

HM SENDS CONDOLENCES TO TRUMP

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Donald Trump of the United States of America on the death of his brother Robert Trump. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to President Trump, the bereaved family and the friendly people of America. — **ONA**

Macron urges new ME talks after call with Abbas

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron urged fresh Middle East peace talks after Israel and the UAE agreed to normalise ties in a move praised by many Western governments.

Taking to Twitter after a phone conversation with Mahmoud Abbas, Macron said he told the Palestinian leader he was determined “to work for peace in the Middle East”.

He added: “The resumption of talks to reach a fair solution that respects international law remains a priority.”

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the suspension of the annexations “must become a definitive measure”.



ROYAL PATRONAGE HAD GREAT IMPACT

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Chairman of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, said that he and members of the Supreme Committee are honoured to express sincere sentiments of gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his noble Royal patronage of tasks of the Supreme COVID-19 Control Committee. He said that this Royal patronage had a great impact on the success of the committee’s tasks and the



accomplishment of their desired objectives.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the minister pointed out that, after the end of enforcement of its decision to ban movement during night, the committee now takes its decisions in accordance with specific well-studied data submitted to the panel by specialised parties from different domains and sectors. The prime aim of the decisions is to protect individuals and the community from COVID-19 disease and alleviate its negative impacts, the minister said.

TURN TO P5

OMANI POPULATION CROSSES 60% MARK

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Even as the total population has dropped in the recent months, Omanis crossed the 60-per cent mark on Saturday (August 15).

According to the latest figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of Omanis now form the bulk 60.60 per cent to reach 2,728,724 against 1,775,577 expatriates.

The total population of the Sultanate now stands at 4,504,301.

The highest expatriate numbers in the past five years was on April 26, 2017, when they accounted for 46 per cent of the population.

The Governorate of Muscat continues to be home for the highest number of 573,706 Omanis, while the lowest number is in Al Wusta with 25,863 nationals.

In its Vision-2050 report, the Ministry of Health projected that the total population of the Sultanate would double and will be slightly more than 7 million in 2050.

“The population is expected to age and the elderly population, aged 60 years and above, is expected to increase to about 13.1 per cent of the Omani population, compared with 6.1 per cent in 2012, and their absolute numbers will increase about five fold”, the ministry said in a report.

SEE ALSO P2



OMAN

WE SHALL OVERCOME



ABDULLA HAQ BADI



AHLAM AL SANANI



HAMYAR AL BRASHDI



JAGRUTHI NARWANI



WASAN BADER AL MALKI

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Life is limping back to normal in the Sultanate as COVID-19 cases decline, lockdowns end and people learn to live with the virus.

“We are slowly straightening the curve and with the support of the people, we will certainly win over it. All the precautionary measures that we announced from time to time need to be followed strictly,” Dr Faryal Ali Khamis, Senior Consultant and Head of Infection Diseases Section, Ministry of Health, told the Observer.

Wasan bin Bader al Malki, Founder of Thy Hard, an innovative concept of luxurious lifestyle, said

“We all know that COVID-19

has impacted us in different ways and any businesses affected but it shouldn't stop anyone from chasing their dreams or implementing whatever you've been working on. We shouldn't be influenced by negative forces.

There is always a way out of any adverse situations. The government, the Supreme Committee and all ministries including the Ministry of Health are doing a great job for the people.”

Ahlam al Sanani, founder, 9Homes, believes that the pandemic has shown life in different hues and the whole idea of life is changed. “We need to think and plan accordingly, chase dreams and follow up the things that we stopped earlier, everyday. We will not reach anywhere if

we are stuck. Keep moving.”

“The pandemic period gives us a lot of introspection and time to think and act and fine-tune whatever our dreams and goals are, and an insight that whatever we were chasing was not that important and one needs to focus on what is important,” avers Jagruthi Narwani, Media and PR Agency executive.

Hamyar al Brashdi, another young self-starter, compares the preconceived notion pre-corona and what it has taught us.

“It seemed like it was a big blow in the beginning but the outcome is that we could learn a lot. We learned to spend more time with our family, we learned to manage time efficiently, understand

life in a better way. Now that things are going normal and life is getting back to the track, we shouldn't forget what it taught us.”

Abdulla Haq Badi says that the COVID-19 period taught us how to fine-tune our lives in congruence with the natural rhythm of life and now that we are getting back on track, let's respect the resources, values, and surroundings and aim for betterment.

Lessons are certainly learned. But implementing them effectively during the days depends on how the future unfolds. Obeying the rules and regulations, abiding by the precautions in word and spirit will be crucial in the battle against the pandemic.

Omani women’s life expectancy above 79 years

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The average lifespan of Omanis reached as high as 77.2 years, with 75.2 for men and 79.2 for women at the end of 2019 against 49 years in 1970.

At the same time, the total fertility rate stood at 2.7 births per woman between the age of 15 and 49 years during the period from 2015 to 2019.

According to data from the annual statistical book issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the average life expectancy rate of the total population stood at 78.2 by December 2019 up from 78.1 in the previous year.

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“Life expectancy at birth for the total population was started only in 2016,”

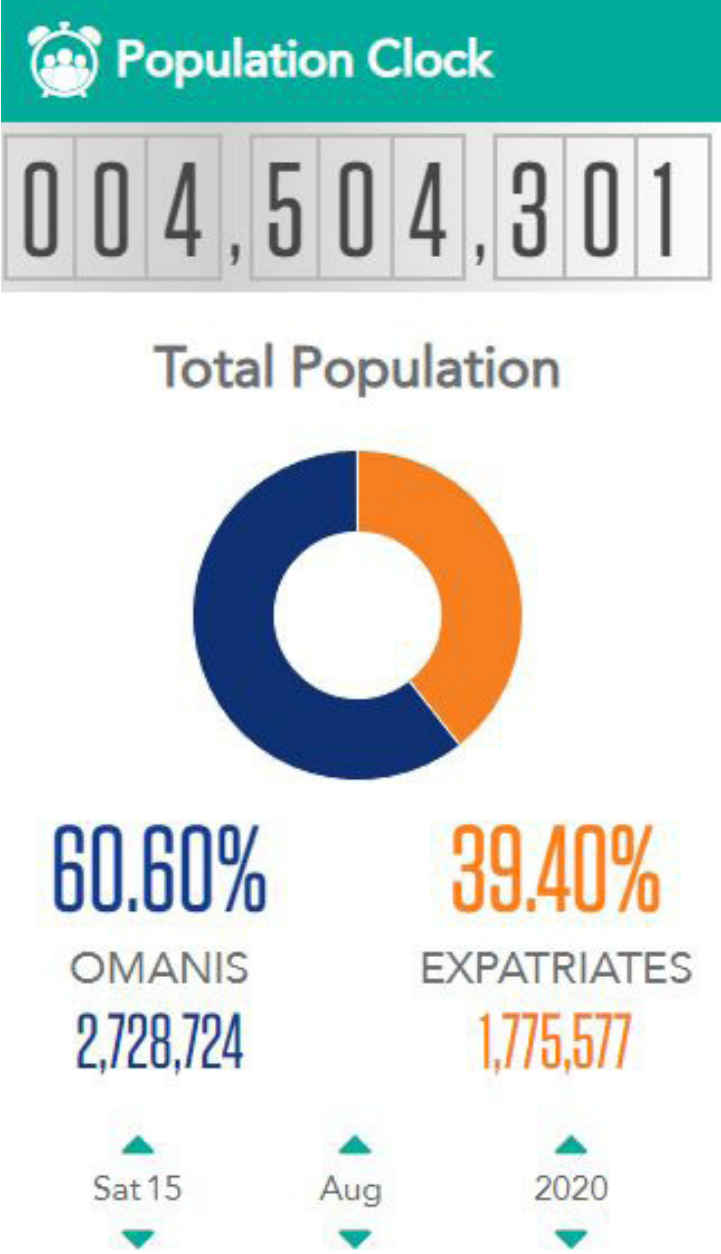
the report said.

The infant mortality, meanwhile, dropped to 7.9 per 1,000 live births compared to 8.6 in 2018. The Under-five mortality per thousand fell to 10.1 against 11.1 in the previous year.

“Crude birth rate reached 18.8 per 1,000 individuals in 2019, while crude death rates were 1.9 per 1,000 individuals,” the report pointed out.

There has been a significant fall in the maternal mortality rate during the period between 2010 and 2019.

The maternal mortality rate witnessed a significant drop to 10.3 per 100,000 live births at the end of 2019 compared to 26.4 per 100,000 live births in 2018.



Non-refundable fare upsets passengers

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The guidelines asking airlines to settle refund claims have raised hope but it is unlikely to help many customers who had to skip their travel due to the pandemic.

Instead of paying the refund, airlines offer travel on the same ticket anytime within a year, by paying the fare difference.

"I had a March-end ticket for Mumbai for my family of four but had to skip the plan as flights were cancelled as per COVID-19 restrictions. The airline sent me a text message that I can fly on the ticket within a year, but there will be no cancellation or money refund," said Ashokan Kumar, who since faced difficulties at the job, including salary delays.

"I have an option to fly on one of the Indian repatriation flights for which I had to shell out RO 70-75 per ticket. With no income for nearly a month, it is just impossible to pay for these tickets without a refund of the original ticket fare."

Hameed Moideen of Oman Wings Travels and Tours said, "The Oman Air directive for agents is that refunds will be processed only after 12 months because of the sheer volume of the applications."

He agreed that the decision has put many people in a spot as their money will be blocked for months and there is no guarantee they would be able to travel within a year.

As per Oman Air's COVID-time ticket policy on its website, "No rebooking or change fees will be charged, but additional fare may be collected depending on the type of airfare purchased. Amended travel dates can be up to 24 months from the date of original ticket issuance. Change to another Oman Air destination is also permitted, but if the fare to the new destination is higher than the original paid, then the difference in fare will be charged."



“

The traveller is entitled to recover the value of the travel ticket at the same price at which he bought the ticket within seven days of the cancellation, for the part or parts of the trip that is undertaken, regardless of the booking conditions and without deducting any amount from the ticket value.

PACA

With ticket fares generally high during summer months of June-July, many expatriates and Omani citizens book tickets at least six months in advance for return to native country or vacation.

"One of the options, before a customer is to approach the Consumer Protection Authority if the ticket booked, is from an agency or airline within Oman jurisdiction. It may not be applicable if the ticket is booked online on a foreign airline," said Mohammed al Balushi, who is weighing options as he had a ticket booked

for the June vacation in Europe. One expatriate told the Observer that he is yet to get the refund after he was promised it will be transferred to him within a week by a budget airline of India. "There is virtually no response to my calls or emails after some initial follow-ups."

