competitive, increase trade, strengthen industry and empower our business community.



This initiative to provide long-term residency for foreign investors is an incentive measure taken to stimulate the business and investment environment in the Sultanate at a time like this

RIDHA AL SALEH

Chairman, OCCI

Council of Oman participates in global IPC forum



MUSCAT: The Council of Oman, represented by the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura participated in the International Forum of Global Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation (IPC) in Implementing the Sustainable

Development Goals.

The virtual two-day forum is organised by the Oliy Majlis (parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The forum aims at exchanging experiences and expertise between parliaments. It also discusses main issues and challenges related to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). Moreover, the forum suggests solutions to overcome those challenges.

The Sultanate was represented in the forum by Dr Isam bin Ali al Rowas, member of the State Council, and Mohammed bin Ahmed al Madhani, member of the Majlis Ash’shura. — **ONA**

■ GCC ARMY CHIEFS MEETING



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), participated on Wednesday in the 19th meeting of the GCC Army Chiefs. The virtual meeting discussed several topics that contribute in promoting areas of the joint military action between the GCC member states. — **ONA**

Royal Navy of Oman continues recruitment process

MUSCAT: In implementation to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to expedite employment of national job-seekers, and in continuation to the national efforts exerted by the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) to allow the chance for citizens to join the military service, the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, continues to implement the required recruitment procedures.

The applicants who pass the evaluation tests will join the military service as cadets with RNO

RNO employs its capacities, expertise and means of transportation to provide a suitable environment for speedy and seamless procedures.

The Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) continues to receive those who meet the general recruitment conditions in accordance to the timeframe for the recruitment procedures and employment in the corps of SAF and the other



departments of the Ministry of Defence in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour.

Regarding the RNO’s preparations for the recruitment procedures and training programmes for new cadets, Lieutenant Commander

Mohammed bin Salim al Kalbani said: “Within the framework of the plans aimed to speed up the implementation of the employment initiatives, the RNO has begun receiving citizens applying for jobs through the advertisement published by RNO

in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

All the applicants will undergo several stages of evaluation and the successful among them will join the Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy (SQNA) for training in order to serve at RNO.” — **ONA**





Vaccination centres witness huge turnout

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) is continuing to vaccinate people aged 45 years and above against Covid-19 in all governorates of the Sultanate as part of the National Immunisation Campaign against Covid-19.

Vaccination centres in all governorates witnessed excellent turnout from the campaign's targets, which reflects the great societal awareness of immunisation against Covid-19.

In the Governorate of Muscat, the vaccination campaign continues at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and the Al Sahil Health Centre in the Wilayat of Quriyat.

Dr Ambareen al Balushi, a senior medical specialist and the field manager of the Immunisation Centre at the Oman Convention

and Exhibition Centre, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the centre witnessed high turnout from the targeted categories, noting that around two to three thousand people are vaccinated a day.

A number of vaccinated people commended the smoothness of the procedures at the immunisation centre. They further praised the efforts exerted by the government for the health and safety of citizens and residents in the Sultanate.

The MoH seeks to vaccinate all targeted categories aged 12 years and above (70% of the population), and this will be implemented in phases according to the vaccine supplies as per the Ministry's National Strategy for Immunisation against Coronavirus (Covid-19). — ONA



Omani builds 40 metres long suspension bridge to get to his farm



MUSCAT: Muhana bin Said al Zaidi, a young man from the Wilayat of Dhank has constructed a suspension bridge measuring 40 metres long and 13 metres high between his family's home and farm.

Al Zaidi said the bridge, made of rust-resistant steels, can withstand the 35-tonne weight.

He said the challenges faced by the project included the search for suitable materials, which took a long time. The total cost of the bridge was RO 2,000.

Al Zaidi stressed that his aim was only to gain the experience necessary to construct new bridges. — ONA

Commercial establishments fined for violating Covid-19 norms

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The municipal authorities in the country continue to monitor and fine commercial establishments for violating SC guidelines and not following preventive measures.

On Wednesday, the Al Buraimi municipality issued a fine against the MS-Max shopping Centre for not complying with the precautionary requirements and measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The North Al Batinah Municipality issued penalised three commercial establishments in Suwaiq for not complying with the precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid 19.

The account stated that the violating establishments are Taj Deluxe Shopping, Taj Hypermarket, and Noor Ghazal Mill.

South Al Batinah Municipality reported violations by some commercial establishments in the Wilayat of Barka, which included non-compliance with the Supreme Committee decisions on Covid-19.



The facilities are Makkah Hypermarket, Grand Centre, Barka Gate Mall, and Fast Line Bakery.

The authorities have warned that the decision to reduce entry to complexes, shops, restaurants, and cafes to 50 per cent of its capacity is still in effect and that violating

these decisions will lead to strict action and penalties.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, too has initiated action against one of the hotel establishments, which included complete closure for violating the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee.

In coordination with the Supreme Committee, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has banned meetings and celebrations and gatherings in hotel and tourist establishments. It also announced the closure of all public facilities in hotel establishments between 8 pm and 4 am.

WORK FROM HOME HAS ITS SIDE EFFECTS



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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The sudden shift of workstation and classes from offices to home is causing unseen problems among computer and mobile phone users. The 'New normal' is causing musculoskeletal injuries among many 'work from home' practitioners.

It has its direct impact on bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments and soft tissues. Orthopaedic practitioners call it the musculoskeletal system stress, which is emerging as a serious health impact of Covid-19.

Cases of text neck, selfie elbow and texting thumb are becoming common due to over-dependence on screens and improper sitting arrangements at home, either for attending classes or working from home.

In an interview with the Observer, Dr Sachin Singh (pictured), senior senorthopaedic and arthroscopy surgeon, admitted that musculoskeletal stress injuries are rising due to various factors, including excessive texting, playing video games, and even taking too many selfies. Such practices are leading to repetitive musculoskeletal stress injuries.

"Parents and children are spending more time on various screens at home which is

seriously affecting their health and now a new study reveals that students are making excessive use of their mobile phones during the lockdown."

Citing the study covered in the 'Sustainability' journal, Dr Sachin said, "It relates the number of hours that young people spend sitting down, their level of physical activity and state of mind when using a mobile phone."

In his practice as a specialist Dr Sachin, is coming through cases involving young students and others in day-to-day outpatient.

"They are unaware of the risk of injury from their smartphones. Selfie elbow, texting thumb and text neck are colloquialisms that describe overuse musculoskeletal injuries associated with increased use of smartphones, tablets, computers and video games," he said.

So, what are the symptoms?

"Common complaints neck pain, elbow pain, hand, wrist and thumb pain, as well as numbness and tingling in the arms, forearms, hand, and fingers."

Dr Sachin suggested some preventive steps for all such cases. "To get a selfie, people usually extend an arm as far as possible to cover everyone. This motion causes the elbow to lock, wrist to contort and puts

strain on your forearm muscles. All of this can result in trauma to the tendon that connects to the elbow joint, and that's not something our elbow joint equipped for.

He suggests keeping a selfie stick that may help to some extent that can help keep your elbow in and cover maximum people.

The best solution to avoid 'texting thumb', according to Dr Sachin is, "to take breaks while gaming and texting. In-between games or levels, stretch your fingers and wrists to keep them loose. Icing your hand or running it under cool water can help as well."

Similarly, 'text neck' is an overuse syndrome or a repetitive stress injury to the neck caused by holding the head in a forward and downward position for an extended period. Dr Sachin suggests exercises and stretches to increase the neck's strength and flexibility, correct postural habits when using smartphones and other devices.

"Raise the phone. Move the phone (and other devices) up closer to eye level so the head does not have to be tilted forward," he suggests.

Apart from these, "It is advisable to take frequent breaks, stand up straight, stretch, and exercise regularly, and the best option of all is to cut screen time."

'TEXT NECK' IS AN OVERUSE SYNDROME OR A REPETITIVE STRESS INJURY TO THE NECK CAUSED BY HOLDING THE HEAD IN A FORWARD AND DOWNWARD POSITION FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD



Corporate houses host blood donation drives

KABEER YOUSUF

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Various corporates and associations are conducting blood donation camps in response to the call for blood units by the Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

Several private and public companies are carrying out blood collection drive under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), requesting their employees and the general public to donate blood.

A two-day public blood donation drive has been organised by Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, on Wednesday and Thursday (June 23 and 24) between 9 am and 2 pm, at

Donating blood is one of the easiest, most rewarding ways to give back in a time of need

its Muscat showroom.

The corporates response to the Blood Bank appeal comes in the wake of the slump in the supply of blood to the Bank due to social distancing and the cancellation of blood drives.

"We deeply care for the community, therefore we always ensure we go above and beyond when it comes to integrating corporate social responsibility into our operations," a spokesperson for Al Jenaibi International Automobiles told the *Observer*.



Pictures shown are for illustration purpose only

"Donating blood is one of the easiest, most rewarding ways to give back in a time of need, and we hope to see as many people as possible take part in this initiative of human solidarity on the second day."

To stand by one another in these challenging times, the company is encouraging members of the public to join a good cause and make the difference between life and death for someone else. The activity is being held under strict safety guidelines, and it will be monitored by personnel from the Ministry of Health.

Those interested in donating blood and taking part in the national cause can get more information from 9617 8383, 9617 9393, 800 50008 (toll-free).

Expatriates urged to transfer ownership of prohibited lands

VINOD NAIR

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The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has said that the transfer of all ownership of land and real estate in areas prohibited for expatriates or foreigners to Omanis should be completed by October 31, 2021.

The announcement comes within the framework of the executive regulations of the law prohibiting non-Omanis from owning land and real estate in some places, issued by Royal Decree No 29/2018.

The ministry called on the owners of land and real estate usufruct contracts in prohibited places to transfer the right of usufruct contract to Omanis

before 06/28/2022.

The prohibited areas include Dhofar (except Salalah), Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, and Al Wusta, Liwa, Shinas and Masirah, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Jabal Shams, and any other mountains of strategic importance determined by the competent authorities.

It also includes locations near palaces, security, and military authorities, archaeological and heritage lanes, which are determined by the competent authorities.

Earlier, the ministry called for the legal transfer of ownership of all lands and real estate in the prohibited places to Omanis.

The Ministry will not receive any new applications that will lead

to cause a change in the nature of the lands or real estate owned by non-Omanis in prohibited places, such as extension, division, change of use, or modification of the shape or height of the plot of land.

With regards to usufruct contracts, If the land is occupied the usufruct contract is transferred to an Omani citizen, provided the approval of the Ministry, and that the person disposed to has not previously used or leased government lands designated for the same use. The relationship between them is the provisions of the agency contract.

If the land is vacant, the Ministry will recover it and settle the financial dues if any.

AL MOUJ VACCINATION PROGRAMME



Al Mouj Muscat has initiated a Covid-19 vaccination programme for all its staff as part of a nationwide drive to combat the impact of the pandemic. All employees plus one family member have been offered a vaccination appointment as part of the rollout. Al Mouj Muscat is home to 6,000 residents and its community has restaurants, cafes, luxury shops, 5-star hotels, a championship golf course and 400-berth marina.

Workshop discusses mechanisms to instil citizenship values in students



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Citizenship Department at the Directorate-General for Curriculum Development, carried out a training workshop on "Mechanisms for activating the citizenship education document in the Ministry" in the presence of Dr Yahya al Harthy, the Director-General of the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development at the Ministry.

The workshop aimed at formulating mechanisms to activate the citizenship education document in cooperation with the directorates and departments of the ministry concerned with citizenship education and determining the time phases for its activation. It also aimed at raising awareness of the importance of the document as a reference for workers and specialists in citizenship education, which contributes

to preparing young people, as well as strengthening the principle of partnership between workers in the Ministry and the Citizenship Department in relation to citizenship education.

The training workshop targeted 15 workers concerned with activating the document in the various directorate-generals in the Ministry's main office, the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for

Teachers, the Omani National Committee for Education, Culture and Science, and the Communication and Media Department.

At the end of the training workshop, several proposals were made on the mechanisms to activate the citizenship education document by the concerned authorities in citizenship education in the ministry and the participating parties in this training workshop.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 27/2021

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/029	(33/2021/MM/HQ-27)	Supply and Laying of Asphalt for Muscat Governorate (E-Tender)	Rial 100	17/07/2021	02/08/2021	Excellent

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond 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.
- Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency / Head of Internal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, 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).

EU considers \$4 bn migrant funding for Turkey

BRUSSELS: The European Union is considering 3.5 billion euros (\$4.18 billion) for Turkey to continue hosting Syrian refugees until 2024, two diplomats said on Wednesday, part of a bigger regional refugee support plan to stop migrants reaching the bloc.

The total 5.77 billion euro package for Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, which goes to humanitarian projects and not governments, aims to prevent a new refugee influx into the EU and win time until the 10-year Syrian civil war eventually ends.

Turkey hosts some four million Syrian refugees and has spent more than \$40 billion providing basic services but wants the EU funds to be paid directly to the government in Ankara.