Last week, the Observer published a report which said that the Public Authority of Civil Aviation (PACA) asked all airlines operating in the Sultanate on the need to protect the rights of travellers whose reservations were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Airlines have been given a deadline, no later than November 2, 2020, to settle their financial positions, and to end all claims to refund the value of air tickets.

The deadline for completing their claims on the tickets issued for Omani students studying abroad is no later than August 19, 2020.

"The traveller is entitled to recover the value of the travel ticket at the same price at which he bought the ticket within seven days of the cancellation, for the part or parts of the trip that is undertaken, regardless of the booking conditions and without deducting any amount from the ticket value," PACA said.

SULTANATE FIRST IN REGION TO MEET TFA NORMS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that the Sultanate has completely met the requirements of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The Sultanate is one of the first countries in the region to fully meet its obligations related to the agreement so far, out of 164 countries in the world. The Ministry said that

the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is one of the most important international agreements aimed at facilitating trade between countries of the world and the free movement of goods at border outlets. Mahmood bin Aamir Al Hatali, Director-General of Organizations and Commercial Relations at

the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, said, "A national task force team has been formed entrusted with the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The team included representatives from several government agencies, namely the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Royal Oman Police (Directorate General of Customs), the Ministry of

Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development (Ithraa) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). — ONA

OMAN

GIS can help monitor pandemic

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Every stream of knowledge is trying to ease the pandemic situation as it has impacted all aspects of life. To map the disease a stream like geography has come handy for the scientists to collect, analyse, and display key data, which is very helpful in drawing policies to tackle the situation.

Ambreen Matloob, a PhD scholar at the Department of Geography, Kyungpook National University, South Korea, is convinced that disease tracking is now a map-centric exercise. The technology called 'geographic information system' (GIS) is a useful tool to collect, analyse, and display key data.

Ambreen, who is currently in Oman due to COVID-19 situation, spoke about the technology and said the data collected through it was mostly accurate.

Talking to the Observer, she said, "Over the past 20 years, leading health organisations, including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have consistently relied on mapping and spatial analysis to manage the outbreak of diseases. The



GIS links data and geography digitally, to create maps. This technology often provides a useful way to reveal spatial and temporal links among data and can help monitor the global spread of a pandemic."

Going into the background of the system she said: "In the course of Severe Acute Respiratory (SARS) outbreak in China in 2002 and 2003, the GIS experts helped the health agencies to track the disease. Also, in the time of the Ebola crisis (2013 - 2016), health and government agencies used GIS to understand the virus, determine its causes and origin, and traced how it travels."

The GIS, according to her, can be used to analyse data about COVID-19 origin and demographics to predict likely the locations of coronavirus and thus reveal populations vulnerable to infection. The interactive map locates and tallies confirmed infections, fatalities and recoveries. The GIS graph details the virus's progress over time. Viewers can see the day and time of the most recent data update and sources.

Commenting on the technology's vital role in such situations, she said, "As we are surviving in the world of bacteria and viruses, we can use the available informa-

tion to help reduce vulnerability, address equity and work towards living better and longer."

Nowadays, public health mapping and spatial analysis are accessible with Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Medical GIS helps people to visually understand the bigger picture of public health around the world and see how health issues affect the population.

Further commenting on the GIS's limitations and advantages, Ambreen said, "Though data science cannot stop this pandemic, it provides information to the public. GIS plays a significant role in understanding the situation of the current pandemic. It is also helpful in contact tracing, which involves understanding where people live and how they move through places. It predicts how an individual acquires the virus and their possible contacts. South Korea is a good example. It tracks the coronavirus spread using a detailed 'contact tracing' map and this helped in the disease control." The applied geography, according to her, contributes to getting rid of this contagious disease, as a single discipline can't handle a pandemic like this.

WEF features Oman's initiatives to digitise logistics

MUSCAT: The World Economic Forum (WEF) showcased the Sultanate of Oman's progressive initiative in adopting new technologies in logistics operations through several successful experimentations.

The article, published on the WEF website, noted that Oman Logistics Centre (OLC) at ASYAD Group has recently launched Tech Try initiative as part of its efforts that aim at piloting and showcasing emerging technologies that can facilitate and improve trade, subsequently, digitising the logistics sector to keep pace with technological developments in the world. This initiative is part of the National Logistics Strategy 2040.

This feature on the World Economic Forum's website is recognition of ASYAD Group's efforts in embracing technology and innovation to elevate the efficiency of the Sultanate's logistics operations on multiple facets and acquaint WEF member countries with



its experimentations.

The report highlighted Tech Try, the experimental initiative launched by Asyad, noting that it included underwater drones, port infrastructure drones, drone delivery and warehouse stock-counting drones. Underwater drones were used to inspect marine infrastructure in the port, detecting cracks and corrosion in the understructure.

The report highlighted the importance of digital transformation in logistics and its operational and economic impact of the facilitation and growth of global trade. It also addressed the challenges facing some countries in applying technologies to serve trade, such as legal and legislative aspects, and reviewed ways to mitigate these challenges for the public interest. — ONA

PORTS ENSURE SUFFICIENT SUPPLY OF FOOD AND LIVESTOCK

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Ports in the Sultanate achieved positive results during the first half of this year, represented by an increase in handling, shipping and export operations, and the promotion of direct import with countries of the world, according to figures by the National Center of Statistics and Information.

Amid the outbreak of COVID-19, the ports have continued to operate with high efficiency to provide vegetables and fruits, in addition to grains, meat and livestock as the Sultanate's markets witnessed an abundance of supplies of all goods and commodities.

During the first half of 2020, the ports handled 1.1 million heads of livestock, 8.9 million tonnes of liquid goods,

2.6 million containers, and 24.4 million tonnes of general commodities.

Achieving these results is attributed to the efforts made by the Asyad Group to connect the Sultanate's ports with regional ports to support direct import in cooperation with government agencies. Also thanks to its promotional campaign for global direct lines and the incentive benefits provided by the ports in addition to facilitating customs clearance procedures.

Moreover, the ports have worked to increase the number of direct import trips from the country of origin through operating many ships designated for transporting various types of vegetables and fruits using large refrigerated containers, in coordination with the various concerned government agencies, to ensure the

quality of the upcoming vegetables and fruits and the needs of the local market.

Officials said the direct import service from the country of origin has saved time, costs and efforts for importers and traders and that was reflected positively on the level of operational operations. It also contributed to attracting many suppliers from the country of origin as well as local importers or Omani merchants. This service has a competitive advantage which is a speedy arrival of shipments without the presence of a third party, in addition to the speed of customs clearance. The officials agreed that this service has also revitalised local handling companies, and opened plenty of job opportunities for young Omanis working in the transport and freight sector.



Royal patronage had great impact

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the purpose of the lockdown between governorates and prohibition of night-time movement was to limit gatherings, particularly during Eid al Adha holidays, which could have provided suitable conditions for the spread of infection among the public.

The minister also thanked all members of society and commended their commitment during the lockdown period and ban on night movement. This commitment, he said, proves Omani society's great discipline and awareness of the significance of elevating supreme social and national interests above all other considerations.

The minister reaffirmed that members of the society have become more adherent and dedicated to measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This, he said, constitutes a successful approach to live with the virus in a safe manner.

Sayyid Hamoud in a message thanked and appreciated the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police for their remarkable efforts in executing the decisions of the committee. He also hailed the efforts of health workers in combating the pandemic, noting that these efforts will have a positive effect in curbing the spread of the virus and alleviating its impact. — ONA

MANY WILAYATS GET RAINS

MUSCAT: A number of wilayats of the Sultanate on Sunday experienced moderate to heavy rains causing some wadis to overflow. Wilayats of North Al Sharqiyah (Al Mudhaibi and Ibra) received light to moderate rain leading wadis to overflow in villages of Al Naba'a, Al Haymaha and Al Yahmadi.

Wilayats of Ibri (Amla, Kabarrah and the wilayat's centre), Yanqul (Waqbah, Saie, Falaj Al Sederein) and Dhank caused some wadis to overflow in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Parts of Al Dakhiliyah, too, experienced light to moderate rains that included Nizwa (Tanuf, Kamma, Smaith and Al Muatmer), Niyabat Al Jabel Al Akhdhar, Izki (Qala't Al Awamer, Saima, Al Kharma and Al Qeraitain) and Bahla.