EU leaders, perturbed by what they see as Turkey's rising authoritarianism and deteriorating human rights record, are unlikely to accept that demand. They also accuse Turkey of using the migrants as a bargaining chip, which Ankara denies.



Storyteller Asmaa Rasheed reads a story to children at the Zaatari refugee camp in the Jordanian city of Mafraq. – Reuters

The 27 leaders are expected to support the funding proposal by the executive European Commission at a summit in Brussels on Thursday.

However, unlike a previous 6-billion-euro round of funding

that was partly paid directly by EU governments, the money will come entirely from the EU's common budget and so the European

Parliament will need to give its approval. That looks likely to reopen the EU's tortured debate over relations with Turkey, which lawmakers have long accused of stifling media freedoms and imprisoning political opponents without proper trial, which Ankara also denies.

The total 5.77 billion euro package for Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, which goes to humanitarian projects and not governments, aims to prevent a new refugee influx into the EU

Under the original migration deal in March 2016, Turkey agreed to take back all migrants and refugees who cross the Aegean to enter Greece illegally, including Syrians, in return for more funds.

For its part, the EU has promised to scrap the visa requirement for Turks visiting Europe and accelerate Ankara's bid to join the bloc, although all talks have stalled.

EU leaders on Thursday will seek to revive them, offering Ankara "the EU's readiness to engage with Turkey ... to enhance cooperation in a number of areas of common interest," according to a draft of the final summit statement seen by Reuters.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu met EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell at the weekend to discuss migration, visa liberalisation and Turkey-EU ties. He told a news conference the EU must "return to the table" on negotiations with Turkey.

"We expect concrete steps from the EU now," Cavusoglu said. "It's been more than 1.5 years and we have not received a reply on these issues yet. We hope this summit will be a turning point and they should not stall Turkey."

— Reuters

Iran says US to lift oil sanctions

DUBAI/BERLIN: Iran said on Wednesday the United States had agreed to remove all sanctions on Iran's oil and shipping, although Germany cautioned that major issues remained at talks between Tehran and world powers to revive a 2015 nuclear deal.

The Iranian remarks, by outgoing President Hassan Rouhani's chief of staff, echoed previous assertions by officials in Rouhani's pragmatist camp that Washington is prepared to make major concessions at the talks, under way since April in Vienna.

The talks adjourned on Sunday for a break, two days after Iran held a presidential election won by Ebrahim Raisi, the Iranian judiciary chief who is on a US blacklist. Raisi is due to replace Rouhani in August.

"An agreement has been reached to remove all insurance, oil and shipping sanctions that were imposed by (former US President Donald) Trump," Rouhani's chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi was quoted as saying by Iranian state media.

— AFP

Iran foils attack at nuclear, vaccine facilities

TEHRAN: Iran foiled a sabotage attack on Wednesday on a building belonging to the country's atomic energy agency, state television said, adding there were no casualties or damage.

There were also unconfirmed reports of a drone attack on a facility producing Barekat, an Iranian-designed coronavirus vaccine. Testing is expected to begin soon.

"On Wednesday morning, a sabotage operation against one of the (Atomic Energy Organization of Iran) buildings was foiled" and the attack "did not cause any damage in financial or human terms," the broadcaster said.

"The saboteurs failed to carry



Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant. – AFP

out their plan," it added, without giving further details on the building or the nature of the attack that had been averted.

The incident comes as Tehran and world powers attempt to

revive a hobbled 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear programme in Vienna talks.

That agreement is staunchly opposed by arch-foe Israel, which Iran accused of being behind

a "small explosion" that hit its Natanz uranium enrichment plant in April.

Israel neither confirmed nor denied involvement in the blast, but public radio said it was a sabotage operation by the Mossad spy agency, citing unnamed intelligence sources.

The New York Times, quoting unnamed US and Israeli intelligence officials, said there had been "an Israeli role" in the attack.

At the time, the Iranian foreign ministry accused Israel of an act of "nuclear terrorism" aimed at scuttling the Vienna nuclear talks and vowed revenge.

— Agencies

Afghan translators fleeing Taliban land in Britain

LONDON: Afghan translators who worked with the British military and fear reprisal attacks from the Taliban have arrived in the UK as part of a relocation scheme, campaigners said on Wednesday.

The Sulha Alliance for Afghan interpreters said the first group of translators landed in Birmingham, central England, on Tuesday evening, adding they expected the arrivals would go into Covid quarantine for 14 days.

The government declined to comment on the reports about the departure of the flight over concerns about the safety of the relocating Afghan translators and their families.

At the end of May, Britain announced it would accelerate plans for the relocation of Afghan staff who worked with the military and their families ahead of a planned withdrawal of US-led Nato forces. — AFP

World powers in new push for Libya peace

BERLIN: World powers gathered on Wednesday in Berlin to seek lasting peace in Libya by ensuring the conflict-wracked North African country stays firmly on the path towards general elections on December 24.

Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah of Libya's interim government is joining US Secretary of State Antony Blinken as well as the foreign ministers of France, Turkey and Egypt at the UN-sponsored talks.

Russia's Sergei Lavrov will be absent, but deputy foreign minister Sergey Vershinin will attend in his place. The efforts to end a decade-long spiral of violence in Libya are the second round held in Berlin, after the first attended by the presidents of Turkey, Russia and France in January 2020, before the pandemic.

Before heading into talks, Blinken renewed demands that all foreign forces leave the war-battered nation.



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during the 'Second Berlin Conference on Libya' at the foreign office in Berlin on Wednesday. – Reuters

A ceasefire agreement from October last year "has to be fully implemented including by withdrawing all foreign forces," Blinken told reporters ahead of the opening of the conference.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who is hosting the visit, underlined that "for the further stabilisation of the country, it is crucial that elections take place as planned and that foreign fighters and mercenaries really do leave Libya." — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KHARTOUM

Sudan seeks meet on Blue Nile dam

Sudan asked the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday to meet and discuss a dispute over a giant dam being built by Ethiopia on the Blue Nile, a government statement said.

Ethiopia is pinning its hopes of economic development and power generation on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), while the two downstream countries - Egypt and Sudan - are concerned about it and seeking a binding agreement on the filling and



operation of the dam.

Egypt relies on the Nile River for as much as 90 per cent of its fresh water and sees the dam as an existential threat. Sudan is concerned about the operation of its own Nile dams and water stations.

ISMAILIA

Compensation pact over Suez Canal ship

A representative for the owners and insurers of a giant cargo ship that blocked the Suez Canal in March on Wednesday said that an agreement in principle had been reached in a compensation dispute with the canal authority.

Work was under way to finalise a signed settlement agreement as soon as possible and arrangements for the release of the Ever Given vessel would be made after formalities had been dealt with, Faz Peermohamed of Stann Marine said in a statement.



The Ever Given container ship has been anchored in a lake between two stretches of the canal since it was dislodged on March 29. It had been grounded across the canal for six days, blocking hundreds of ships and disrupting global trade.

TEHRAN

Iran slams US websites seizure

Tehran warned on Wednesday that Washington's seizure of 33 websites run by Iran-linked media was "not constructive" for ongoing talks on bringing the United States back into a landmark nuclear deal.

The US Justice Department said it had seized 33 Iranian government-controlled media websites, as well as three of the Iraqi group Kataeb Hezbollah, which it said were hosted on US-owned domains in violation of sanctions.



Iran's state broadcaster accused the US of repressing freedom of expression, while the president's office questioned the timing of the move as talks on bringing Washington back into the nuclear agreement between Tehran and major powers.

In brief

■ KATHMANDU



COURT REMOVES MOST OF OLI CABINET

Nepal's Supreme Court delivered a fresh blow to embattled communist Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli by removing 20 recently appointed ministers, pending a ruling on whether a caretaker premier can make such sweeping cabinet changes.

"This is an interim order and the court will give its final verdict later," court official Bhadrakali Pokharel told Reuters on Wednesday, a day after the decision by a two-judge bench.

With the Himalayan country struggling to contain a deadly second wave of coronavirus infections and beset by political turmoil, Oli lost a vote of confidence in May as a result of factional infighting within his Communist Party of Nepal (UML).

■ LAHORE



PAKISTAN BOMB BLAST KILLS FOUR

A bomb attack in a residential area of Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore killed four people on Wednesday, including a child, and wounded 14, police said, but there was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Among those wounded in the powerful blast were some police officers manning a checkpoint next to the house of Hafiz Saeed, the jailed founder of militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

"Apparently what we see is that our law enforcement agencies are the target," provincial police chief Inam Ghani told reporters. "You can see our police officials are also wounded."

Three people were killed, Ghani said.

■ MOSCOW



RUSSIA TO BOOST TIES WITH MYANMAR

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told Myanmar's junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (pictured) that Moscow is committed to strengthening military ties with it, Russia's RIA news agency reported.

Rights activists have accused Moscow of legitimising the junta, which seized power in a Feb. 1 coup, by continuing bilateral visits and arms deals.

"We are determined to continue our efforts to strengthen bilateral ties based on the mutual understanding, respect and trust that have been established between our countries," RIA quoted Shoigu as saying at a meeting on Tuesday.

Global vaccine plan set to shrink

BRUSSELS: Shunned by rich countries and failing to meet the needs of the poorest, a programme co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) for fair distribution of Covid-19 vaccines is planning a shake-up, internal documents seen by Reuters show.

The COVAX programme is far short of its target of delivering 2 billion doses by the end of the year, but does expect a big increase in supplies by early 2022, and wants to make sure that those, at least, reach the countries in direst need.

COVAX's initial lofty ambitions to act as a clearinghouse for the world's vaccines, collecting from the manufacturers in the most developed countries and quickly distributing to those in the most urgent need, have fallen flat.

So far, it has distributed a mere 90 million vaccines. While densely populated lower-income countries act as incubators for new and more dangerous strains of the coronavirus, some of the poorest countries have vaccinated less than 1 per cent of their populations, according to estimates from Gavi, a global vaccine alliance that runs the scheme with the WHO.

The overhaul is meant to reduce COVAX's financial risks, increase its focus on the countries most in need and reduce the participation of richer countries as both donors and recipients, according to a paper prepared by Gavi.

The document is expected to be adopted at a Gavi board meeting on Wednesday and Thursday.

Wealthy countries have generally preferred to use their financial clout to buy their own vaccines direct from the manufacturers.



A nurse prepares to administer the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine under the COVAX scheme in Addis Ababa. — Reuters

SHAKEN AND STIRRED

- ★ COVAX had aimed to manage vaccination for the world
- ★ Scheme undermined by richer countries putting themselves first
- ★ Overhaul expected at Gavi alliance board meeting
- ★ Membership expected to drop from 190 to 120-130 countries
- ★ Members in Latin America and Middle East may face higher costs
- ★ Investments planned to prevent vaccine wastage in poor countries

And despite pleas from the WHO to share any surplus vaccines via its programme, the United States, Japan and the European Union have all outlined plans to donate to countries directly, as well as to COVAX.

By prioritising their own diplomatic and commercial interests, wealthy nations have in effect wrecked COVAX's ambition to take overall charge of the global fight against the pandemic.

"The fact that Gavi's board is now reviewing the way in which wealthier countries can continue to participate in the facility is in part a recognition that the set-

up does not work," said Kate Elder, senior policy adviser at the medical aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres.

About 190 countries are currently COVAX members, but one-third do not use its vaccines and only about 40 have launched their vaccination drives with jabs from COVAX, the Gavi document says. In a separate internal document, Gavi estimates that membership may shrink to 120-130 next year.

Many rich nations are expected to step aside voluntarily, but the planned policy change will also make it costlier for middle-

income countries to take part.

Whereas now Gavi takes significant financial risks in ordering vaccines on behalf of its members, next year middle-income nations that still need COVAX vaccines will have to pay for them fully in advance.

This means that countries in Latin America and the Middle East, as well as the likes of South Africa, may face higher costs and need to borrow money to secure doses.

However, the poorest countries, mostly in Africa and Southeast Asia, will keep the same conditions, with little or no costs to buy vaccines.

COVAX has raised nearly \$10 billion, above its target for this year, and has begun receiving some surplus doses from rich nations. However, wealthy states' earlier massive purchases of vaccines and curbs on exports from India, the facility's main supplier, have left poorer countries short of supply. — Reuters

Japan court rules couples must use same surname

TOKYO: Japan's top court on Wednesday ruled a law requiring married couples to have the same family name is constitutional, rejecting plaintiffs who sought the right to keep separate surnames, local media said.

The plaintiffs -- three couples -- submitted marriage registration documents with different surnames for wives and husbands in 2018. But municipal governments refused to accept the documents, the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper reported.

The plaintiffs argued requiring married couples to choose a single name "is against equality under the law and freedom of marriage, which are guaranteed by the constitution."

The ruling is in line with a 2015 Supreme Court decision that also found the law constitutional but urged lawmakers to discuss a bill addressing growing calls for flexibility on the issue.

Calls to allow separate surnames have been growing in recent years. The couples argued that the "reasons for the 2015 verdict are no longer valid given changes in society," Jiji Press said.

Supreme Court officials could not immediately confirm details of Wednesday's verdict, which was widely reported by local media. ing legislation, couples can choose to adopt either the husband or wife's surname when they marry.

— Agencies

Unliveable Sydney homes going for millions in realty boom

SYDNEY: Sydney houses with crumbling walls, shredded ceilings, and bathrooms and kitchens stripped of fixtures are getting snapped up for millions as buyers try to grab a slice of Australia's soaring property market.

Last week, a derelict brick cottage in the city's northwest sold for A\$1.6 million (\$1.20 million), a price the real estate agent handling the deal said was "much more than we were expecting."

Photos on the property agent's website showed torn carpets, tattered roll-up blinds and a grime-caked kitchen.

"(The buyers) are individuals who wanted to live in this part of Sydney and are looking to knock down the property and rebuild," McGrath sales agent Michael Dowling told Reuters.

Despite the condition of the house, they were attracted by the nearly 500 sq m (5,382 sq ft) of land, he said.

"More supply is coming into the market but there is still heaps of demand."

In another desirable suburb in Sydney's southeast, an abandoned house with no water supply or power connection went this month for A\$4.7 million.

Property agents said they expected to see more such sales in Australia's A\$8.3 trillion housing market.



A man walks past a derelict home, which sold for A\$1.6 million, in Sydney. — Reuters

Home prices nationally have surged 10.6% from a year ago driven by record-low borrowing rates, tax incentives and solid employment growth.

In Sydney, median prices rose about A\$1,200 a day last month, with buyers willing to pay a premium for uninhabitable homes to tear down and rebuild.

"It's more cost-effective to knock down and rebuild than renovate," said Nerida Conisbee, chief economist at real estate group Ray White.

Sydney's Northern Beaches is another desirable area where there are some "low-quality

homes close to the beach" that may get swooped up for their land value, Conisbee said.

"There is no shortage of people willing to buy. We are seeing very high numbers of active bidders."

The purchases are helping to drive a building boom, with approvals to build new homes at record highs.

The frothiness in the market is starting to worry Australia's Council of Financial Regulators who said last week there were signs of increased risk-taking in mortgage lending by banks, although standards remain sound nationwide. — Reuters



Residents locked down as virus cluster grows in Sydney

SYDNEY: Sydneysiders were largely banned from leaving the city Wednesday as Australian authorities rushed to stop a growing outbreak of the highly contagious Delta Covid-19 variant from spreading to other regions.

More than 30 people have been diagnosed with Covid-19 since the cluster emerged in the city's Bondi Beach area last week, the latest in a string of flare-ups that highlight Australia's difficulty in extinguishing outbreaks.

New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian announced new restrictions that will apply for the next week, including the immediate ban on non-essential travel out of Sydney and limits on social gatherings.

A "very huge proportion" of Sydney's five million residents are subject to the travel ban, which applies to seven

local government areas where Covid-19 cases have been detected, she said.

Authorities stopped short of ordering the closure of restaurants and bars, but singing and dancing are out, while major events can still go ahead with stadium capacity limited to 50 per cent.

Officials pleaded with Sydney residents to follow the new rules.

"I know from my experience ... there is a degree of tiredness and a degree of apathy about the response to the virus," said NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard.

"But in a sense, this is a new and more dangerous version of the virus and that apathy has to be swept away."

Australia has been among the world's most successful countries in containing Covid-19, with just over 30,000 cases and 910 deaths. — AFP

5 years on, Brexit bedevils UK

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday extolled Britain's decision to "take back control of our destiny", five years after a divisive Brexit referendum whose political and economic aftershocks are still reverberating. The coronavirus pandemic has masked the trade dislocation caused by the referendum of June 23, 2016, in which a slim majority voted to end five decades of integration with the European mainland.

The benefits promised by Johnson for a newly invigorated "Global Britain" remain a work in progress, while the UK's own cohesion is at risk from an emboldened nationalist movement in pro-EU Scotland.

But the Conservative prime minister, who rode to power after years of post-referendum political paralysis, remains upbeat.

"Five years ago the British people made the momentous decision to leave the European Union and take back control of our destiny", Johnson said.

"Now as we recover from this pandemic, we will seize the true potential of our regained sovereignty to unite and level up our whole United Kingdom.

"This government got Brexit done and we've already reclaimed our money, laws, borders and waters." In reality, Britain remains



Five years on from Britain's shock decision to quit the European Union, the wounds opened by Brexit have yet to heal, and analysts say its far-reaching changes are only just beginning. — AFP file photo

bound by reams of EU-era legislation, its fishermen are in uproar, and its farmers are crying betrayal over new trade deals.

Britons voted by a narrow margin of 52-48 to leave the EU. A new poll by Savanta ComRes found that if the referendum were repeated today, the result would be 51-49 in favour of staying in.

But when asked if the UK should now rejoin the EU, 51 per cent disagreed.

"I think that whatever happens, whether it's going to be good or

it's bad, I think it's better to have our future in our own destiny", 60-year-old musician Stephen Clark said in Boston, eastern England, which recorded Britain's highest pro-Brexit vote in 2016.

But for the majority of Scots who voted to stay in the EU, the question of national destiny rings equally true.

The Scottish National Party is vowing to hold a new referendum on independence by the end of 2023, against Johnson's objections.

"The impact of Brexit hasn't come because we've been too preoccupied, as the rest of the world has, with Covid", pro-independence university lecturer Diane Willis said in Edinburgh.

"But I think things are now seeping in", she said, giving Northern Ireland as one example where the scale of post-Brexit complications is becoming clear.

"I think the devil is always in the detail, and I don't think the detail yet has come out."

— Agencies

Vaccines effective against Delta Covid variants

LONDON: Covid-19 vaccines made by AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech alliance remain broadly effective against Delta and Kappa variants of the Covid-19 causing virus, which were first identified in India, according to a scientific study, underpinning a continued push to deliver the shots.

The study by Oxford University researchers, published in the journal *Cell*, investigated the ability of antibodies in the blood from people, who were vaccinated with the two-shot regimens, to neutralise the highly contagious Delta and Kappa variants, a statement said.

"There is no evidence of widespread escape suggesting that the current generation of vaccines will provide protection against the B.1.617 lineage", the paper said, referring to the Delta and Kappa variants by a commonly used code.

However, the concentration of neutralising antibodies in the blood was somewhat reduced, which may lead to some breakthrough infections, they cautioned.



A healthcare worker applies a dose of the AstraZeneca coronavirus disease (Covid-19) vaccine in a vaccination centre in San Salvador, El Salvador, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Last week, an analysis by the Public Health England (PHE) showed that vaccines made by Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca offer high protection of more than 90pc against hospitalisation from the Delta variant.

"We are encouraged to see the non-clinical results published from Oxford and these data, alongside the recent early real-world analysis from Public Health England, provide us with a positive indication that our vaccine can have significant impact against the Delta variant", AstraZeneca executive Mene Pangalos said in a separate statement.

— Reuters

Pilots call on politicians to rescue travel industry

LONDON: British pilots on Wednesday urged politicians to save the summer holiday season through clearer travel guidance and provide direct financial support to rescue jobs as the industry grapples with an existential crisis brought on by Covid-19 restrictions.

England is re-opening from a third national Covid-19 lockdown but the travel sector is essentially closed for business, with the government advising against travel for all but a small handful of destinations.

British government ministers are examining ways to re-open travel more broadly, and are considering plans to ditch quarantine requirements for vaccinated adults and their children to some destinations.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned that whatever happens, it will be a difficult year for travel.

"The government has to decide if this summer it will make or break the UK travel

industry", said Brian Strutton, acting General Secretary of the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA).

"Pilots are meeting politicians across the UK today to urge them to put pressure on the government to act now and save not only the summer but the future of UK aviation and travel."

BALPA said that a more transparent and open system to make restrictions more proportionate and re-open larger scale travel to the United States and Europe.

Under the current "traffic light" system, only travellers to a small number of green-list countries can avoid quarantine.

Popular European holiday destinations for Britons, including Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Greece, are currently rated "amber" and require returning passengers to take three expensive Covid-19 tests and isolate for 10 days on return. — Reuters

Crushing climate impacts to hit sooner than feared: Draft UN report

PARIS: Climate change will fundamentally reshape life on Earth in the coming decades, even if humans can tame planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, according to a landmark draft report from the UN's climate science advisers obtained by AFP.

Species extinction, more widespread disease, unliveable heat, ecosystem collapse, cities menaced by rising seas — these and other devastating climate impacts are accelerating and bound to become painfully obvious before a child born today turns 30.

The choices societies make now will determine whether our species thrives or simply survives as the 21st century unfolds, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says in a draft report seen exclusively by AFP.

But dangerous thresholds are closer than once thought, and dire consequences stemming



A child at an area affected by a drought on Earth Day in the southern outskirts of Tegucigalpa. Hunger, drought and disease will afflict tens of millions more people within decades, according to a draft UN assessment that lays bare the dire human health consequences of a warming planet. — AFP

from decades of unbridled carbon pollution are unavoidable in the short-term.

"The worst is yet to come, affecting our children's and grandchildren's lives much more than our own", the report says.

By far the most comprehensive

catalogue ever assembled of how climate change is upending our world, the report reads like a 4,000-page indictment of humanity's stewardship of the planet.

But the document, designed to influence critical policy decisions, is not scheduled for release until



The worst thing is that when people don't want to talk about the climate crisis... when they try to smooth things over. Try to make it sound more attractive

GRETA THUNBERG
Swedish climate activist

February 2022 — too late for crunch UN summits this year on climate, biodiversity and food systems, some scientists say.

In response to AFP's reporting, the IPCC released a statement saying it "does not comment on the contents of draft reports while work is still ongoing". — AFP

BERLIN

Merkel gets Moderna as second jab

German Chancellor Angela Merkel received a Moderna coronavirus vaccine as her second jab, after getting AstraZeneca as the first, a spokesman said on Tuesday. The 66-year-old took her first dose of AstraZeneca's vaccine in April, more than two weeks after German authorities recommended use of the jab only for people aged 60 and over.

Merkel is stepping down this year after 16 years in power.

In 2019, she sparked concerns for her health with a series of



shaking spells in public but has appeared to be in good condition since then. After a stuttering start, Germany's vaccination roll-out has sharply accelerated in recent weeks.

MOSCOW

UK denies Russia claim on warning shots

Russia said on Tuesday it had fired warning shots and dropped bombs in the path of a British destroyer sailing in the Black Sea off the coast of the Crimea peninsula, which Russia seized and annexed from Ukraine.

Britain's Ministry of Defence said no Russian warning shots were fired at the Royal Navy's HMS Defender, which sailed into the Black Sea earlier this month, and it did not recognise assertions that bombs were put in its path.



"We believe the Russians were undertaking a gunnery exercise in the Black Sea and provided the maritime community with prior-warning of their activity", the defence ministry said in a statement on Twitter.

LIMA

Plea to to lock up Fujimori dismissed

A Peruvian judge on Monday dismissed a prosecutor's request for the detention of corruption-accused presidential hopeful Keiko Fujimori while the country awaits the outcome of June 6 elections in which she vied for the top job.

Fujimori, who narrowly trails leftist rival Pedro Castillo according to the unconfirmed vote count, risks an imminent corruption trial if she loses the race.

If she wins, it will be delayed until after her term. Fujimori has



already spent 16 months in pre-trial detention on charges of taking money from scandal-tainted Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht to fund failed presidential bids in 2011 and 2016. She denies the charges.

Quality journalism and why it matters...

Journalism has been a discipline of relevance to society, and impartiality has been at its core. The truth is that there is less of journalism nowadays. The traditional notions of journalistic objectivity are under pressure from authoritarianism, populism and fake news.

Besides, Covid-19 has affected news reporting with a plethora of misinformation and disinformation from both reliable and non-reliable sources. On the other hand, the pandemic accelerated the news media organisations process of digital transition — with social networking sites at the top of choice from where people get their information.

In ‘The Future of Journalism’ report, Mark Scott, an Australian former media executive, wrote that for those who care about quality journalism it is important to preserve the social benefits good journalism has delivered in the past, and that can deliver in the future.

Let’s face it, quality journalism needs skilled people. Good journalism helps people make important decisions about their lives; it helps civil society. However, other perspectives support the idea that with the Internet freely available to spread information, trained skilled professionals are no longer needed.

Technology and social media are now the dominant players as news business models. Twitter for example is now a tool for breaking news reporting,



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news-gathering, and a normalised professional practice — but the writers are not skilled storytellers — which is one of the most effective skills needed in the media.

With newsrooms moving on into new platforms, and new models of controlled news, organisations are investing in IT people rather than journalists. Beautifully well-designed news websites and social platforms are loaded with material from press conferences, controlled news content, and announcements.