NOTICE



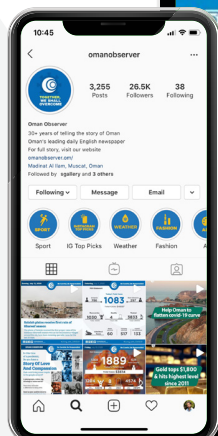
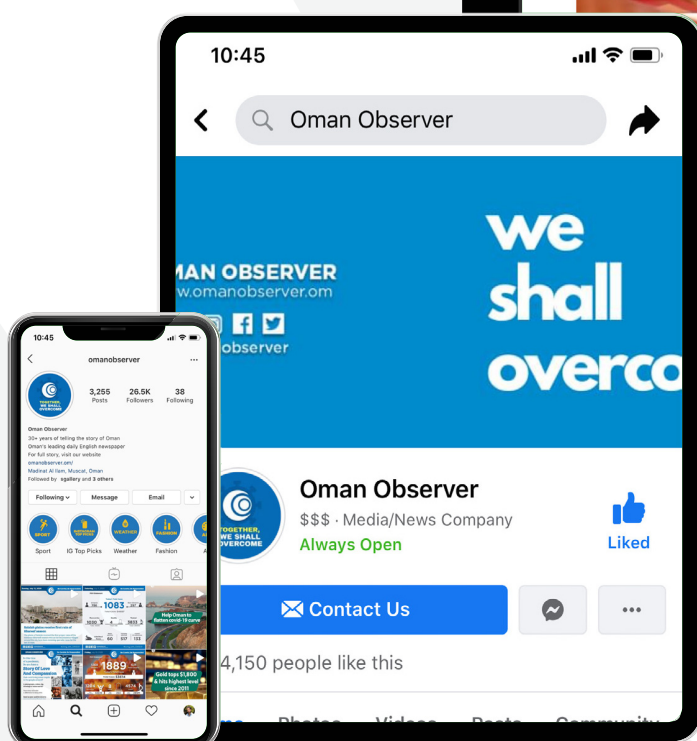
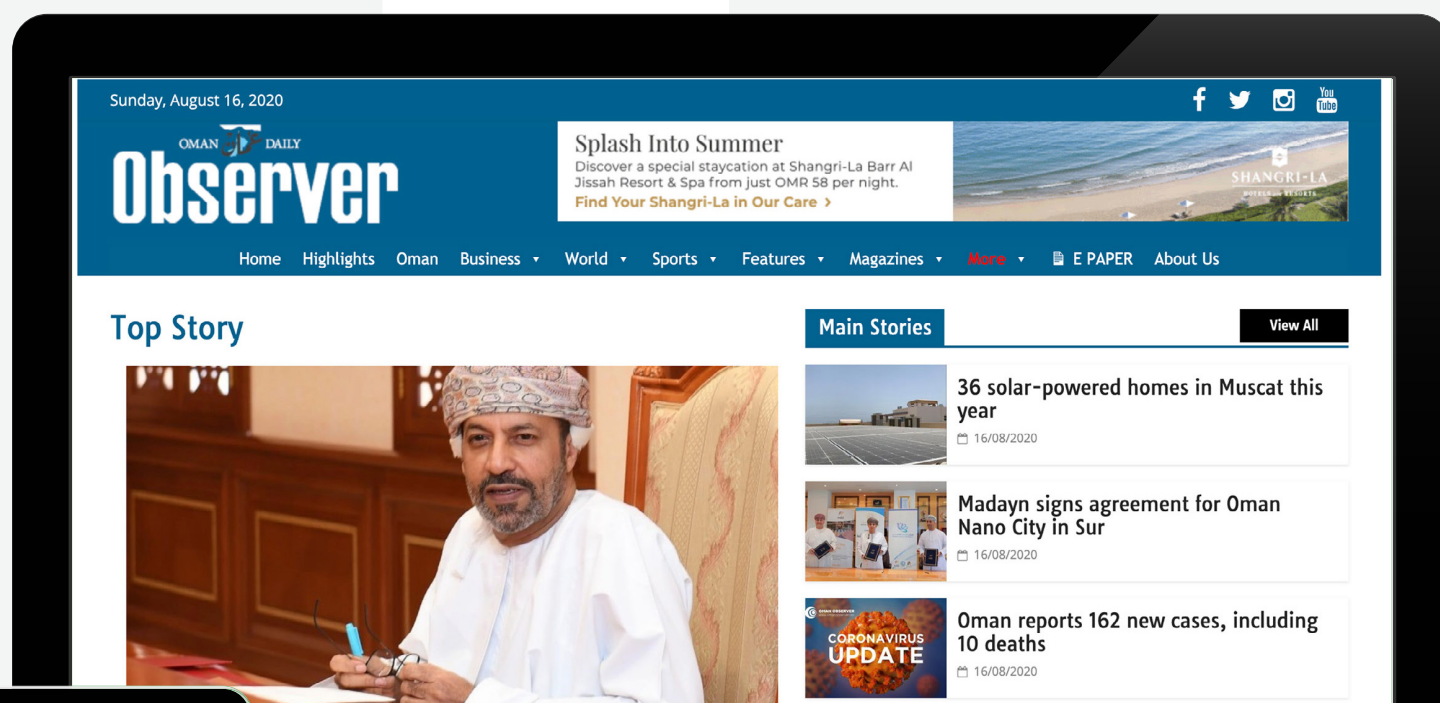
ABDUL JALEEL

AL TAMAM
MODERN SERVICES
TECHINICAL &
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LLC OMAN HEREBY
ANNOUNCE THAT
MR. ABDUL JALEEL,
HOLDER OF INDIAN PASSPORT NUMBER
Z 3131554 IS NO LONGER WORKING WITH
AL TAMAM EFFECTIVE FROM 22.06.2020.
HE IS NOT AUTHORIZED TO REPRESENT
OUR COMPANY IN ANY DEAL. THE COMPANY
SHALL NOT BEAR ANY RESPONSIBILITIES
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People view the damaged port area in Beirut. — Reuters

Lebanon needs early elections: Patriarch

BEIRUT: Lebanon's top Christian cleric called on Sunday for early parliamentary elections and a government formed to rescue the country rather than the ruling "political class" after the vast explosion in Beirut's port threw the nation into turmoil. The now-caretaker cabinet resigned amid protests over the August 4 blast that killed more than 172 people, injured 6,000, left 300,000 homeless and destroyed swathes of the Mediterranean city, compounding a deep financial crisis. Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, who holds sway in Lebanon

as head of the Maronite church from which the head of state must be drawn under the power-sharing, warned that Lebanon was today facing "its biggest danger". "We will not allow for Lebanon to become a compromise card between nations that want to rebuild ties amongst themselves," Al-Rai said. "We must start immediately with change and quickly hold early parliamentary elections without the distraction of discussing a new election law and to form a new government." Several MPs submitted their resignations over the port explosion but

not in the number needed to dissolve parliament. Under the constitution, President Michel Aoun is required to designate a candidate for prime minister with the most support from parliamentary blocs. The presidency has yet to say when consultations will take place. There has been a flurry of Western and regional diplomacy after the blast, which fuelled public anger at politicians already accused of corruption and mismanagement. A financial meltdown has ravaged the currency and froze depositors out of their savings. — Reuters

IN BRIEF

UAE, Israeli firms sign agreement on coronavirus R&D

CAIRO: A company based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has signed a cooperation agreement with an Israeli firm, claimed as the first such deal since the two countries agreed to establish full diplomatic ties earlier this week. The Emirates company APEX National Investment announced the accord with Israeli TeraGroup to develop research and studies on the novel coronavirus, the state UAE news agency WAM reported on Sunday. The agreement was signed by APEX head, Khalifa Yousef Khouri, and Oren Sadiv, the TeraGroup chief executive, in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, according to WAM. — dpa

Turkey condemns Biden's remarks

ISTANBUL: Turkey has condemned remarks made by US Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden criticising President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and calling for support for the Turkish leader's opponents. Biden made the comments in an interview filmed by the New York Times in December, but a video of the remarks only appeared on Saturday before going viral on social media. Asked about Erdogan, Biden described the Turkish president's policy towards the Kurds, and advocated supporting the Turkish opposition. — Reuters

Israel strikes Gaza targets amid renewed violence

TEL AVIV: Israel's defence minister warned on Sunday that its military would "respond harshly" to any violence from the Gaza Strip, as its air force overnight bombed Hamas targets and its navy closed off a fishing zone. Hamas security sources said that Israeli drones and warplanes fired several missiles at posts and facilities of the Qassam Brigades.



No injuries were reported but the airstrikes caused severe damage. The Hamas-run Health

Ministry said Israeli soldiers shot and moderately wounded two Palestinians who joined overnight protests at the Gaza-Israel border fence. Palestinians this month have stepped up cross-border attacks, launching balloons with explosives attached to them over the border, and setting ablaze large swathes of Israeli agricultural land. — dpa

WORLD

Thais rally for change in political system

BANGKOK: Thousands of protesters rallied against Thailand's government in Bangkok on Sunday with tensions rising in the kingdom as a pro-democracy movement gathers steam.

Thailand has seen near-daily demonstrations for the past month by student-led groups denouncing Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha — a former military chief who led the 2014 coup — and his administration.

By Sunday afternoon, protesters — who are demanding major democratic reforms — had taken over the busy intersection around Bangkok's Democracy Monument, which was built to mark the 1932 revolution that ended absolutism.

Tensions have risen over the last two weeks with authorities arresting three activists. They were released on bail after being charged with sedition and violating coronavirus rules.

They were told not to repeat the alleged offences, but one of them — prominent student leader Parit Chiwarak — arrived at the protest venue on Sunday flanked by cheering supporters.

Partly inspired by the Hong Kong democracy movement, the protesters



The protesters are demanding major democratic reforms in Thailand. — AFP

claim to be leaderless and have relied mostly on social media campaigns to draw support across the country.

The protesters are demanding an overhaul of the government and a rewrite of the 2017 military-scripted constitution, which they believe skewed last year's election in favour of Prayut's military-aligned party.

A rally last week — attended by some 4,000 demonstrators — also called for a frank discussion about the monarchy's role in Thailand.

Students have presented 10 reforms they seek to the monarchy of King Maha

Vajiralongkorn — including curbing his powers over the constitution, the royal fortune and the armed forces.

Near the anti-government protest, several dozen royalists also held a demonstration, waving national flags and holding up gold-framed portraits of the king and other royals.

"I don't care if they protest against the government but they cannot touch the monarchy," said Sumet Trakulwoonnoo, a leader of the royalist group, Coordination Center of Vocational Students for the Protection of National Institutions (CVPI). — AFP

Grounded tanker splits in two

PORT LOUIS: A ship that has leaked more than 1,000 tonnes of oil in pristine waters off the Mauritius coast has split into two, its Japanese operator said on Sunday. The bulk carrier MK Wakashio ran aground on a coral reef off the southeastern coast of Mauritius on July 25 and began oozing oil more than a week later, threatening a protected marine park boasting mangrove forests and endangered species. — AFP

Taliban refuses to recognise govt

KABUL: Just ahead of the planned intra-Afghan peace negotiations which are likely to take place soon in Doha, the Taliban has said that it does not recognise the government in Kabul as a legitimate system, according to an official statement. — IANS

Trump considering Snowden pardon

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said he is considering a pardon for Edward Snowden, the former US National Security Agency contractor - now living in Russia - whose spectacular leaks shook the US intelligence community in 2013.

— Reuters

Kerala remittances likely to decline by 15%

LIJU CHERIAN

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: A top researcher at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Kerala, a social science research institution, has predicted a 10 to 15 per cent return of emigrants from Gulf and the decline of remittances by about 15 per cent with the trends indicating the cycle of return migration has not ended.

"The migrant stocks in the Gulf will determine the remittances from the Gulf to India. Over the last four months during COVID-19, the stock of migrants in the Gulf has not declined because of non-availability of regular commercial flights. Once the travel

between India and Gulf becomes normal, only then can we predict the extent of the return emigrants and their impact on remittances," according to Professor Irudaya Rajan S (pictured), a senior faculty at CDS, Thiruvananthapuram.

The emigrants from the Gulf are left in the lurch upon their arrival. Unfortunately, there was no big package for rehabilitating return migrants by the Central Government, except for the Kerala government who announced the 'Dream Kerala' project for return emigrants, says



Prof Rajan. He has based this on his experiences of working and researching on the Gulf sector for over 20 years. Prof Rajan told the Observer that though some of them came back to India losing jobs, there are no jobs available for them back home due to the deteriorating economic situation here as well.

"Some of them came back in a hurry without collecting their salary, end of service benefits and other payments and are back with empty hands. Adding to this pain, the 14-day compulsory quarantine in institutions also led to mental stress after returning to India. My prediction is the flow of return emigrants will continue till December, explains Prof Rajan.



As COVID-19 cases rise in US, plasma donations lag

NICK BROWN

In late April, a coalition of New Mexico health care systems began asking local COVID-19 survivors to donate their plasma, the antibody-rich blood product used to help treat people hospitalised with the disease. More than 50 people donated in May, but then the numbers started falling, according to data from Vitalant, a nonprofit blood bank that works with the coalition to recruit donors. In June, 34 people gave plasma to the effort, the data show; in July it was just 29. The coalition's struggle is not unique. Across the United States, home to the world's worst coronavirus outbreak, demand is soaring for COVID-19 convalescent plasma, known as CCP, to keep sick patients alive. But the number of willing donors isn't keeping pace, according to interviews Reuters conducted with more than 25 regional hospitals, blood centres and other blood industry players across the country.

Many said they are having difficulty persuading survivors to give plasma, in part because it's a time-consuming process. That has led to a patchy supply that, in some regions, doesn't meet demand. It raises fears of CCP shortages ahead of an anticipated surge in infections in the fall. The American Red Cross saw its CCP reserve fall more than 70 per cent in July as it shipped plasma around the country faster than it could recruit new donations, said Chief Medical Officer Dr Pampee Young. The New York Blood Center, a regional blood bank with 19 donation centres in the New York area, said its plasma stock, built during the city's COVID-19 spike in the spring, steadily dwindled in June and July as it sent supply to coronavirus hot spots like Texas and Florida. Meanwhile, the US government's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) said it has put on hold an earlier push to build a national reserve of CCP, acknowledging there isn't enough supply for a surplus. — Reuters

When left is not right!



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

aljahdhami22@gmail.com

People are born in life to be different from one another. Their individual differences are more or less reflect psychological characteristics that distinguish one person from another. This helps defining each person's uniqueness represented in intelligence, personality traits and values. Those differences are neither a fiction nor a worry; they only contribute to the shaping of behaviours and individual's self-importance. Usually, these different personal characteristics include cognitive, affective, behavioural and genetic traits attributed to human beings or animals. Yet, many people spend their life trying to fit in and be like everyone else! So strange, but this is a human nature to be attracted by what others have in hand; probably it is their jealousy. Thus, nobody is satisfied with what has been bestowed by the Almighty Allah. A very common individual difference that has been remarkably renowned worldwide among people is that whether one is a right or left-handed. Can you believe that sometimes people tend to look at lefties or left-handers differently? To many, it seems abnormal to see someone using a left hand while writing, using a knife or to do anything else. Around 10 to 12 per cent of the world's population are lefties. Nevertheless, humans are not the only one to show a preference between the left and right hand. Other creatures in the animal kingdom also show a 50/50 split when it comes to using which hand, foot or paw the most! Among the left-handed animals are kangaroos, which tend to favour their left paw for eating. Also, studies have shown that 90 per cent of parrots use their left foot to pick things up. It is attributed that babies, at a certain time while in the womb, show a clear preference for sucking one thumb over the other. Hence, handedness is probably hardwired before baby's birth. However, experts say that parents do not likely get a good sense of their child's dominant hand until they are 2 or 3 years old. Most importantly is that genetics play a key role in having a right or left-handed child. Historically, the left-handedness is often considered a bad omen and associated with evil in some cultures and countries. However, the world annually commemorates the International Left-Handers Day designated on August 13. This day was first marked in 1976, and was aimed to make the majority right-handers aware of the frustrations that left-handed people face while using devices designed for right-handed. The day urges designers, corporates and governments to be more left-handed friendly and adapt objects for lefties. The left-handed are precious; they take places, which are inconvenient for the rest.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this page are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the *Observer*.



OMINVEST

Investing in a Shared Future

UNAUDITED RESULTS OF THE GROUP AND PARENT COMPANY
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

DIRECTORS’ REPORT

Dear Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Unaudited Financial Results of OMINVEST Group for the period ended 30 June 2020. During the period, despite the challenging business and economic conditions caused by persistently low oil prices and the onset of COVID-19, OMINVEST achieved healthy performance both at the Group and the Parent level.

Below, I would like to apprise you of the important transactions completed during the period and major areas of focus within our future Strategic Direction.

One of the most remarkable transactions was the successful completion of the merger between Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB). In line with the merger’s terms, OAB issued its shares to the shareholders of AIB, bringing their shareholding to 19.36% in the share capital of OAB post-merger. I am pleased to share with you that pursuant to the merger, OAB successfully listed on the Muscat Securities Market and transformed into an SAOG. As part of the steps leading up to the merger, OMINVEST also sold 11.76% stake in OAB to Arab Bank Plc (ABP) for RO 46 million and generated a profit of RO 12 million. As a result of the above transactions, OMINVEST’s stake in OAB was reduced to 31.64% and OAB is now classified as an Associate in OMINVEST’s financials.

Looking ahead, we are sharpening our focus and intensifying our efforts to realize the following objectives: (i) optimize our current portfolios to ensure highest return on our invested capital; further boost our liquidity position; enhanceoperational efficiencies and synergies amongst our portfolio companies, (ii) pursue revenue growth and profit diversification by undertaking large-scale strategic investment opportunities and private equity investments in growth sectors and markets, (iii) support our portfolio companies to build fee-based income streams, and, (iv) become an impactful player in the areas of ESG (Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance). In addition, I am pleased to update you that despite the ongoing health and economic challenges, OMINVEST and its subsidiaries and associate companies are focused on ensuring the safety of their staff and serving the needs of their customers and stakeholders with greater efficiencies.

Below, I would like to present the financial performance of OMINVEST Group and our major portfolio companies for the Q2 2020:

Parent Company Performance

During the period ended 30 June 2020, total revenues rose by 33% to RO 39.5m and net profit increased by 41% to RO 28.1m, over the same period in 2019. The increase in profits is due to profit on partial disposal of Oman Arab Bank and increase in our share of P&L of the subsidiary’s income. As at 30 June 2020, total assets of the Parent Company stood at RO 619m compared to RO 601m as at 31 December 2019. Increase in total assets was due to growth in the portfolios and business activities of our key subsidiaries.

Group Consolidated Performance

During the period ended 30 June 2020, total Group revenues rose by 7% to RO 163.1m and the net profit attributable to OMINVEST’s shareholders increased by 50% to RO 24.1m from RO 16.1m, over the same period in 2019. The increase in profits is due to profit on partial disposal of Oman Arab Bank and strong performance of our key subsidiaries: National Life & General Insurance Company (NLGIC), Jabreen International Development Company SAOC (Jabreen) and Oman Real Estate Investment and Services Corporation (ORIS).

Performance of Key Subsidiaries & Associates:

Oman Arab Bank(OAB), our subsidiary in the banking sector, reported a profit of RO 10.4m for the period ended 30 June 2020 compared to RO 14.7m for the same period in 2019, a decline of 30%. The decline is due to higher ECL provisions being created as a precautionary measure, given the stress in the economic and business conditions on account of COVID-19 and lower oil prices. Post-acquisition of AIB, Customers’ deposits rose by 29.1% to RO 2.56bn compared to RO 2.00bn, as at 31 December 2019. The Shareholders’ funds were RO 358m compared to RO 296m, as at 31 December 2019.

National Life & General Insurance Company(NLGIC), our subsidiary in the insurance sector, reported exceptional profit of RO 10.8m for the period ended 30 June 2020 compared to RO 5.1m for the same period in 2019, a growth of 111%. The growth is due to optimized re-insurance strategy, higher investment income and lower claims reported during COVID-19 related lockdown. NLGIC reported Gross Written Premium (GWP) of RO 87.2m, of which Oman contributed 50%, UAE 49%, and, Kuwait 1%. NLGIC achieved a net insurance premium of RO 58.2m compared to RO 51.4m for the same period in 2019, an impressive growth of 13%. NLGIC continues to maintain leadership position in Oman in terms of assets, gross written premiums, investment income and net profits. We believe that NLGIC’s growth prospects continues to remain strong and its recurring revenues from insurance business are stable.

Jabreen International Development Company SAOC (Jabreen), our subsidiary, is focused on making private equity investments in diverse sectors and expanding into new growth markets in Asia. Jabreen reported a net profit of RO 14.6m for the period ended 30 June 2020 compared to RO 13.6m for the same period in 2019, a growth of 8%. The profit growth was mainly attributable to the gain on disposal

of partial stake in International General Insurance and dividend income received from Jabreen’s public and private equity portfolios. During this period, Jabreen sold 6.74% of treasury shares at a premium of 11% to market price and made new investments in its school platform. At 30 June 2020, Jabreen’s total assets stood at RO 324m compared to RO 331m at 31 December 2019. We expect Jabreen to further enhance and diversify its investment income in the years ahead. International General Insurance (IGI), an associate in the insurance sector, got listed on Nasdaq in March 2020.

Oman Real Estate Investment and Services Corporation (ORIS), our subsidiary in the real estate sector, invests in iconic real estate projects and acts as lead Developer and Promoter of such projects. ORIS also provides real estate management services to our affiliates within OMINVEST Group and to large institutional clients outside the Group to generate fee income. ORIS is now in advance stages of initiating new large-scale commercial & residential projects at attractive locations in Muscat.

National Finance Company(NFC), our associate in the leasing sector, reported net profit of RO 3.9m for the period ended 30 June 2020 compared to a net profit of RO 4.2m for the same period in 2019 – a decline of 6.1%. NFC’s revenues grew by 2.5% to RO 22.2m in this period compared with RO 21.6m in corresponding period in 2019. NFC continues to adopt a conservative approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. The projected lower levels of credit offtake combined with increased interest costs will make it challenging to sustain current profitability levels. NFC will continue to focus on strengthening its efficiencies, customer experience, product offerings and quality of service delivery. We expect NFC to further consolidate its position as the leadingfinance company in Oman.

Contributions for COVID-19:

As a corporate citizen and in light of our responsibility towards the safety of our community, I am pleased to update you that OMINVEST contributed RO 500,000 to The Endowment Fund to Support Health Services to address the challenges caused by the Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic outbreak. In addition, our Subsidiaries and Associate companies combinedly contributed another RO 1,850,000 towards this national noble cause. Accordingly, OMINVEST’s share of contribution at the Group Level amounted to RO 1.1 million.

Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the Board, I thank our esteemed Regulators for their continued support and guidance. I also take this opportunity to thank the management teams at OMINVEST and across our Group companies for their dedication and hard work.

We are profoundly thankful to our beloved leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his great vision and initiatives as he continues to lead the Sultanate on the path of development, peace, and enduring prosperity.