As Gaven Morris noted in ‘The Future of Journalism’ report, “a hungry digital beast demand constant content, more deadlines, more mediums, and different versions for niche audiences.” In search for engagement, the beast found its bliss in a well-oiled spin industry. The attention-grabbing algorithms underlying social media contribute to sow confusion, ignorance and ultimately manipulation. In this scenario, it must be added that poor quality reporting is not only a disservice to society but also contributes to misunderstandings.

Within the bleak picture, there are concerns such as the monopoly control of news content; the failure to meet public benefit; and the erosion of journalistic capacity and quality. These not only discredit quality journalism but open doors to allow social media the opportunity to have too much influence on important social and political issues.

It was once assumed that social

networking platforms would enable greater access to information and civil society empowerment. However, it has increasingly been perceived that social media is in reality proving to be among the most effective enablers to authoritarianism. The list of scrutiny can range from the type of articles a consumer reads, the type of stories shared, the click of likes on social media content: the readers’ opinions, relationships, and who is searching for what. Though platforms encourage trust and intimacy, individuals and journalists can fall prey to cybersecurity laws just by commenting on news and public posts.

The complexity of journalism, and information, points to a need to develop systems of public education. It is crucial to cultivate media literacy, social media literacy, ethics and tolerance to different opinions. The tasks are enormous, yet necessary — that is, if a desire to have a well informed and participatory society is there.

How communities can exist and prosper without relevant reliable information? Some people still favour the idea of neutral and objective journalism, and there are others who prefer news that shares their point of view. With the challenges of the digital age, it is important that public service journalism based on quality, transparency, and ethical approach can help people better understand the world they exist.

GREENER OIL

Gridlock puts Norway’s industry in a bind

NORA BULI AND NERIJUS ADOMAITIS

Norway’s oil and gas industry is counting on renewable power from hydro plants to cut emissions from its offshore platforms but rival demand from the green economy is putting a spanner in the works.

The decision to keep investing in new oil and gas projects flies in the face of growing global pressure to shift away from fossil fuels and Norway’s own reputation as a pro-green economy with more electric cars per capita than any other country and a reliance on renewable hydropower for virtually all of its electricity.

But Oslo is loath to relinquish Norway’s lucrative position as one of the world’s top oil and gas producers, accounting for over 40 per cent of its exports, and instead wants to make the industry greener.

“The Norwegian parliament has set a target of 50 per cent reduction in emissions on the Norwegian continental shelf by 2030. Power from shore is the only technology that can deliver cost-efficient cuts that can get the industry close to this target”, Deputy Oil and Energy Minister Tony C Tiller said.

There’s a practical problem with the plan.

Norway’s electricity grid is constrained at some junctures and the needs of other industries, particularly green economy players such as battery factories and hydrogen plants, have to be factored in.

Earlier this year, the national grid operator Statnett told Norway’s state-owned oil firm Equinor and

partner Aker BP to look elsewhere for power capacity, something that could add “nine zeros” to a current 50 billion crown (\$6 billion) project cost estimate for electrifying some of their platforms, according to Aker BP CEO Karl Johnny Hersvik.

Statnett’s recommendation was a rude awakening for the oil industry, which has made Norway one of the richest countries in the world. Without access to cheap, renewable energy some of its oil fields might have to be shut prematurely due to rising emissions costs, analysts say.

Environmentalists say that is what should happen, and that renewable energy should not be used to extend the life of the fossil fuel industry.

“We call it greenwashing because we believe that the oil and gas industry should be phased out, not expanded, and since it should be phased out, it doesn’t make sense to invest in marginal improvement”, Truls Gulowsen, the head of Friends of the Earth Norway, said.

The measure would only address a fraction of total oil and gas emissions, while sucking power from shore that is essential to develop new, green industries, he added.

Norway’s oil and energy ministry told Reuters it “categorically” rejected accusations of “greenwashing”, because electrification would address a significant part of the country’s total emissions.

The industry’s greenhouse gas emissions stood at 13.3 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent in 2020, or 27 per cent of the country’s total, according to the statistics office.

— Reuters

THE COMPLEXITY OF JOURNALISM, AND INFORMATION, POINTS TO A NEED TO DEVELOP SYSTEMS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Creditworthiness is a must...

Solvency and creditworthiness are important not only for countries, governments, companies and institutions. But it is also required for individuals to shape consumer behaviour according to their solvency and credit value so that they can sustain their financial condition.

With this vision, the Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) has decided to provide practical solutions to measure solvency and creditworthiness in the Sultanate of Oman. Various institutions, companies and individuals can equally benefit from this service of accurate assessment of their creditworthiness.

For this purpose the centre has put in place correct mechanisms and standards. This helps in improvement of credit levels, strengthening of the financial environment and ensures ease of doing business in the country according to clear accounting and scientific indicators. It is gratifying that this will reduce credit risks and related problems for individuals and the society in the country.

The services being provided by Mala’a is of huge importance for the country and its people. It helps in strengthening financial standing of every individual and institution. The time is not far when its importance will be appreciated by all in the country.

Mala’a was established by Royal Decree No 38/2019 issued on May 8, 2019, to play a vital role in providing accurate financial and credit data to



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the authorities concerned. Since then, huge interest has been shown in the service. The number of applications for credit reports reached 740 during 2020. It shows that there is a realisation that the centre is playing a crucial role in reducing risks and improving the quality of loans to donors, companies and individuals in a manner which helps in achievement of balance between financial capabilities and the obligations. This is required to make sound decisions for providing loans and prevent any threat of default.

If anybody commits default in repayment of loans and financial obligations, it has negative implications for everybody without any exception. Therefore, it is important for such institutions to guard their credit compass strictly.

Mala’a has signed more than 30 membership agreements with entities working in the area of finance or credit related activities in various sectors. With this, these entities can benefit from the centre’s services for their required data on the creditworthiness of institutions and individuals. This step is of great importance to maintain their financial and credit standing by employing accurate data, in a way which is in the public interest. It can enhance the financial and credit efficiency of the country in a sustainable manner.

We should not overlook the importance of these services to individuals which protect them from

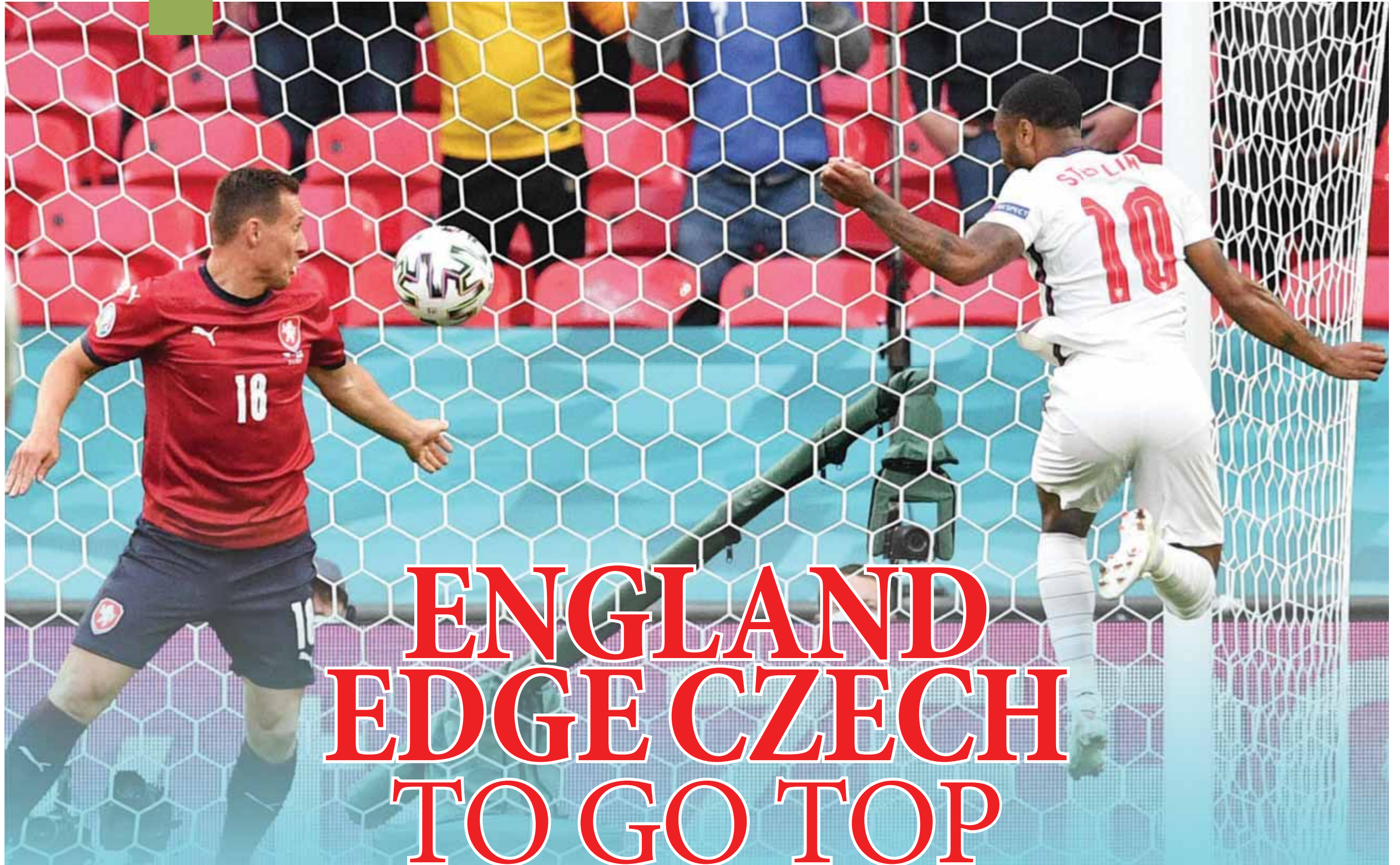
irrational consumer practices and irresponsible financial behaviour. These services increase their credit level and make their lifestyle safe from any such risks. The centre indirectly guides individual behaviours smoothly to the right direction. This is aimed at maintaining the individual’s solvency and making balance between their capabilities and obligations by its credit reports.

The efforts made by the Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre, also known as Mala’a, are very important to make credit conditions stronger and achieve sustainability in business. This is because their financial value is the basis for their business and for getting guarantees. It is important for growth, development and sustainability.

There is no doubt that there are challenges everywhere in large businesses. This is why it is important to create credit culture in the country. With the passage of time, everybody would realise its importance for individuals as well as institutions.

We are confident that Mala’a will achieve its objective of strengthening and consolidating the credit culture. It will take it to levels which will help in achieving the public interest in business sustainability. These are the services of the centre which will ward off risks for individuals and institutions and protect them from negative implications. This is required for everybody’s financial and monetary security and stability.

THE SERVICES BEING PROVIDED BY MALA’A IS OF HUGE IMPORTANCE FOR THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE. IT HELPS IN STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL STANDING OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTION



ANDY JALIL,
LONDON, JUNE 23

With his second goal in three Euro 2020 matches, Raheem Sterling helped England to beat the Czech Republic, 1-0, and head their group as they progress into the last 16 stage. It will be tougher opposition for them next game as they could face, France, Germany, Portugal or if they are fortunate, Hungary — the weakest of the four — depending on results.

England manager Gareth Southgate said: "These will be different games. World champions, European champions or Germany, who are back on song. Whoever we play will be tough opposition. But we've known the route for 18 months. The good thing is that we're still improving, we look different to

play against, there is more to come from us.”

Southgate had to reshuffle his team against the Czechs with Mason Mount and Ben Chilwell in isolation after coming in close contact with Scotland's Covid-positive Billy Gilmour and Phil Foden omitted from the team after receiving a yellow card last match. Bukayo Saka was brought into the side and was man-of-the-match after a most impressive display.

Southgate said: "I can't speak highly enough of him. He earned that opportunity, his performances in training since he joined this camp has been outstanding. He grabbed his chance tonight and was fabulous."

England began with pace and were unlucky not to take the lead after just two minutes when Luke Shaw played a great pass down the

line on the right for Sterling to pick up and chip over the advancing goalkeeper only to see the ball hit the post. England might have scored in the 37th minute when a cross from Shaw deflected off full back Vladimir Coufal and the goalkeeper had to scramble to push it wide at the near post.

The Czechs missed chances too with Jordan Pickford forced into a full-stretch save from a 20-yard effort from Tomas Holes' and Tomas Soucek drove wide after Shaw was unable to clear the ball out of defence with his header.

England, meanwhile were having the better of the game having taken the lead after just 12 minutes. Saka and Jack Grealish, who was also brought into this game and was highly impressive, were both involved in the build-up. Saka

made the run from midfield before Grealish received the ball on the left and sent a fine cross to the far post for Stirling to nod into the net.

The Czechs always looked dangerous in counter attacks particularly in the second half but England's defence held firm and with Harry Maguire having returned to fitness gave the side added strength and his ball-distribution was excellent.