Khalid Muhammad AlZubair
Chairman

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2020				
	Parent Company (Unaudited)			
	6 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	6 months ended 30-Jun-19 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-19 (RO'000)
Interest income	3,106	5,277	1,460	2,669
Investment income	6,414	34	6,490	(6)
Other income	375	175	345	103
Share of results from subsidiaries	28,218	22,779	12,172	9,012
Share of results from associates	1,375	1,379	677	698
Total revenue	39,488	29,644	21,144	12,476
Interest expense	(7,201)	(5,784)	(3,840)	(3,014)
Operating expenses	(3,232)	(3,675)	(1,812)	(2,310)
COVID-19 contribution	(500)	-	-	-
Total expenses	(10,933)	(9,459)	(5,652)	(5,324)
Profit before tax	28,555	20,185	15,492	7,152
Income tax expense	(500)	(250)	(500)	(250)
Profit for the period	28,055	19,935	14,992	6,902
Basic earnings per share attributable to the equity holders of the Parent Company (RO)	0.030	0.020	0.014	0.004
Other comprehensive (expense) / income				
<i>Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:</i>				
Movement in cashflow hedge	(561)	-	(193)	-
Foreign currency translation reserve	(11)	(1)	(8)	64
	(572)	(1)	(201)	64
<i>Items not to be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:</i>				
Fair value changes of financial assets fair value through other comprehensive income	(10,810)	(5,227)	1,306	505
Other comprehensive (expense) / income for the period	(11,382)	(5,228)	1,105	569
Total comprehensive income for the period	16,673	14,707	16,097	7,471

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED AND PARENT COMPANY STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2020				
	Consolidated		Parent Company	
	(Unaudited) 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	(Audited) 31-Dec-19 (RO'000)	(Unaudited) 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	(Audited) 31-Dec-19 (RO'000)
Assets				
Balances with banks and money at call	59,854	191,505	45,865	4,549
Deposits with banks	58,200	80,916	25,022	-
Premium and insurance balance receivable	76,288	62,642	-	-
Re-insurance share in insurance funds	22,020	19,565	-	-
Investment securities	114,310	242,197	3,113	3,215
Investment in associates	336,287	239,635	145,855	38,937
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	280,554	432,664
Loans and advances to customers	-	2,006,330	-	-
Due from subsidiaries	-	-	112,437	115,876
Other assets	18,837	69,296	2,912	2,322
Investment properties	10,812	10,776	2,100	2,100
Property and equipment	11,008	50,904	1,029	1,102
Intangible assets	17,893	18,377	-	-
Total assets	725,509	2,992,143	618,887	600,765
Equity and liabilities				
Equity				
Share capital	80,777	80,777	80,777	80,777
Share premium	43,838	43,838	43,838	43,838
Treasury shares	(58,580)	(81,464)	-	-
Legal reserve	16,054	38,871	16,054	38,871
General reserve	-	13,033	-	13,033
Other non-distributable reserves	5,008	41,350	5,008	19,618
Cumulative changes in fair value reserve	(17,997)	(8,384)	(26,999)	(21,891)
Retained earnings	136,233	64,268	134,599	84,461
Equity attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	205,333	192,289	253,277	258,707
Perpetual Tier I capital bonds	46,055	116,762	60,638	60,638
	251,388	309,051	313,915	319,345
Non-controlling interests	17,885	162,522	-	-
Total equity	269,273	471,573	313,915	319,345
Liabilities				
Due to banks	307,379	310,016	298,729	276,551
Deposits from customers	-	1,978,832	-	-
Insurance funds	101,895	80,108	-	-
Subordinated debt	-	20,000	-	-
Other liabilities	44,101	122,467	5,604	4,730
Taxation	2,861	9,147	639	139
Total liabilities	456,236	2,520,570	304,972	281,420
Total equity and liabilities	725,509	2,992,143	618,887	600,765
Net assets per share (Rial Omani)	0.307	0.313	0.314	0.320

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2020				
	Consolidated (Unaudited)			
	6 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	6 months ended 30-Jun-19 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-20 (RO'000)	3 months ended 30-Jun-19 (RO'000)
Gross premium earned	72,534	71,354	35,254	34,615
Interest income	61,212	56,508	30,329	29,316
Investment income	13,020	2,391	7,183	728
Fee and commission income - net	4,421	4,076	3,789	2,081
Other operating income	2,112	4,781	(804)	2,413
Share of results from associates	9,824	12,933	5,132	6,612
Total revenue	163,123	152,043	80,883	75,765
Premium ceded to re-insurers	(14,330)	(19,919)	(6,787)	(8,512)
Net claims	(36,947)	(37,716)	(14,308)	(19,742)
Interest expense	(28,938)	(25,651)	(14,654)	(13,325)
Operating expenses	(36,299)	(35,818)	(17,953)	(18,207)
COVID-19 contribution	(1,175)	-	-	-
Allowance for loan impairment, net of recoveries	(9,237)	(4,679)	(5,300)	(2,758)
Total expenses	(126,926)	(123,783)	(59,002)	(62,544)
Profit before tax	36,197	28,260	21,881	13,221
Income tax expense	(4,571)	(3,942)	(2,869)	(2,194)
Profit for the period	31,626	24,318	19,012	11,027
Profit for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	24,118	16,076	14,766	6,872
Non-controlling interests	7,508	8,242	4,246	4,155
	31,626	24,318	19,012	11,027
Basic earnings per share attributable to the equity holders of the Parent Company (RO)	0.032	0.020	0.018	0.005
Other comprehensive (expense) / income :				
<i>Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:</i>				
Movement in cash flow hedge	(561)	-	(193)	-
Foreign currency translation reserve	(11)	(1)	(8)	64
	(572)	(1)	(201)	64
<i>Items not to be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:</i>				
Fair value changes of financial assets fair value through other comprehensive income	(11,484)	(3,651)	(970)	(1,599)
Other comprehensive expense for the period	(12,056)	(3,652)	(1,171)	(1,535)
Total comprehensive income for the period	19,570	20,666	17,841	9,492
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	12,542	12,369	13,186	5,399
Non-controlling interests	7,028	8,297	4,655	4,093
	19,570	20,666	17,841	9,492

Note: The Unaudited Interim Condensed Financial Statement of the Company would be made available to any Shareholder or interested Party on request in Arabic and English within 7 days from the date of request.
PO Box 3886, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24769500 Fax: +968 24951620



JABREEN CAPITAL



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Special Prizes

Umrah Prizes March 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	Ramdan Prizes May 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	Khareef Season Prizes July 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	National Day Prizes November 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners
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(The six winners for the above prizes are 3 from priority banking customers, 2 from affluent and 1 from standard customers)

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Oman Nano City planned in Sur

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and its investment arm Shumookh Investment and Services have signed a cooperation agreement with Advanced Universal Tech LLC to establish Oman Nano City in Sur Industrial City.

The project, aimed at promoting nanotechnology in the Sultanate, seeks to attract industries and investments, as well as provide support to investors through the implementation of regional and international competitive strategies. Oman Nano City project aspires eventually to diversify income sources, attract foreign investment, create new jobs, and support the innovation and entrepreneurship community.

The agreement was



signed by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, Eng Musallam bin Juma'a al Hudaifi, CEO of Shumookh Investment and Services, and Eng Qasim bin Habib al Lawati, partner and founder of Advanced Universal Tech.

Al Hasani emphasised that this agreement aims at establishing an incubator for nanotechnology in the Sultanate supported with high quality infra-

structure and excellent services through forming teams of experts and providing continued support for the project. "Oman Nano City will contribute in developing the manufacturing sector, creating links between industries, universities, colleges, schools and research institutions, and providing on job training opportunities," Al Hasani pointed out.

Oman Nano City also aims at supporting innovation in the Sultanate through transforming laboratory research into new products, as innovations give manufacturers the performance or cost edge they need to compete in

international marketplace, which will consequently allow to achieve Madayn's objectives in introducing advanced technologies, equipping the workforce with necessary technical skills to boost productivity, and creating new job opportunities for the national cadres.

On his part, Eng Qasim al Lawati stated that Oman Nano City aims at contributing to the sustainability and support of the national economy, as the project comes in line with Oman Vision 2040. "Oman Nano City will be built on a total area of one square kilometre to act as an incubator for innovations and industries related to nanotechnology.

The project will be equipped with a main administration centre in addition to various public facilities such as a hotel, cultural centre, business centre, banks, shopping centres, clinics, logistics services, and a residential area equipped with quality services for the workforce based in factories."

Omantel announces pre-orders for Samsung Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra

Pre-orders from Omantel begun on August 5, 2020 and will end on August 20, 2020.

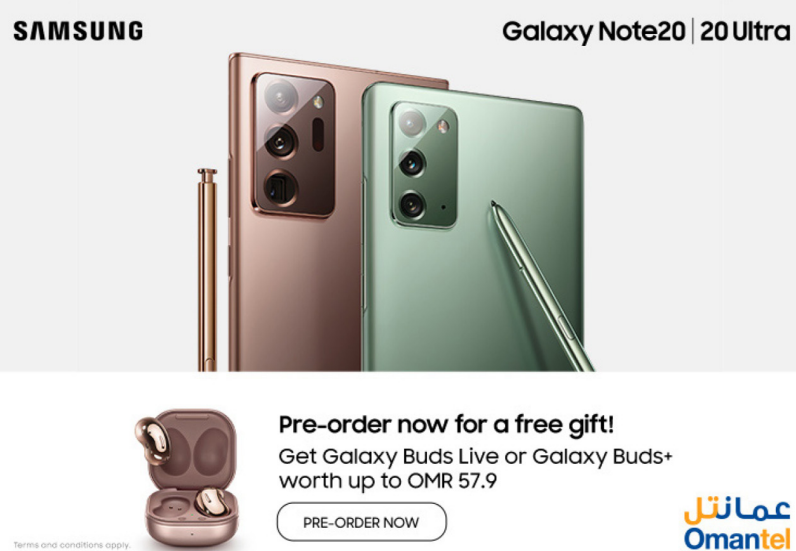
Muscat, Oman, 15 August 2020: The first and leading integrated telecommunication services provider in the Sultanate – Omantel - announced that devices part of the all-new Samsung Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra are available for customers starting August 23, 2020. At the same time, Omantel is also providing exclusive offers on the Samsung Note20 and Note20 Ultra with complimentary pairs of Galaxy Buds+ and Buds Live, respectively.

The Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra's next-generation design and sophisticated appearance are perfectly complimented by the mystic color options. Together, these factors combine to provide consumers with a device perfect for their dynamic lifestyles. What's more, the screen, which is also the largest to date for a Galaxy Note model, is the driving force behind outstanding immersive experiences and unrivalled performance. The world-class S Pen offers ease, simplicity, and conviction on every occasion to elevate standards of working, while watching videos and playing games has never been easier thanks to the design that fits perfectly into one's hand.