Speaking about the tough opponents to be faced next week, England's match winner in both winning games, Sterling said: "At some point you have to face best teams. It's about challenging yourselves. It's tournament football, it's very different to being at your clubs. We just need to see games out a little bit better. We're making good progress and now it's time for a big challenge."

Standings		EURO 2020						
Group D								
	England		Croatia					
	Czech Rep.		Scotland					
Standings	Pts	P	W	D	L	f	a	D
1 England*	7	3	2	1	0	2	0	2
2 Croatia	4	3	1	1	1	4	3	1
3 Czech Rep.	4	3	1	1	1	3	2	1
4 Scotland	1	3	0	1	2	1	5	-4

Matches: Played - Won - Drawn - Lost
Goals: for - against - Difference

Source: UEFA *Qualified for last 16

Modric inspires Croatia into last 16, Scotland fail again

GLASGOW: An inspired Luka Modric curled home a magnificent finish as Croatia shrugged off a slow start to Euro 2020 to beat Scotland 3-1 on Tuesday and reach the last 16 in style, leaving their opponents again on the tournament scrap-heap.

Nikola Vlastic and Ivan Perisic were also on target for Croatia in a victory that lifted Zlatko Dalic's side — so leggy and unconvincing in their first two games — to second in Group D on four points.

They finished ahead, on goals scored, of the Czech Republic, who lost 1-0 to group winners England.

Croatia, lambasted by their own fans and media after their first two games, next face the runner-up of Group E — where Sweden, Slovakia, Spain and Poland are still jockeying for position — in

Copenhagen on June 28.

Scotland, who scored their only goal of the tournament through Callum McGregor, finished bottom of the pile on one point, despite a positive performance against England lifting hopes of reaching their first knockouts of a major tournament.

Modric's form had been called into question at the tournament, but the 35-year-old shaped a delightful finish into the corner of the net with the outside of his foot in the second half to make it 2-1.

"After tonight's performance, we'd have been able to walk off the pitch with our heads high even if we had lost," said Modric, now both Croatia's youngest and oldest scorer at the Euros.

"The goal I scored means a lot to me, I am glad it helped us win but the most important thing is

Croatia through as runners-up after Czechs lose to England

Vlasic, Modric and Perisic on target for Croatia

Scotland exit after finishing bottom of Group D

Scots have never made knockouts in 11 major tournaments

that the whole team looked the part.”

Deprived of Billy Gilmour, who failed a Covid-19 test, Scotland seemed lacking in midfield and



Croatia's Luka Modric celebrates after the match against Scotland. – Reuters

Croatia bossed the ball, before deservedly taking the lead after 17 minutes as Vlasic scored a sixth goal for his country.

SCOTLAND MISS KNOCKOUTS AGAIN

There seemed little danger when a cross floated towards the far post but Perisic towered above his marker to head down for Vlasic to swivel and finish low into the bottom corner.

The goal drained the life out of Hampden Park and Scotland's fortunes did not look like improving as Croatia stroked passes around, but just as the World Cup finalists seemed likely to turn the screw further, Steve Clarke's side struck back. As the clock ticked towards halftime, Croatia failed to clear a cross and it fell at the feet of McGregor just outside the box. — **Reuters**

Suns sink Clippers with last-gasp Ayton dunk



Phoenix Suns' Deandre Ayton (22) scores the game-winning shot against Los Angeles Clippers. — USA Today Sports

LOS ANGELES: Deandre Ayton made the go-ahead catch and dunk with one second left and a bloodied Devin Booker scored 20 points as the Phoenix Suns shocked the Los Angeles Clippers 104-103 in game two of their NBA play-off series.

Booker shook off a cruel clash of heads that left him bloodied and bruised, returning to the game as the Suns took down the Clippers in a see-saw fourth quarter to win their ninth straight and seize a 2-0 lead in the Western Conference finals.

"It was like a Muhammad Ali fight with haymaker after haymaker going back and forth," said Suns guard Cameron Payne, who finished with a career-high 29 points.

Ayton scored the eventual game winner in a thrilling finish as the Suns perfectly executed on their final possession of the game.

The play started with an inbound pass by Suns forward Jae Crowder who lobbed it directly to the front of the basket where a leaping Ayton was waiting. He caught and then

dunked the ball in one motion to give to give the Suns a 104-103 lead with 0.7 seconds left.

Clippers Paul George then put up a desperation shot at the buzzer but it hit the front of the rim and bounced harmlessly away to end the game in front of the crowd of 16,600 at Phoenix Suns Arena.

"Jae made a great pass," said Ayton, who finished with 24 points and 14 rebounds. "I am glad it counted. We just wanted to finish the game strong."

If game one in the series was the feel-out game then game two was the knockout punch. Booker had his nose bloodied late in the third quarter when he accidentally butted heads with Clippers' Pat Beverley.

The 24-year-old Booker needed two stitches and may have broken his nose. But rather than let it end his night, Booker returned to power his team to victory with another superb offensive performance.

"They put a lot of pressure on D-Brook. I hope his nose isn't broken," said Ayton. — AFP

New Zealand eye World Test final glory

INDIA COLLAPSE TO GET ALL OUT FOR 170

SOUTHAMPTON, United Kingdom: New Zealand were in sight of winning the inaugural World Test Championship final at Southampton against India heading into the last session of Wednesday's additional sixth day.

At tea, they were 19-0 off eight overs, having been set a target of 139 in 53 overs after dismissing India for 170 in their second innings.

Tim Southee took wickets at both the top and bottom of the order in a haul of 4-48 in 19 overs.

Longtime new-ball partner Trent Boult struck twice in an over on the way to 3-39 in 15 overs with towering paceman Kyle Jamieson, following his first-innings 5-31, snaring India captain Virat Kohli for the second time in the match during a miserly return of 2-30 in 24 overs.

They would have had even fewer runs to chase had not Rishabh Pant, the innings top-scorer with 41, been dropped on five.

Pant and Rohit Sharma, out for 30 on Tuesday, were the only India batsmen to make more than 16.

New Zealand, with the weather set fair on a sunny day, now only needed to score at a run-rate of under three an over.

Few cricket fans around the world would begrudge New Zealand, a country with a



India's Rishabh Pant in action. — Reuters

population of around five million compared to India's 1.3 billion, victory after their agonising Super Over loss to England in the 2019 50-over World Cup final at Lord's.

But they entered this final match-hardened after a recent 1-0 series win in England, whereas India were playing their first Test since March.

Victory would give New Zealand's men just their second major global cricket title after they beat India in the the 2000 Champions Trophy one-day final in Kenya.

After rain washed out two days of this match, the reserve day — a special provision for this Test — was used in the hope a two-year

effort to crown red-ball cricket's first official world champions would end with an outright winner.

Play resumed in bright sunshine on Wednesday in a match where there is total prize money of \$2.4 million, with India 64-2.

KOHLI FALLS EARLY

Star batsman Kohli had added just five runs to his overnight eight when he fell to Royal Challengers Bangalore team-mate Jamieson for the second time in the Test, edging a delivery that bounced and moved late to wicketkeeper BJ Watling, in his final match before retirement.

And 71-3 became 72-4 when

Cheteshwar Pujara, who took 80 balls to score his 15, edged Jamieson low to a diving Ross Taylor at first slip.

Pujara's exit brought in the free-scoring Pant, whose batting heroics had helped India achieve a remarkable come from behind series win in Australia earlier this year.

But the wicketkeeper should have been out for five when he edged Jamieson, only for second-slip Southee, going across first slip, to drop a routine chance.

Pant, to the delight of India fans in the crowd, then whipped Southee past mid-on for four.

India were 130-5 at lunch, a lead of 98 runs, with Pant 28 not out and fellow left-hander Ravindra Jadeja unbeaten on 12.

Jadeja fell for 16 but Pant pressed on before a skied edge off Boult was brilliantly caught by Henry Nicholls running away from the pitch at point.

Two balls later, India were 156-8 when Ravichandran Ashwin was well held by Taylor at first slip.

That this might be New Zealand's day was emphasised when tailender Mohammed Shami was caught by Tom Latham at fly-slip off Southee moments after skipper Williamson had moved him to the rarely used position.

— AFP

Medvedev advances in Mallorca, Djokovic tries doubles



SANTA PONCA, Spain: Some of the world's top men had mixed fortunes as they warmed up for Wimbledon at the Mallorca grass-court event on Tuesday.

World number two Daniil Medvedev eased into the quarterfinals, fifth ranked Dominic Thiem retired from his second-round game with a wrist injury, while number one Novak Djokovic barely survived on a rare excursion into doubles.

Medvedev lost the first three games to Corentin Moutet, but found his rhythm to win 6-4, 6-2.

The victory over Frenchman Moutet improved Medvedev's career record on grass to 19-13. The Russian has previously reached the semifinals at Eastbourne in 2017 and at Queen's Club in 2019.

His build-up to Wimbledon, which starts next Monday, will continue with a last-eight meeting with the young Norwegian, Casper Ruud.

Thiem retired with a right wrist injury while leading 5-2 against Frenchman Adrian Mannarino.

The Austrian was returning to the courts three weeks after a five-set loss in the first round of the French Open to Pablo Andujar.

Djokovic, who won Roland Garros on June 13, did not enter the singles in Mallorca.

Instead, he opted to play doubles for the first time since the ATP Cup in Australia in February. He paired with 31-year-old Spaniard Carlos Gomez-Herrera, ranked 355 in singles, and they received a wild card entry.

On Tuesday, they got a workout from another Serb Nikola Cacic and his partner from Bosnia Tomislav Brkic, before winning 5-7, 6-4, 13-11.

In the deciding super tie-break, the Djokovic pair saved two match points before advancing.

— AFP

Pliskova fails to defend Eastbourne title



Italy's Camila Giorgi in action against Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova. — Reuters

LONDON: Former world number one Karolina Pliskova will drop out of the WTA's top 10 for the first time in almost five years after her bid to retain the Eastbourne title was ruined by Camila Giorgi on Tuesday.

The fifth-seeded Czech was beaten 2-6, 6-2, 6-2 by Italian qualifier Giorgi in the first round of the Wimbledon warm-up event on England's south-coast.

French Open finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova suffered a 6-1, 6-3 defeat against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko.

Russia's Pavlyuchenkova lost to Barbora Krejickova in the Roland Garros title match, having at last reached her first Grand Slam final at a record 52nd attempt.

Second seed Elina Svitolina held her nerve to beat French Open quarter-finalist Paula Badosa 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1).



Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova reacts during her match against Italy's Camila Giorgi. — Reuters

Bianca Andreescu, seeded third, secured her first victory on grass since 2018, defeating Christina McHale 6-4, 2-6, 6-2.

Britain's Harriet Dart lost 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4 against Kazakh world number 21 Elena Rybakina, who beat Serena Williams at the French Open. — AFP



TOKYO 2020

TAKES NEW STEPS TO CURB COVID

TOKYO: Alcohol, high-fives and talking loudly will be banned for the reduced numbers of Olympic ticket holders allowed into venues as organisers concede a “sense of celebration” will be limited at a Games already postponed by a year due the coronavirus.

Organisers have pushed ahead with preparations for the Olympics, still called Tokyo 2020, despite strong concerns among the Japanese public that hosting competitors from around the world could result in further Covid-19 outbreaks.

Compounding those worries, a second member of Team Uganda, an athlete, has tested positive after being given a clean bill of health just days ago upon arrival in Japan.

Media reports that organisers were considering allowing alcohol consumption in Olympic venues when sales have been restricted in and around Tokyo over concerns it would increase contact and mingling in bars provoked an outcry this week.

The hashtag “cancel the Olympic Games” garnered tens of thousands of tweets, adding to wave of protests online and on the streets over the past months.

A crowd of people gathered in front of the metropolitan government headquarters on Wednesday evening to protest against the Games, with participants chanting “cancel Olympics”, “stop the torch”, “save

The COVID Games

Stringent pandemic controls for Olympic athletes, with violators facing possible disqualification and fines

LIAISON OFFICER

Each athlete assigned a Covid-19 Liaison officer (CLO)

The CLO is responsible for the athlete complying with the rules

Provides information and support

Works with athlete to formulate an "Activity Plan"

ACTIVITY PLAN

Includes accommodation address, all travel details

All planned destinations to be listed

List of people the athlete expects to meet and spend time with

CLO submits plan to Olympic authorities for approval

APPS

All athletes required to download two apps available after end of June

- Online Check-in and Health report App (OCHA)
- Contact Confirming App (COCOA)

If any athlete does not have a compatible smartphone, they must obtain a "Written Pledge" from their CLO

TESTING AND MONITORING

- Athletes must carefully monitor their health for 14 days before travelling to Japan
- Must take two separate covid tests before arriving in Japan, within 96 hours of each other, with the second one taking place within 72 hours of embarkation
- Proof of negative test results must be brought to Japan in a government approved certificate format
- Rapid antigen test taken on arrival at airport
- Daily testing during the Games

MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL LIFE

- Athletes must only leave accommodation to go to official venues and limited additional locations outlined in the Activity Plan
- Where possible, use only dedicated Games vehicles
- No walking around the city, tourism, visiting shops, restaurants, bars
- Eating restricted to accommodation, games venue, and socially distanced athlete's village restaurants
- When supporting team mates, advised to clap instead of singing or chanting
- Advised to minimise stay in Japan after completing event

Source: Tokyo2020.org -- The Playbook: athletes and officials

lives”, and “protect livelihoods”.