Mohammed Omar Al Hakmani, Senior Manager Emerging Services at Omantel's Consumer Business Unit, said: "With the launch of Samsung's latest Galaxy Note20 & Galaxy Note20 Ultra, we are delighted to offer our customers the opportunity to pre-order the devices on both cash and instalment payments. Our Baqati subscribers can order the latest Note20 line with easy monthly instalments starting from RO 13.250 and get the Galaxy Buds live or Galaxy Buds+ worth up to RO 57.9 for free. Customers can pre-order the Galaxy Note20 & Galaxy Note20 Ultra through www.omantel.om/Samsung-Note20-Ultra".

"The highly anticipated release of the Samsung Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra in the region is nearing closer and we are delighted that operators throughout Oman will again feature prominently in the build-up of our latest flagship devices," said Osman Albora, Head of Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

The Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra promise to represent another proactivity and productivity chapter concerning working



Omantel Baqati Subscribers can pre-order the devices with easy monthly instalments starting from RO 13.250

remotely. Thanks to the new and improved capabilities of the Samsung Notes app, all who purchase either device can take advantage of both auto-save and syncing capabilities to ensure all workpieces are seamlessly saved on every occasion. A contributing factor behind this is the long-term partnership between Samsung and Microsoft, which has been fundamental in guaranteeing Windows PC is compatible with both of the latest releases.

At the same time, the stage is also set for gaming experiences to be significantly elevated to newfound heights. This will ensure immersive gaming supported through 5G, a next-generation AI game booster, Bluetooth audio response optimization, and 240 Hz touch response in the Galaxy Note20 Ultra's case to offer outstanding visual and audio capabilities.

The long-lasting battery can last an entire day having been charged for 30 minutes, bringing an end to the days of running out a vital moments,

whether in personal or professional life.

The Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra has also been engineered with a pro-grade multi-camera setup comprising Wide, Telephoto, and Ultra wide lenses, along with a high-resolution sensor for shots, to bring new meaning to creativity. As for the Galaxy Note20 Ultra, the device's 120 Hz display refresh rate is a critical factor behind elegant gaming encounters that provide ultimate satisfaction. Those who purchase the Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra can link with their PC, reply to messages received via their phones, and transfer and edit files involving multiple devices to reap the rewards of frictionless multitasking.

Omantel customers pre-ordering the Samsung Galaxy Note20 will get the Buds+, and those pre-ordering the Galaxy Note20 Ultra will receive the Buds Live.

For more details, please visit www.samsung.com.



الخليجية بادر للأسواق المال ش.م.ع.م.
GULF BAADER CAPITAL MARKETS S.A.O.C.

Merger Notice

Gulf Baader Capital Markets SAOC (GBCM) registered with commercial registration number (1025584) announces that it is in the process of dissolution and merger by way of incorporation with **Ubhar Capital SAOC (U Capital)** registered with commercial registration number (1279406) pursuant to a resolution passed at an Extraordinary General Meeting of U Capital held on 28/7/2020 and a Merger Agreement dated 13/8/2020 entered into between U Capital and GBCM. Any creditor who has an objection to this merger is invited to submit their objection or claim with the supporting documents to the following address:

Attention: Hamad Yaseen Moosa, Legal and Compliance Department
Ubhar Capital SAOC
 Penthouse, OMINVEST Business Center, Airport Heights, Muscat, Oman
 PO Box: 1137. PC 111. Tel: +968 2494 9018

Attention: Sakina Al Lawati, Compliance Officer
Gulf Baader Capital Markets SAOC
Ghazal Tower, Ruwi, Muscat, Oman
P.O Box 974, PC 112 Tel: +968 2494 9042

A copy of any objection must be filed with the commercial register at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date of notice.

Chairman of the Board of Directors

BUSINESS

Passenger terminal envisioned in Duqm Port's future plans



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Provision has been made for the inclusion of a passenger terminal at Port of Duqm should a decision be taken in the future to open up the gateway, which anchors a mega industrial and economic hub, to cruise ships and pleasure boats.

According to a report in the latest edition of Duqm Economist, the quarterly newsletter of the Special Economic Authority of Duqm (SEZAD), a passenger terminal could be part of the newly operational Government Berth within the port. The 980-metre-long berth is earmarked primarily for vessels of Oman's defence and security establishments, notably the Oman Royal Yacht Squadron, Sultan's Special Force, Royal Navy of Oman, and Coast Guard of the Royal Oman Police.

But the Government Berth, strategically located between the ship repair yard of Oman Drydock Company and the new Oil Berth, could also potentially host a passenger terminal in the future, according to the report. "It can handle tourist operations, as it is possible to construct a passenger terminal in the future for travellers coming through Duqm Port," Duqm Economist noted.

The disclosure affirms Duqm's potential as a tourism destination underscored by its white-sand beaches, unique geology, and relatively pleasant climes, among other characteristics. A Tourism and Hospitality Zone master-planned within the SEZ already features a handful of luxury hotels overlooking the Arabian Sea with several new resorts and leisure developments planned for implementation in the future.

A one-of-its-kind 'Rock Garden' located within the SEZ is also being developed into the country's first-ever Geo Park, complete with facili-

TOURISM POTENTIAL:

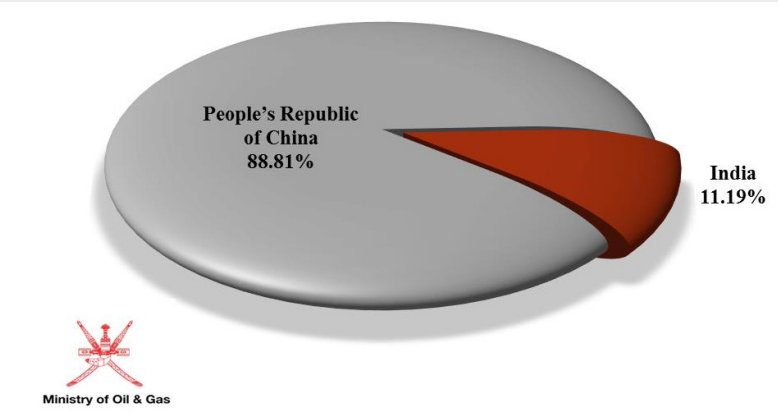
A future passenger terminal could be part of the newly operational Government Berth, a 980-metre-long structure currently earmarked for maritime vessels of Oman's defence and security establishments.

ties to receive nature tourists and geology enthusiasts. Also within driving distance of Duqm is the Huqf – a sprawling region abounding with examples of Oman's rich natural and geological heritage.

According to experts, a future passenger terminal will also pave the way for Duqm Port's inclusion in the coastal maritime transportation network of National Ferries (which is now part of Sinyar Oman – the integrated brand of Mwasalat Oman and National Ferries). The high-speed ferries operated by Sinyar will enhance connectivity between Duqm and a number of coastal communities and towns located along the Dhofar and Wusta coasts, thereby supporting tourism as well as economic development.

The Government Berth at Duqm Port – the first such integrated complex of berthing facilities for government defence and security agencies among the country's maritime gateways – was completed last year as part of Package 4 of the port's infrastructure development.

Construction of the roughly 1-km-long quay was undertaken by Kuwait-based Combined Group Contracting Company (CGC) at a cost of RO 55.4 million. The contract also entailed the construction of a number of administrative buildings, marina facilities, road networks and utilities covering the length of berth.



India's share of Omani crude imports rises in July

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT: China and India were the only two markets for Omani crude exports in July, the latter lifting 11.19 per cent of total exports of 778,012 barrels per day (bpd) for the month, an increase of 9.25 per cent from the previous month. China, long the dominant importer of Omani crude, accounted for the remaining 88.81 per cent, the Ministry of Oil and Gas said in its monthly report.

Crude oil production during July 2020 averaged 671,275 bpd, representing a decline of 1.85 per cent m-o-m compared with the June 2020 daily production average. Exports of 778,012 bpd were lower by 13.5 per cent compared with the previous month.

Oil prices for all reference crude oil grades around the world experienced a bullish trend during the trading days of July 2020 – for September 2020 delivery – compared with trading of June 2020. The average price of West Texas Intermediate Crude Oil at the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) settled at \$40.91 per barrel, an increase by \$2.42. The average price of North Sea Oil (Brent) at the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in London averaged \$43.22 per barrel, rising by \$2.45 compared with trading during July 2020.

The average price of Oman's Crude Oil futures contract on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange similarly increased by 4.9 per cent compared with the previous month. The monthly official selling price for Oman Crude oil for September 2020 delivery – traded during July 2020 – was \$43.62 per barrel, an increase of \$2.03 compared with the June 2020 official selling price. The daily trading marker price ranged between \$42.73 per barrel and \$44.98 per barrel.

"Crude oil prices experienced overall optimistic sentiments during trading in July 2020 due to several factors, which had direct and positive impact on prices. The main factors that supported positive trading sentiments were some of Opec+ countries curbing their production to more than what was agreed. In addition, oil flows to Asia rose for a third consecutive month, reflecting healthier demand," the Ministry added.

112 pc jump in Sohar Port cargo throughput

MUSCAT: The implementation of its business continuity plan has seen Sohar Port and Freezone maintain its operations and deliver high-quality services to its tenants and vessels that travel via its complex, despite the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on global markets.

Q2 saw an increase of 112 per cent in STS throughput, compared to the values of Q2 in 2019. This has resulted in a growth of STS operations by 16 per cent and anchorage calls by 4 per cent, a rise that is the result of Sohar's strategic location as gateway between the East and West and a myriad of direct connections to ports around the world.

Abdulrahman bin Salim al Hatmi, Group Chief Executive of Asyad, stated: "We continue to place a huge importance on maintaining an uninterrupted flow of goods and commodities into the local market, via all the ports in the Sultanate, which is further complemented by the provision of high-level marine services to shipping agents, and export and import companies.

Keeping in mind the current situation, we ensure only the highest levels of safety at all our facilities, in line with the directives of the relevant Supreme Committee, to safeguard



the health and well-being of all our employees, customers and the community at large."

Commenting on the Q2 statistics, Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port, said, "The quarter saw several key highlights, including the introduction of two new services that facilitate ease of setting up business at the Port or Freezone and attractive land lease opportunities at Sohar Port South and Terminal 2D.

The General Trade License (GTL) extends several discounts to established and potential investors. A second license, Tasheel, is available for our customers to allow them to meet all documentation requirements

conveniently. Derived from the Arabic word for 'Simplified', this easy-to-use online Permit Management System is one of our many digitised services and we have several additions to Tasheel planned for the future. All these developments and innovations are aimed at offering more features and options to both existing as well as new businesses, to further reinforce our position as a key logistics hub in the region," Mark added.