A month before the opening ceremony on July 23, Tokyo Olympics President Seiko Hashimoto reiterated that organisers wanted a safe and secure Games.

“If our citizens have concerns (over serving alcohol at the Olympics),

I think we have to give up on that. That’s why we have decided to ban the sale of alcohol,” she told reporters.

Sponsor Asahi Breweries said it agreed with the decision, calling the move natural.

Ticket holders, to be selected in a new lottery after domestic spectators

were capped at up to 10,000 per venue, will also be asked to go straight to venues and straight home, to refrain from talking en route and should not ask athletes for autographs.

“The major challenge at the Tokyo Games is to curb a flow of people and limit a sense of celebration,”

Hashimoto said. “We are striving to make the Tokyo Games safe and secure, so it won’t be full of celebration.”

When Tokyo won the Games back in 1964, it was greeted with a roar of approval and an outpouring of emotion from a country hailing the decision as the final step of the country’s recovery from a devastating 1945 earthquake and tsunami that set off multiple reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

UGANDAN CASES

Eight years on, that joy has been dimmed by the pandemic.

Japanese medical experts have said banning spectators is the least risky option but also given recommendations on how best to host the Games if spectators are admitted. Spectators from overseas have already been barred.

Hashimoto has defended the decision to allow spectators.

“I understand that holding the event without spectators would lower the risk, but there is evidence that there have been no clusters at other events and tournaments,” Hashimoto said on Tuesday.

Organisers said on Wednesday they would decide on whether to allow spectators at night sessions, taking infections into account, by July 12 when virus curbs are due to be lifted in Tokyo and some other areas.

— Reuters



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MAISARAH

3D printed buildings now allowed at SEZs and free zones



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has approved building construction based on the use of 3D printing techniques at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). It also affirmed the use of 3D printed structures at other SEZs and free zones in the country.

Different packages of facilities and incentives will be offered for companies that prefer to use the 3D-printed building technology, with an exemption from the leasing fees for a period of five years, it said.

The approval came at the second meeting of the Board, chaired by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Board. During the meeting, the Board discussed the proposal aimed to promote real estate development in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD)

based on a mechanism that stimulates introducing long-term housing solutions and providing residential properties under long-term contracts.

The meeting touched on the actions taken to attract clean energy projects in Duqm and Sohar, and highlighted what has been accomplished in activating the services of one-stop shop in both Salalah Free Zone and Sohar Free Zone, taking into account the one-stop shop experience in Duqm.

Further, the Board was briefed about the latest updates regarding the procedures for providing gas for a number of projects in the chemicals sector in Salalah Free Zone, steel and mining industries in SEZAD.

They were also updated on the procedures implemented for registering the green hydrogen production project company in Duqm, and the programme for installing experimental equipment for the project.

Oman, IEA to co-host Ministerial Dialogue on clean energy transition

NET-ZERO EMISSIONS: Sep 9 event to feature top officials of hydrocarbon producing countries in MENA region affected by climate change

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

The Sultanate will co-host a Ministerial Dialogue with the International Energy Agency (IEA) on September 9, 2021, with the participation of top officials from Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries.

The event, jointly organised by Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Paris-based global energy forum, will explore ways to leverage clean energy transitions to ensure broader economic resilience in oil and gas producing countries impacted by climate change.

The Ministerial Dialogue — co-hosted by Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy and IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol — will address the particular challenges that energy transitions present for economies in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the tangible opportunities for those countries to increase economic resilience and prosperity for the region and its people.

“Not only is the Middle East and North Africa region warming at a significantly faster rate than the global average, but the region's exports are uniquely vulnerable to energy market shifts resulting from global efforts to mitigate climate change.

If oil and gas demand were to decline as much as implied in the IEA's Global Road map to Net-Zero



“Not only is the Middle East and North Africa region warming at a significantly faster rate than the global average, but the region's exports are uniquely vulnerable to energy market shifts resulting from global efforts to mitigate climate change

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY

Emissions by 2050, then producer economies' net incomes from oil and gas could fall to just one-fifth of their current levels in the next three decades. The loss of these revenues would pose substantial risks for undiversified economies,” warned the Agency in a press statement.

It noted however that economies in the region are well placed to

leverage their existing capacities and competitive advantages in clean energy technologies.

This could help satisfy their own growing energy demand and potentially open new export opportunities for emerging low-carbon energy sectors, such as hydrogen. “Countries in the region have some of the best solar resources in the world,

and recent prices obtained at auction attest to significant further potential. Meanwhile, growing energy demand in the region could be mitigated through increased investment in energy efficiency, which would have the added benefit of creating high-value private-sector jobs, a crucial consideration in a region where high unemployment is a serious issue,” the IEA statement added.

Established in 1974, the IEA is an international energy forum comprise of 29 industrialised countries under the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD). Its mandate has expanded over time to include tracking and analysing global key energy trends, promoting sound energy policy, and fostering multinational energy technology cooperation.

Sohar Port inks strategic agreement with Brazilian port

GROWTH STRATEGY: Both parties to explore joint business opportunities, exchange of knowledge and best practices, and develop technologies for green hydrogen and other renewables

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

SOHAR Port and Freezone have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Port of Pecém in Ceará, one of Brazil's top ten major ports. The agreement will allow the entities to collaboratively advance their global maritime and logistics operations, enacting a number of shared objectives including the exploration of joint business opportunities, the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and



developing technologies for green hydrogen and other renewables, in cooperation with its shareholders, Port of Rotterdam and Asyad.

As one of the world's fastest-growing ports, the tie-up reinforces

Sohar Port's growth strategy while strengthening its position as a key logistics hub in the region and beyond.

“International partnerships, like the one with Pecém, allow us to

consolidate expertise that helps us strengthen and expand our world port network and foster economic competitiveness,” said Mark Geilenkirchen, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar Port.

As the closest Brazilian terminal to both the USA and Europe, the Port of Pecém is becoming a main hub for North and Northeast Brazil. Considered to have the best port and hinterland infrastructure connectivity in the region, it is one of just a few Brazilian terminals capable of handling ultra large container vessels

“Particularly with Brazil being such a strong player in food exports, Pecém is a welcome addition to our flourishing food cluster. At the same time, by showcasing the incredible success Vale has achieved in Oman

over the last 10 years, it will enable us to demonstrate to Brazilian companies the vast opportunities SOHAR has to offer.”

Danilo Serpa, CEO of Complex of Pecém said, “Our relationship with the Port of Rotterdam, who has been our partner since 2018, has opened up many new opportunities for us, including our latest with the SOHAR.

Strategically located on a global trade route connecting Europe and Asia, it presents us with unrivalled connectivity, helping us to tap into the tremendous potential of the region. We look forward to linking both ports and bringing value to our shared customer base.”

As the closest Brazilian terminal to both the USA and Europe, the Port of Pecém is becoming a main hub for North and Northeast Brazil. Considered to have the best port and hinterland infrastructure connectivity in the region, it is one of just a few Brazilian terminals capable of handling ultra large container vessels.

Why bank mergers bode well for the region

Economists have emphasised the importance of bank mergers in the region to cope with present and future challenges.

Mergers enable the adoption of best practices and procedures that pave the way for healthier growth in the financial, banking and investment sectors. This approach will also help buttress national economies through the establishment of efficient and sound institutions with good quality assets and high liquidity.

The few mergers reported in this sector came after extensive, in-depth and comprehensive due diligence and economic studies that took into account all scenarios. The most recent merger, which took place last week in Doha, was Al Rayan Bank and Gulf Commercial

Bank to establish a unified entity after requisite approvals between the two institutions.

Banking sector merger take into account resulting benefits to both constituent entities, as well as the wider stakeholder community, to create a strong cornerstone for financing and investment.

This will result in a significant reduction in administrative and operational costs for both parties and improve their collective performance, competencies and capabilities.

It is expected that a merger will contribute to a 30-per cent reduction in operational costs upon the completion of the exercise encompassing staff, offices, branches, transportation, and other functions. The new entity will also benefit from cost reductions in relation to fees and



HAIDER ALLAWATI
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BANKING SECTOR MERGER TAKE INTO ACCOUNT RESULTING BENEFITS TO BOTH CONSTITUENT ENTITIES, AS WELL AS THE WIDER STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY, TO CREATE A STRONG CORNERSTONE FOR FINANCING AND INVESTMENT

financial transactions.

Today there is no place for weak institutions in the world, whether they operate in the political or economic realm, unless they are distinguished by their strength, performance, efficiency, calibre of their staff, and the use of modern technologies to deliver their services, particularly in light of the ongoing pandemic.

All of this is also true of the banking sector in our region, where a number of bank mergers have been concluded in recent years with beneficial impacts for the wider economy.

It has led to the establishment of large institutions corporate institutions that have enabled the provision of funding support for individuals, entrepreneurs and owners of small business.

We expect that the trend will

be replicated during the coming period due to the constraints that governments and private institutions are going through because of the adverse effects of the economic slump, on the one hand, and the pandemic on the other.

Hence, any economic or banking sector integration in the world will lead to the strengthening of institutions in addressing current and future challenges and difficulties.

Mergers will undoubtedly lead to the creation of stronger financial institutions not only at the national level, but regionally and globally as well. Indeed, bank mergers in any country have many positive effects for the banking sector in particular and economy in general, as they contribute to the delivery of enhanced banking services.

Ooredoo, Nokia introduce new FWA on-premises gateway



MUSCAT: Ooredoo and Nokia have announced a partnership for the introduction of Nokia's FastMile 4G and 5G fixed wireless access (FWA) on-premises gateway, which offers an amazing and superfast in-home Wi-Fi experience to customers across the Sultanate. The new state-of-the-art units will provide homes and businesses with a fantastic Internet experience.

Dr Ahmed bin Abdullah al Abri (pictured), Chief Technology and Information Officer at Ooredoo Oman, said, "Fixed wireless access is a critical part of our strategy to provide high-speed Internet across Oman. These top-of-the-line wireless CPE devices are taking our 4G and 5G experience to the next level. Meanwhile, we continue to offer market-leading connectivity, supporting the demands of our residential and business customers for superfast and reliable internet."

Buy MG Motor’s MG 5 with starting EMI at RO 69 only



MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to Do More, MG Motor is offering its stylish and sleek MG 5 sedan with a reasonable EMI starting from RO 69 only. MG Motor has extended its Festival of Winning campaign by popular demand and if you book or buy MG 5 sedan by end of June, you can avail low EMI offer along with a host of other benefits. The buyer of MG 5 will get a chance to instantly win mobile phone bundles or fuel

cards or up to 200km free service packages.

Apart from this, the buyer will also stand a chance to win his/her car back every week. The other guaranteed benefits are free insurance, free registration and free window tinting.

A senior spokesperson of MHD, the sole distributors of MG Motor in Oman, says: "Known for its distinctive style, superior performance and smart technology, MG 5 is one of our

most special sedans and we are happy to offer it at a monthly reasonable EMI of RO 69 only. We have clubbed this offer with our ongoing Festival of Winning campaign for guaranteed benefits to our customers. The buyer of MG 5 will enter a weekly draw and if selected, he/she will get a chance to win the car back. This is a great deal as there is a huge demand for MG 5 for its capabilities, comfort and safety quotient and value for money."

All-New 2022 Toyota Land Cruiser Now in Oman

Reinforcing the legendary status of one of Oman’s best-loved vehicles, Toyota has launched the new generation iconic Land Cruiser in Oman.

Throughout its 70-year history, it has served as an indispensable tool that supports people’s livelihoods in remote destinations, contributes to humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts, and enriches people’s lives through experiences only the Land Cruiser can provide.

A cumulative total of approximately 10.4 million units have been enjoyed by customers in 170 countries all over the world, and particularly in the Middle East where the Land Cruiser has attained a loyal following thanks to its reliability, durability, and superlative off-road performance.

Takami Yokoo, Chief Engineer in charge of development, commented: “The Land Cruiser must remain true to its roots. The launch of the all-new Land Cruiser is a celebration of its 70th year as an icon, and I sincerely hope it can be a source of vitality and support for our customers around the world.”

“We are excited to introduce the all-new Land Cruiser, an iconic vehicle that has earned its place in the hearts of drivers around the world and remains one of the region’s most popular SUVs,” said Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation.

“The Land Cruiser’s go-anywhere capability truly delivers the joy of mobility, bringing unrivalled performance, safety, and comfort to drivers and passengers alike.”