Commenting on the growth of the Freezone, Omar Mahmood al Mahrizi, Deputy CEO of Sohar Port — CEO of Sohar Freezone said, "The success of the Freezone coincides with that of the Port, with the construction

of several new projects going ahead as scheduled. A majority of these developments will be operational by the end of 2020, contributing additional revenue to the national economy as well as enhancing the number of downstream opportunities we can offer to our tenants. Q2 has seen our land occupancy rate reach 62 per cent, with our warehousing and office occupancy rates reaching 71 per cent and 18 per cent respectively.

Additionally, the Secured Bonded Corridors initiative, launched by the Directorate General of Customs, aims to facilitate trade and ease of doing business. This, in turn, will enhance the attractiveness of the Freezone and bring further investments."

Hyundai wins six 2020 Red Dot Design awards

MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Company announced they have won six 2020 Red Dot Design Awards. The company took the 'Best of the Best' and five other awards in the Brand & Communication Design area this year.

The 'Best of the Best' under the Advertising category (subcategory Integrated Campaign) went to Hyundai's brand campaign film 'Second First Steps,' which also secured a Winner under the Film & Animation category (subcategory Online Film). Hyundai also grabbed five Winners for 'Hyundai's Hi-Charger' in the Interface



& User Experience Design category, 'Hyundai X BTS Goods' in the Advertising

category (subcategory Image Campaign), 'Future Mobility Solutions Exhibition

Hall' in the Fair Stands category (subcategory Stands & Booths) and 'FIFA World Football Museum' in the Spatial Communication category (subcategory Event Design).

The 'Second First Steps' brand campaign film embodies Hyundai's next-generation brand vision of 'Progress for Humanity.' It shows para-athlete and archer Jun-boem Park's "second first steps" following those of his infancy, toward his mother, aided by Hyundai Motor's H-MEX (Hyundai Medical Exoskeleton), a wearable robotics technology.



A general view of Tiguentourine Gas Plant in In Amenas, 1600 km southeast of Algiers. — Reuters

Algeria turns to Islamic finance to prop up economy

ALGIERS: Algeria has launched Islamic finance products in a bid to attract money from the informal market, but bankers warn it will take more to fix the country's struggling economy.

Falling oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic have battered the North African country, triggering alarm bells among officials and experts.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast that Algeria's economy will shrink 5.2 per cent this year.

Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad has warned of an "unprecedented economic situation", and experts have estimated unemployment at nearing 15 per cent.

In Algeria, Africa's largest nation and home to 43 million people, most transactions are done in cash circulating outside the formal banking sector, said professor Mohamed Boudjelal, an expert on Islamic finance.

Many Algerians "turn their nose up" at conventional banking, Boudjelal said.

Some Muslims believe that the traditional banking system is incompatible with their faith.

Islamic finance — the provision of financial services in accordance with religious laws — is a fast growing sector that has been adopted in many Muslim countries.

The industry is based on shared profit and loss, while earning interest is banned as "usury".

Funds are also blocked from invest-

ISLAMIC FINANCE – THE PROVISION OF FINANCIAL SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH RELIGIOUS LAWS – IS A FAST GROWING SECTOR THAT HAS BEEN ADOPTED IN MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES. THE INDUSTRY IS BASED ON SHARED PROFIT AND LOSS, WHILE EARNING INTEREST IS BANNED AS 'USURY'.

ing in companies associated with tobacco, alcohol, pork or gambling.

Algeria is hoping the new products could woo new investors into the market, following the success of Islamic finance products over the past decade in other countries, notably in the Gulf and Malaysia.

The country's neighbours have already rolled out similar schemes.

In Tunisia, Islamic finance has operated in the private sector since the 1980s, although the sector remains modest, while in Morocco it began in 2017, though it has recorded net losses it says are due to initial start-up costs.

But Algeria hopes to tap into the significant revenues of the informal mar-

ket, estimated to be as much as \$30-35 billion, according to Abderahmane Benkhalfa, a former minister of finance and ex-head of the banking association.

"It is not only necessary to draw these resources, but to inject them into banks in order to bolster the economy," Benkhalfa said.

Earlier this month, state-run National Bank of Algeria offered nine Islamic financial services, receiving a certificate from Muslim clerics ensuring they were compatible with Islamic law.

Only two other private banks, subsidiaries of the Bahrain-based Baraka Bank and Al Salam Bank, offer Islamic finance services in Algeria.

However, Algeria's other banks — all state-run — are now expected to follow suit by the end of the year.

Most foreign banks are also planning to sell Islamic finance products too.

But Benkhalfa, who is also a member of a panel of African experts tasked by the African Union to mobilise international funds to help the continent combat coronavirus, warned that Islamic finance is not a "miracle solution".

Only a small slice of cash in the informal economy circulates because of people's religious beliefs.

The solution, Benkhalfa argues, are to make steps to modernise the traditional banking system — to make it more responsive — and develop in parallel with Islamic finance. — AFP

SPORTS



Oman Karate Committee attends Asian-level webinar

MUSCAT: The Omani Karate Committee participated in the coaches webinar organised by the Asian Karate Federation on Saturday.

The webinar was held on the Zoom application with the participation of the national karate team coach Ali bin Said Al Shabibi, who holds the Asian classification as a coach, along with 325 Asian-ranked coaches representing 29 countries from the member countries of the Asian Karate Federation.

Mansour al Sultan, Chairman of Asian Referees Committee and member of International Referees Committee, lectured about the kumite and kata rules and the recent amendments. Major General Nasser al Razooqi, AKF President and Vice-President of International Karate Federation, and other members of the AKF were present.

The Oman Karate Committee had participated in the event for the registration of five Omani referees who obtained the Asian classification. A group of players in the Sultanate will participate in the players webinar in kata and kumite on

SALIM EMERGES NATIONAL SENIOR CHESS CHAMPION



Salim al Amri



Ameen al Ansi



Salim al Kathiri

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: National team player Salim al Amri won the senior title in the National Singles Online Chess Championship late on Saturday.

Al Amri was crowned the champion after he earned 6.5 points as overall credit while Ameen al Ansi claimed the runner-up position with six points. Salim al Kathiri finished third with 5.5 points.

Salim shrugged off his early round loss — also due to some network issues — to come back strong in the final rounds to take the title.

More than 60 players took part in the senior category and only 12 players advanced to the finals which witnessed tough competitions among the participants.

The sixth edition of the tournament, which was organised online for the first time, was monitored carefully by the umpiring team through 'Zoom' application to ensure the players complied strictly to the rules and regulations. The tournament was played under the 'Swiss classic' system and the qualification stage comprised seven rounds while the finals featured nine rounds.

Another national team player Salim al Mushikhi performed strongly to end in fourth position.

Hamood al Busaidy became the junior champion and Anas al Darwashi came in second. Anaa al Essai was the ladies champion in the above 17 years category with Afra al Balushi taking second place with six points while Alanood al Ghafri finished third. Kamila al Ghafri and Wafia al Ghafri ended at fourth and fifth places respectively.

SPORTS



OFA to wait for Supreme Committee decision for season resumption

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced that the board resolution on all the remaining domestic competitions for the footballing season 2019-2020 is linked with the upcoming decisions of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19.

The OFA board meeting which was held on Sunday at OFA headquarters in Seeb Stadium and chaired by Salim al Wahaibi, OFA Chairman, in presence of all the members, also discussed the preparation of the Annual General Meeting which is scheduled to take place on September 19. The



preparatory programme of Oman national team was another item on the agenda.

Board discussed a revised plan for the joint qualification of the Fifa 2022 World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup after the qualifying matches were moved to 2021. The OFA said on their twitter channel that the

board will have another meeting very soon in this regard.

The OFA chairman met Omantel League representatives on July 1 and agreed to continue the season with the three remaining matches of top-tier domestic league as per the previous confirmation issued by OFA

board in mid March.

Before the sporting season stopped in the Sultanate in mid of March, Seeb were topping Omantel League by 50 points while Dhofar were placed second with 45 points. At the bottom of the league table order, Mirbat are confirmed of their relegation to the first division league while Al Oruba and Oman Club are positioned in the 12th and 13th positions respectively. In the HM Cup, the second leg matches of the semifinals and the final are still to be played. Ibri beat Al Oruba 2-1 in the first leg of the semifinal while the match between Al Nahda and Dhofar ended in a 1-1 draw.

BURNS FALLS EARLY AS RAIN RULES IN SECOND TEST

SOUTHAMPTON: Pakistan claimed the wicket of opener Rory Burns for a duck on Sunday to leave England seven for one in their first innings at lunch on day four as rain once again interrupted the second Test at the Rose Bowl that is meandering towards a tame draw.

England had earlier bowled out the tourists

for 236, with top-scorer Mohammad Rizwan (72) being the last Pakistani batsman to be dismissed on a day when a little over an hour of play was possible due to rain.

Burns was caught at second slip by Asad Shafiq off the bowling of Shaheen Afridi as the tourists produced prodigious movement with the



new ball under the heavy skies.

It was another failure for the left-hander in the series after he managed scores of four and 10 in the first test.

Dom Sibley (2 not out) and Zak Crawley (5 not out) survived to the end of

the fifth over before play was halted.

Pakistan had resumed on 223 for nine, the first play possible since just before 5pm on Friday afternoon, with Rizwan flashing his bat in an attempt to score quick runs. — Reuters

Former India Test opener Chauhan dies of coronavirus



NEW DELHI: Former India Test opener Chetan Chauhan, who forged a prolific opening partnership with Sunil Gavaskar, has died aged 73 from coronavirus, his brother said on Sunday.

Chauhan, who tested positive last month, was put on ventilator support at a hospital in Gurgaon, but his condition worsened after he suffered multiple organ failure.

He is one of the highest-profile figures to die from the disease in India, which is the world's third-most infected nation with more than 2.5 million cases and almost 50,000 deaths.

"He had tested negative but then the reports came positive again," brother Pushpendra Chauhan said.

After playing 40 Tests for India, Chauhan switched to politics and was a minister in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh as a member of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Born July 21, 1947, the right-hander scored 2,084 runs and shared 10 century partnerships with his more illustrious teammate Gavaskar.

He failed to score a Test century, with 97 his highest-ever innings.

In 179 first-class matches, he accumulated 11,143 runs, earning a reputation for his solid defence and doggedness. — AFP



DEMBELE SHOCKS CITY

LYON COACH GARCIA
HAILS TEAM SPIRIT

LISBON: Olympique Lyonnais striker Moussa Dembele conceded he was disappointed to start on the bench in the Champions League quarterfinal against Manchester City but was thrilled to be the hero and seal his side a place in the last four.

Named as a substitute by coach Rudi Garcia, who chose Memphis Depay and Karl Toko Ekambi up front instead, the 24-year-old Dembele scored shortly after coming on in the 75th minute and then wrapped up the 3-1 win three minutes from time.

His goals prompted wild scenes on the streets of Lyon on Saturday as fans gathered in the city centre, dancing and lighting flares to celebrate their victory over pre-match favourites City.