The 2022 Land Cruiser is equipped with a choice of three powertrain options, including two newly developed V6 twin-turbo engines. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm.

Meanwhile, the V6 twin-turbo engine 3.3-litre diesel variant, which will be



available to buy in the region soon, is capable of 302 hp and up to 700 nm. Both of these newly developed engines are mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission.

The vehicle is also available with a naturally aspirated 4.0-litre V6 petrol engine that produces 271 hp and up to 385 nm mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

Additionally, the vehicle is available with Adaptive Variable Suspension System (AVS), the All-Wheel Drive Integrated Management (AIM) concept, which delivers integrated control of the vehicle’s drive force, AWD, suspension, braking and

steering systems according to driving conditions to enhance driving pleasure.

The all-new Land Cruiser is equipped with the latest off-road driver assistance features, including the new 3D-Multi-Terrain Monitor (3D-MTM) which assists the driver in determining the road conditions around the vehicle, a first for Toyota that facilitates safer and more confident low-speed manoeuvring.

A new AUTO mode enhances the capabilities of Multi-Terrain Select by adjusting according to road conditions such as sand, rock, dirt and mud. The

vehicle also features crawl control and turn assist functions.

The all-new interior cocoons passengers in a sophisticated and comfortable space unaffected by the external environment.

The cabin offers a range of advanced features such as wireless charging for smartphones, Active Noise Control, and a 4-zone automatic air conditioning system with rear control switches. The cluster gauge features a 7-inch colour Multi-Information Display (MID) and a 12.3-inch Multimedia Display.

Additional features available include a 14-speaker JBL sound system, Rear

Seat Entertainment (RSE) system with 11.6-inch touch-screen displays that are Wi-Fi and HDMI connection enabled, ventilation for the first and second-row seats, a multi-adjustable power driver seat, 40:20:40 split-folding second-row seats, fully flat-folding third-row seats, a kick-sensor operated power tailgate, and smart entry and start systems.

Safety remains a top priority for the all-new Land Cruiser, which comes with an advanced safety system.

This is complemented by Toyota Safety Sense, an advanced safety technology package that includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS) that introduces new features including Emergency Steering Assist (ESA) and Intersection Turn Assistance to help prevent collisions with vehicles and pedestrians.

The package also includes Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) with Full-Speed Range, Lane Tracing Assist (LTA), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), and Automatic High Beam (AHB).

In addition, the car features a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as SRS airbags, including side-curtain airbags for all three rows, Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), Multi-Terrain Monitor (MTM) including Panoramic View Monitor (PVM), Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA), Drive Start Control (DSC) and a clearance sonar featuring eight sensors located in the front and rear bumpers.

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

For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman or www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



Jordan Aviation to operate flights between Muscat and Amman

MUSCAT: Jordan Aviation, Jordan's budget airline, has received landing rights to operate weekly 2 flights between Muscat and Amman effective June 28. Their first flight from Amman to Muscat is all set to take off with overwhelming response on both destinations. Marmul International Travel, a flagship division of Marmul Travel & Tours has been appointed as the general sales agent here in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion Mebal Pinto, Group General Manager of Marmul Group of Companies had said, "This new Airline will be a valuable bridge between two beautiful countries — Oman & Jordan, and will



definitely enhance Oman's position in the list of Jordan Aviation's 11th international destinations — Dubai, Sharjah, Cairo, Dhaka, Istanbul, Baghdad, Antalya, Aqaba, Sharemsaikh".

Reiterating the objective behind starting the flight operations, Osama Quntar, Vice-President — Commercial, Jordan Aviation said, "It is a privilege to

have Jordan Aviation, Jordan's favourite airline, as a partner in Oman.

The representation of this Airline in Oman will definitely increase the visibility of the brand in the market and attract even more clients. More importantly it will enhance the Economic activities between the two friendly countries."

Ominvest starts vaccination for employees and families



MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) started Covid-19 vaccination for its employees and their families. 80 per cent of staff members have so far received the first dose of the vaccine. Second doses will be provided in few weeks' time.

In collaboration with Burjeel Hospital, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was administered at Ominvest's premises, while adhering to all protocols approved by the Ministry of Health.

"The well-being of our staff has always been part of our top priorities. By raising awareness on the importance of vaccination and making it available for our employees and their families, we contribute to the national effort to fight Covid-19. Through vaccination, we also see a

glimpse of hope to regain some normalcy in the near future. We do so while maintaining all needed health and safety measures to ensure the well-being of our staff and to serve the needs of our stakeholders with greater efficiency", said Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO, Ominvest.

This initiative by Ominvest is in line with its corporate citizenship, and in support of the government's efforts to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Since the start of the pandemic, Ominvest has worked diligently to raise health awareness amongst its people and apply all necessary measures at the workplace. Remote work protocols have been in place across Ominvest Group to make sure employees' safety, work productivity, and business continuity are maintained.

SA recognises excelling employees and departments

MUSCAT: Sohar Aluminium (SA) recently held a virtual ceremony to recognise its excelling employees and departments as part of the 2020 Muntaz Recognition Scheme. The event was attended by the CEO of the company, members of the Executive Committee, and the Management Team.

The achievers, including top nominees and winners in the company's six strategic objectives, were thanked, and applauded by the leaders of the company for their outstanding work and dedication.

Engineer Said al Masoudi, SA's CEO praised the nominees and winners for their exceptional efforts and hard work and reiterated the importance of sustaining the benefits and results that were achieved last year.

In 2020, the company witnessed great achievements in its Environment, Health and Safety, Productivity and Incremental Improvements, People and Community, Innovation and Growth, Financial Strength, and Customer Satisfaction strategic objectives. One of the major achievements was the outstanding results of the Value Creation Programme that saw savings above set targets.

Omani women are breaking cultural barriers

It's International Women in Engineering Day yesterday (June 23, 2021) and I couldn't be happier. First off, let me introduce myself. I'm Sara al Mandhari, I'm from Oman and I'm an electrical engineer. Given this auspicious day, I wanted to share my engineering journey with all of you in the hope of inspiring and motivating you.

My first step into the world of electrical engineering began in 2013 while I was at Sultan Qaboos University. I was enrolled in a general engineering degree and was deciding which major I should pick.

Although I loved chemical engineering in high school and was leaning towards the same degree, the professors I worked with made me see things in a whole new light.

Even though chemical engineering was my first choice, the faculty pointed out that my mindset, problem-solving skills, and logic-based reasoning made me a stronger candidate for a degree in electrical engineering. This was a quite a departure from what Omani women were choosing to study at the time.

Civil and architecture engineering were much more popular for young women to pursue, so my decision to become an electrical engineer was met with a little resistance from family, especially my grandmother who saw electrical engineering as a 'man's job'.

However, I wanted to follow my dreams and that's exactly what I did.

It wasn't easy in the beginning but today I handle inside sales for electrical equipment and provide on-site technical and digital solutions to customers around the Gulf. I really love my job and my work brings me so much joy.

It's the perfect combination of my technical and social skills, and it also gives me the unique chance to negotiate, which I thoroughly enjoy.

Obviously, at the start of my career there were some heads turning because it was quite rare to have a female electric engineering salesperson, especially one from Oman.

However, in time, customers and channel partners were a lot



Remember, if we as women believe we can do it, the universe will always support us to achieve our dreams and goals. There's no doubt about that

SARA AL MANDHARI
Electrical engineer

more encouraging and pleased to see women like me take on traditionally male-dominated roles in engineering.

Now if you were to ask me my advice for young, budding women engineers given my personal experience, I'd say to focus on what you want, work very hard and fight for what you believe in and you will get what you want.

Given the uncertainty in the current economic climate, I feel strongly that every young woman needs to take up the challenge and always follow their dreams regardless of the hurdles they face.

Remember, if we as women believe we can do it, the universe will always support us to achieve our dreams and goals. There's no doubt about that.

Fortunately for us women, more and more companies

are now seeing the huge value women can bring to the field of engineering. In fact, when I was in university there were only five ladies in the engineering programme when I started in 2013.

I was the only woman in many of my engineering classes, however when I graduated in 2018 I saw so many more women enrolled, which made me so incredibly happy and hopeful for the future.

Slowly but surely, I also saw progress in the workplace and began noticing women regularly working in on-site offices and even on the field in on-site projects across Oman. The tides were changing.

I'm very lucky to work for my employer because it's a company that values and promotes gender equality.

In fact, Schneider is the first multi-national company to achieve commitment by all its country leaders to the Women's Empowerment Principles, and that makes me so proud to work for a company like this.

It's very important for me to work for an organisation that values the role and contribution of woman in the workplace.

At Schneider there is no difference in opportunities for males or females; everyone gets an equal chance and is encouraged to grow, learn, and excel in their jobs.

I want to see more young Omani women take up the opportunity to enter engineering; They will succeed professionally; they will transform the workplace and they will continue to break through cultural barriers.

[Sara al Mandhari is Schneider Electric's first female inside sales representative in Oman]

New mobile app to enrich domestic tourism in Oman

MUSCAT: 'My Stay' mobile application (Eqamati) was launched recently as a mobile application to enrich the domestic tourism of Ash Sharqiya Governorate in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general. The application can be easily downloaded for free from the App store of the smartphones.

'My Stay' online booking application contains various tourism services and entertainment activities to help users search for best accommodation options and the best prices for Hotels, Apartments,

Chalets, Lodges, Rest houses and Camps.

The booking application is a brainchild of Maryam al Gheilani, an entrepreneur who owns a company in tourism named United Four Seasons in Wilayat Sur. The idea of the application comes as a result of the rapid changes and development in tourism sector globally and the need for people to use modern technology for obtaining efficient and prompt results. The project has been a beneficiary of the BP Khazzan Project for SME Development.

Al Maha signs cooperation pact with OIH

MUSCAT: Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company signed a memorandum of cooperation with Oman International Hospital (OIH). The agreement was signed on behalf of Al Maha by its CEO Eng Hamed al Maghdari and by Marcelo Pereira, CEO of OIH.

The agreement aims to provide important additional services to Al Maha prepaid card holders, as the cardholder will receive 15 per cent discount in a comprehensive healthcare screening and general



practitioner consultation. Oman International Hospital will offer the Membership Bronze Card to 150 e-rial Card holders.

Eng Hamed al Maghdari, CEO of Al Maha said that

Al Maha seeks to launch a number of important projects and valuable additional services that will impress and satisfy the company's customers and provide them with comfort, and which will

be announced during the coming weeks.

Marcelo Pereira, CEO of OIH, said, "we are pleased with this cooperation and partnership with Al Maha and our full readiness to provide discounts and healthcare at Oman International Hospital, which is one of the largest private hospitals, which will be officially opened in the coming months. The hospital includes local and international medical staff, up to date medical devices and equipment's, 4 operating theatres and 200 beds."

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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features



From making films to teaching art classes

Mai is a 23-year-old film-making graduate who got her degree from the New York Film Academy in America with the hope of making a film-making career in Oman. But finding a job with her degree is not easy, especially during a global pandemic... **20**

CULTURE

READ

GOLDEN GIRL
BY ELIN HILDERBRAND

A Nantucket novelist gets one final summer to watch what happens from the great beyond.

Colombia has the world's largest variety of butterfly species: Study

COLOMBIA IS HOME to the world's largest variety of butterflies, approximately 20 per cent of all known species, according to a study published on Tuesday by the Natural History Museum in London.

An international team of scientists cataloged 3,642 species and 2,085 subspecies, register-

ing them in a document titled "Checklist of Colombian Butterflies."

More than 200 butterfly species are found only in Colombia, said Blanca Huertas, the senior butterfly collection curator at the Natural History Museum in London, who was part of the research team.

Project researchers travelled widely in Colombia, analysed more than 350,000 photographs, and studied information collected since the late 18th century, the museum said.

"Colombia is a country with a great diversity of natural habitats, a complex and heterogeneous geography and a privileged location in the extreme northeast of South America," the report reads in part.

"These factors, added to the delicate public order in the last century in certain regions, has limited until now, the advancement of field exploration."

Colombia has endured more than half a century of armed conflict, with some areas controlled by leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups



or drug lords, and with little government presence.

Protecting butterflies in Colombia will also help protect its forests as well as other, less likeable species, Huertas said.

Between 2000 and 2019 Colombia lost nearly 2.8 million hectares of forest, equivalent to the area of Belgium, according to the National Department of Planning. — **AFP**



Al Fardh Mosque in Nizwa is perfect place to start appreciating Islamic art

Since the dawn of Islamic civilisation, Muslims never hesitated to build mosques whenever even slight needs arose. As a result, mosques with their imposing minarets, domes and iwans or portals emerged as the most dominant elements in the skyline of Muslim urban and rural settlements. The language of mosque architecture, likewise, emerged as the most prevailing and influential in the total organisation of Islamic architecture. In fact, the language of mosque architecture came first into being as most complete, which then was modified and as much as possible integrated into the rest of the corpus of the Islamic built environment.

In Oman, the interest in building and decorating mosques appeared since the early ages of Islam. This sacred place where people perform their daily prayers is considered valuable to them and the government itself took care of this point by establishing mosques in each residential block.

Al Fardh or Al Ahwas Mosque is one of the historical and archaeological mosques in Nizwa, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. It is located in the Guwair neighbourhood, near the famous Bait Al Sarooj in the heart of the historic Al Aqr village and Nizwa Castle.

The researcher, Mohammad al Saifi, says that the construction date of the Al Fardh mosque dates back to the fifth century AH and was rebuilt



during the era of Imam Mohammad bin Abdullah al Khalili in the month of Ramadhan of the year 1348 AH.

He added that the mosque was considered as a school where the sciences of the Quran, interpretation, grammar, jurisprudence and biography were studied.

The mosque is still standing to this day and frequented by worshipers, pointing out that the mosque stored a manuscript bookcase that students read and learn from.

Hassan bin Nasser al Busaidi, the Wakeel of the mosque, said that the mosque was built of mud,

plaster and sarooj, and there are two vertical cylinders with three architectural arches and trunks of old wood. It contains four entrances and a water well, indicating that a plan has been prepared for the reconstruction of the mosque in the coming years.

LOCAL SCENE

Helping Omani farmers solve critical agricultural issues



THE OMANI AGRICULTURAL Association plays a prominent role in the development of the agricultural sector through its various goals and plans. Through such plans, it seeks to raise the level of the association, achieve its ambitions, future aspirations and strategy, and adopt modern technologies for innovative projects in agriculture and marketing.

The association was established in 2018 in Al Batinah coast called (Al Batinah Association) and developed to include 6 governorates in the Sultanate. The association also comes to cooperate with the concerned and governmental authorities to overcome many obstacles that may face the Omani farmers and to deliver their messages to the governmental authorities, as well as to unify the efforts of the farmers to create investment movement.



It also has a major role in assisting farmers and supporting them with agricultural tools and providing many services in addition to marketing through continuous coordination with companies and suppliers. The association relies in marketing on the contract system with some big companies and trusted establishments. It works to search for solutions with the ministry and discusses the challenges facing farmers in the various governorates of the Sultanate.

The association has also made continuous achievements over the past years, most notably is the export of various agricultural products such as beans to Japan and many achievements. This indicates that it is moving towards food security to rely on local production without having to import from abroad.

Saed al Kharusi, Head of the Omani Agricultural Association, said that the association plays a concrete role in solving and overcoming all problems and obstacles that may face farms through continuous coordination with the concerned authorities, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, as well as with the private sector.

He added that the association provides consultations and addresses all issues facing the agricultural sector and farms.

"Efforts are being made in the field of agricultural marketing in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and it also provides agricultural guidance in the field of agricultural pest prevention."

He explained that one of the most important challenges facing Omani farms is marketing. The association, in cooperation with the concerned authorities, has found solutions for agricultural marketing to reduce imports if the local production covers the needs of local markets in order to support farmers and develop their agricultural capabilities.



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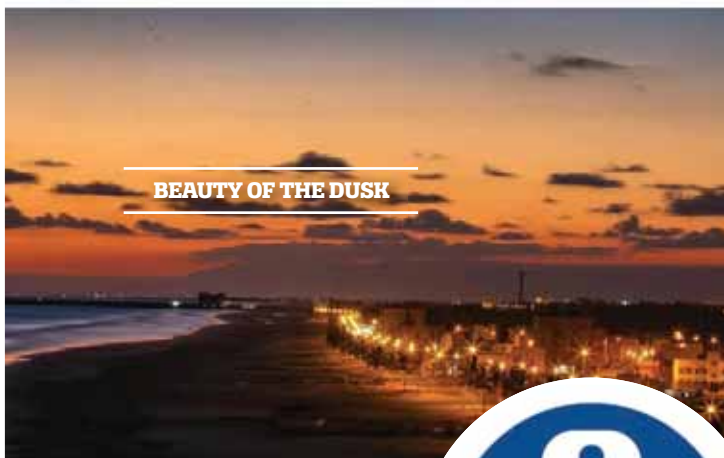
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ART



Waxing lyrical: Madame Tussauds to open museum in Dubai

LONDON'S RENOWNED wax-work museum Madame Tussauds will open its first outpost in the Arab world in Dubai later this year, the group's owner Merlin Entertainments said on Tuesday.

The brand, which began life in London where it boasts 250 wax sculptures that draw millions of visitors annually, also has smaller branches in the



United States, Europe and Asia.

"Today, Merlin Entertainments Ltd, the second largest attraction operator in the world, has officially announced the opening of the world-famous wax attraction, Madame Tussauds in Dubai", the company said in a statement.

"The iconic attraction is set to open its doors later this year", it said.

The Dubai branch would display 60 sculptures of "global stars", 16 of them from the region including Lebanese pop stars Nancy Ajram and Maya Diab, it added.

With only limited oil reserves, the emirate of Dubai has the most diversified economy in the Gulf, focusing on the development of tourism and the entertainment sector.

Dubai was one of the first destinations to re-open its doors to international visitors amid the pandemic in July 2020.

The city-state, known for its skyscrapers and man-made islands, is hoping to boost its tourism revenues when it hosts the delayed World Expo from October this year. — **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

Tunisia 'trailblazer' in Mediterranean seaweed farming

WADING KNEE-DEEP in the calm waters of a lagoon, workers in northern Tunisia harvest red seaweed, in a nation dubbed a Mediterranean "trailblazer" in cultivating the in-demand plant.

Red seaweed or algae is used for gelling, thickening and texturing agents that are increasingly a substitute for animal-based products in processed foods, and it is also being used increasingly in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

The harvest, the Selt Marine company's first on an industrial scale, comes after years of research and a wait of more than two decades for authorisation to use the lagoons, said French-Tunisian entrepreneur Mounir Bouklout.

Several countries including nearby Morocco have seen their natural reserves of red seaweed diminish in recent years due to overexploitation.

Instead near Bizerte, north of the Tunisian capital, 10 per cent of what is harvested goes back into the water, said Bouklout, another seaweed expert.

"We wait for nature to do its work, and after 45 days we harvest it", Bouklout told AFP.

Surrounded by hills topped with wind turbines, workers pull seaweed growing around cylindrical netting from the lagoon and bring it to shore.

The plant matter, which ranges from green to dark red in colour, is separated, dried in the sun and taken to a factory to be turned into substances such as agar-agar.

The sought-after red variety is mainly grown in Asia, which is the world's biggest producer, consumer and exporter of seaweed.

But Tunisia's waters and climate also favour its farming, which can encourage the development of local marine life including shellfish.

Seaweed absorbs elements like nitrogen and phosphorous, so growing it is also a way of "naturally clean-

ing the lagoon", Bouklout said.

'TRAILBLAZER'

He said the firm hoped to reap 500 tonnes of wet seaweed this harvest, with plans to rapidly expand the growing area in the coming years, eyeing a 3,500 tonne yield next year.

"Tunisia is a trailblazer" in cultivating seaweed in the Mediterranean, said Houssam Hamza, an aquaculture expert for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Selt Marine is the biggest grower of red seaweed in the region but also has expertise in "transforming the seaweed into different products" and adding value locally, he told AFP.

For 25 years, the business has been processing seaweed imported from Asia in the Tunis suburb of Ben Arous.

The plants are washed then heated to 90 degrees Celsius (194° Fahrenheit) to obtain a liquid that is pressed, dried and crushed into a fine white powder.

Mixed with other ingredients, it is used in dairy products, cold meats, confectionery and other foods for local, European, Turkish and Chinese companies, Bouklout said.

Its potential is being studied for products from biodegradable bottles to noodles and even meat-substitute vegetarian nuggets, said biologist Mariem Mouheddine, head of research and development.

The business employs around 100 people, according to Bouklout, and hopes to expand to 500 over the next two years, in a country struck by an economic crisis and skyrocketing unemployment even before the coronavirus pandemic.

FAO aquaculture expert Hamza said seaweed farming presented important opportunities for Tunisia.

He said there was still work to do, including in promoting innovation in the sector, but "it's also our role (of the FAO) to stand beside Tunisia" and its young people. — **AFP**



ENTERTAINMENT

Latino actress Zegler cast as Snow White in Disney adaptation



COLOMBIAN-AMERICAN actress Rachel Zegler will play Snow White in Disney's latest live-action adaptation, the company said on Tuesday.

Zegler, 20, is currently largely unknown to audiences but will soon star as Maria in Steven Spielberg's much-delayed remake of "West Side Story", out in December, having seen off 30,000 rivals in an arduous open audition process.

The casting of a Latino actress for a Disney princess role traditionally portrayed by white actresses follows Disney's 2019 announcement that R&B singer Halle Bailey, who is Black, will play Ariel in "The Little Mermaid".

"Rachel's extraordinary vocal abilities are just the beginning of her gifts", said Marc Webb, Director of the Snow White adaptation, in a statement to AFP.

"Her strength, intelligence and optimism will become an integral part of rediscovering the joy in this classic Disney fairytale."

Zegler, of New Jersey, wrote on Instagram "well... hello to a dream come true."

Hours before the announcement Zegler had tweeted her admiration for Bailey's casting in "The Little Mermaid", adding: "I love you disney princess cinematic universe."

Zegler's casting comes more than two decades after Disney cast singer Brandy, who is Black, as Cinderella in a live-action 1997 film.

But Disney came under criticism in 2018 for "whitewashing" Princess Tiana in cartoon movie "Ralph Breaks the Internet", hastily redrawing the character with darker features just months before the film's release.

Cuban-American singer Camila Cabello is set to appear as Cinderella in yet another live-action adaptation later this year, produced by Sony-owned Columbia Pictures and set for release on Amazon's Prime Video.

Production on Disney's untitled Snow White film is expected to begin next year. — **AFP**



From making films to teaching art classes



After her graduation, Mai realized that finding a job with her degree is not easy, especially during a global pandemic. She quickly started looking for other things to do to make a decent living for herself and remembered how much she liked making art before going to college

Most kids growing up tend to watch cartoons for entertainment, but Mai al Harthi was a little different. Watching TV as a young child was a huge inspiration for her and became a foundation of what her career would become when she grew up.

Mai is a 23-year-old film-making graduate who got her degree from the New York Film Academy in America with the hope of making a film-making career in Oman.

Her journey wasn't the easiest in college. She fought hard to pursue a film-making career, as she understood and knew everything there is about films. She said, "Films were my best friend during my free time in high school, and I was so devoted to understanding everything about them."

But things didn't go as planned.

Mai's art teacher in high school noticed how good of an artist she was and encouraged her to join the Advanced Placement classes (which is a programme for advanced students). That gave her the confidence to become better at drawing.

She said, "In school, you never saw me without a pencil, and I'd always fill up the whiteboards in class with things like the Power Puff Girls or Lilo and Stitch (cartoon characters)."

As a kid, Mai was constantly inspired to recreate her favourite cartoon characters so she started drawing everything she saw on TV.

One of Mai's earliest childhood memories was when one of her older cousins who is an artist too gave her some tips on how to become better. She said, "My earliest memories were of my older artist cousins giving me tips during family gatherings, and I'd hold onto what she taught me for dear life. She once showed me a technique for drawing the roots of the hair and I still use it to this day."

Mai didn't think that going to college for arts would get her anywhere, so she stopped drawing during her studies. She said, "I don't regret that though, because, in a way, it's just like eating — it feels okay when you just do it, but a million times better when you're starving. Everything I experienced when I stepped away from creating came out flooding onto the canvas when I came back to it."

After her graduation, she realized that finding a job with her degree is not easy, especially during a global pandemic. She quickly started looking for other things to do to make a decent living for herself and remembered how much she liked making art before going to college. So, she started an Instagram page for her art. At first, she posted her paintings for fun and as time passed, people started noticing her and asking her for commissions.

She immediately took that opportunity and turned it into a small business.

After getting the attention on the Internet, Mai realized she wanted more and started teaching private art lessons. She said, "by sheer coincidence, I found a post on Facebook from a mother looking for an art teacher for her daughter. That daughter ended up being my first student in 2021 and kick-started what would become my current job. One of my biggest takeaways from all of this was the fact that children thrive off of positive encouragement, and that's been my whole approach ever since."

Teaching kids fulfilled the gap that was in Mai's life and also, she started to make a decent living out of it as she says that things are going good for her.

Mai's advice for young Omani artists: "I'd say to go for it. I heard just about every criticism in the book choosing to pursue a creative field, and I sometimes still do. But at the end of the day, I'm doing what I love and I'm helping others express themselves, too. Even if I'm not exactly where I want to be just yet, I'm working towards it, and I can't imagine my life going any other way or me doing anything else. I'm right where I need to be at this moment in time and it'll all pay off in due time. Just work hard and believe in yourself".

You can contact Mai on her Instagram page [@theartofmai](https://www.instagram.com/theartofmai)