"It was a complicated game against a very great team. For a player, there is always a little bit of sadness to start on the bench, but I made a difference," Dembele told French television.

"We made the promise to give everything. The spirit of the group has changed, we know that we are a great team."

— Reuters



Raina follows Dhoni into retirement



NEW DELHI: Former India all-rounder Suresh Raina has joined ex-skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni in quitting international cricket, the 33-year-old said in a statement on Sunday.

Minutes after Dhoni announced his retirement on Instagram on Saturday, Raina posted a message on the same platform, saying "With my heart full of pride, I choose to join you in this journey."

The Indian cricket board issued a statement on Saturday confirming Dhoni's retirement but there was no official word on Raina.

"With a lot of mixed feelings, I'm able to make this announcement of my retirement," Raina, who made his India debut in a one-day match in Sri Lanka in 2005, said on Sunday.

"I had multiple surgeries, setbacks and moments when I felt that this is it... It's been an incredible ride..."

A fluent left-handed batsman and a handy off-spinner, Raina played 18 Tests but impressed more in limited-overs cricket, where his agile fielding made him an asset.

Raina played 226 ODIs for India, his last being in 2018 in England. He scored nearly 8,000 international runs, having scored a century in all three formats.

"Congratulations Suresh on a wonderful career..." batting great Sachin Tendulkar tweeted. — Reuters

SPORTS

NEW DELHI: The crestfallen look on Mahendra Singh Dhoni's face was beamed across the subcontinent as the then 23-year-old — his silky black mane cascading on his broad shoulders — appeared gutted after a nightmarish international debut in 2004.

Dhoni had fallen for a first ball duck in Chittagong, and in the cruellest of manner — run out.

For much of the next decade-and-half, Dhoni subjected rivals to such agonies — from behind the stumps, with the bat, and as a shrewd captain of a highly successful team.

Three and half months after that forgettable debut, Dhoni announced his arrival with a breath-taking 148 off 123 balls against Pakistan in Visakhapatnam.

He wielded the willow like a mace and his batting was less technique and more pyrotechnic.

He did not have the steely defence of a Rahul Dravid or the silken touch of a VVS Laxman but Dhoni made up with his muscular ingenuity.

He converted the yorker into a scoring opportunity with his trademark 'helicopter shot', a culmination of violent convulsions involving his arm, wrists and torso.

Dhoni wrote his own keeping manual too, barely moving his hands sideways before gathering the ball and rather thrusting them down to pull off electric stumpings.

His biggest legacy, however, would be as India's 'Captain Cool' who was also one of one-day cricket's greatest finishers.

Dhoni is the only captain to win all ICC trophies — T20 World Cup in 2007, 50-overs World Cup in 2011 and Champions Trophy in 2013. Under him, India also became the top ranked Test nation in 2009.

And he led a cricket-mad nation of 1.3 billion with ice in his veins.

— Reuters

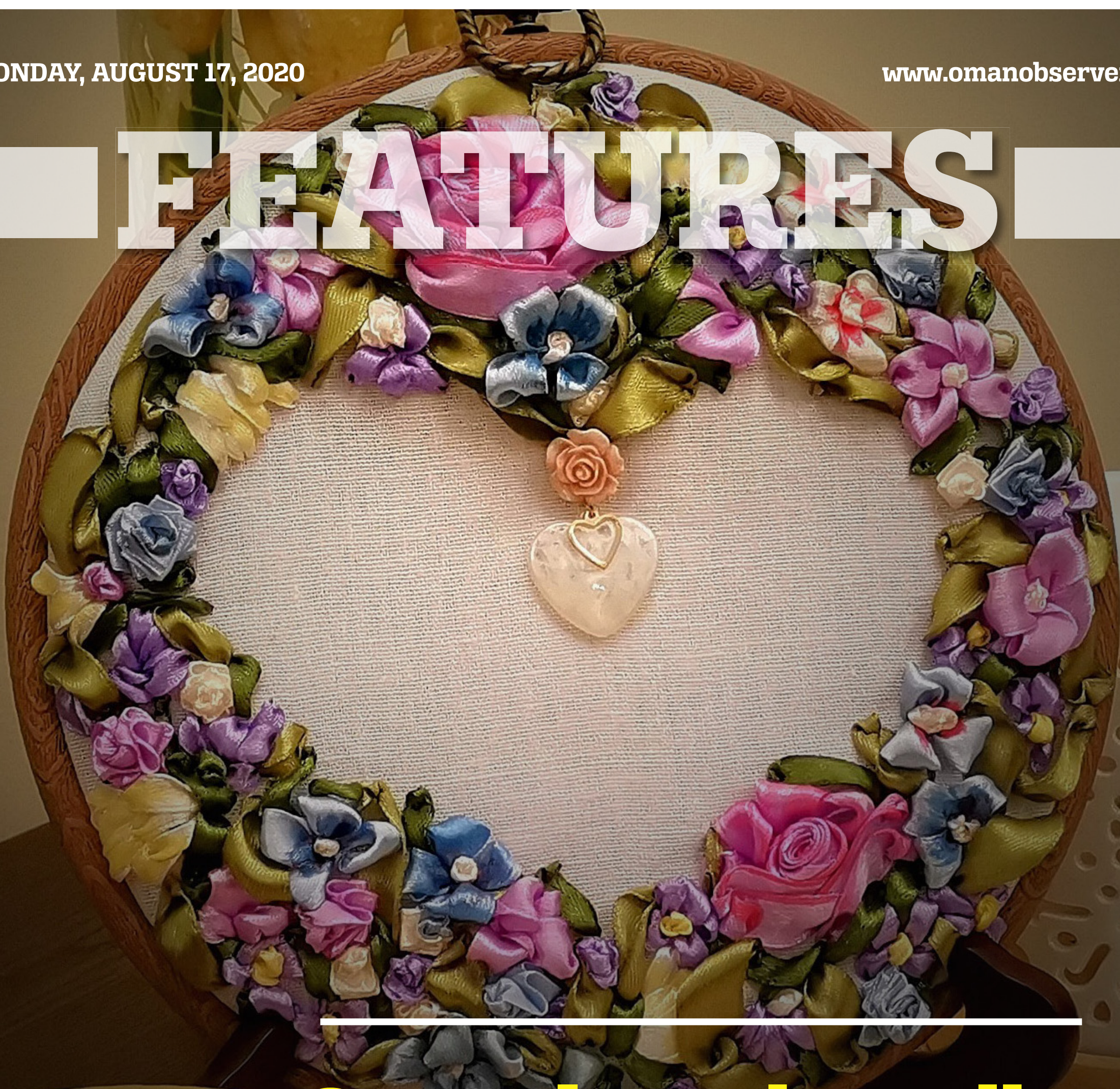
DHONI

ENDS JOURNEY WITH ENIGMA INTACT

DHONI IS THE ONLY CAPTAIN TO WIN ALL ICC TROPHIES — T20 WORLD CUP IN 2007, 50-OVERS WORLD CUP IN 2011 AND CHAMPIONS TROPHY IN 2013



FEATURES



Oman-based needle painter creates hand embroidered masterpieces

Embroidery, in all its forms has stood the test of time and this beautiful and intricate method of embellishing fabric continues to be an art form that attracts attention and awe. Artist Lina Ibrahim Mustafa pursues the art for the joy it brings to people ... **p20**

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Remove masks, celebrate free-
dom: fashion grannies return
to Beijing street "catwalk"



Rundown Sudan National
Museum to get face-lift





Oman-based needle painter creates hand embroidered masterpieces

MARY OOMMEN

Every artist needs a canvas and Lina Ibrahim Mustafa, chose fabric. Influenced by her Palestinian roots, and her experiences Lina creates strikingly beautiful embroidery using silk threads and satin ribbons. She took to the needle as a young child and created her first embroidered work when she was only in fifth grade. She reminisces, “by the time I was in eighth grade, I had developed a steady hand. I embroidered a pillow cover for my mother using the art of Tatreez, a special style of cross-stitching which is used in traditional Palestinian embroidery.” Embroidery, in all its forms has stood the test of time and this beautiful and intricate method of embellishing fabric continues to be an art form that attracts attention and awe. An unmistakable symbol of

tradition and history, examples of embroidery have been found at various archaeological excavations dating back to at least the second millennium BC. It is a skill that has been diligently developed and nurtured by different cultures, each one contributing its own unique set of colours, distinct techniques, patterns and stories. The types of stitches, fabrics, pictorial representations and decorative elements, like beads and pearls to silk and sequins, differ vastly from region to region. When Lina moved to Jordan, she was deeply inspired by the beautiful embroidery made using ribbons. “I saw ribbon embroidered products at Jordan’s Souk Jara and I just knew in my heart that this was something that I wanted to try. I felt that ribbon embroidery was almost like weaving a kind of magic, that turns a piece of fabric into breathtaking pieces of art. The shine of the satin

and silk ribbons add to the magical effect. It looks difficult to do, but all it needs is patience and time and the end result can be very rewarding.” Professionally trained as a pharmacist with a specialization in Regulatory Affairs, Lina moved to Muscat in 2011 and spend six years in Salalah before moving to Muscat in 2017. “In Salalah I attended classes to further strengthen my passion for embroidery and tailoring. I find that embroidery really helps me to relax and destress.” Lina is passionate and meticulous about her work. “There have been times that I have been so focused on completing my patterns that I find myself unable to leave the hoop, it’s almost like an addiction. I have been fortunate to have the support of my husband and children. They encouraged me to make embroidered hoops



which I began gifting to family and friends.” Knowing that her work brings joy to people infuses her with an indescribable feeling that she cannot put in words. “The hugely positive response that I got gave me the impetus to widen my horizons and I now take commissions from those who want to own and display my hand embroidered pieces. I am thrilled when I see the happiness of people as they uncover the packaging and see the final product. I think people appreciate hand embroidery not only for its beauty but also for the time involved to create it.” In the near future, she plans to teach embroidery as she believes that even novices can create elegant floral arrangements and beautiful patterns with some simple stitches. Lina’s work is displayed on her Instagram account @ Lollary95 and on her facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Lollary9/>

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



i_am_baloch_photography • Follow



le_touriste_68 • Follow
Corniche, Muscat, Oman



halfdevil_ • Follow
Muscat, Oman



Remove masks, celebrate freedom: fashion grannies return to Beijing street “catwalk”

FOUR FAMOUS amateur model grandmothers took off their masks during a saunter down the streets of Beijing on Thursday to demonstrate life returning to normal as the COVID-19 pandemic eases. Glimma Beijing, a group of four women who met during a modelling training course after retiring 20 years ago, became an internet sensation

in China last year. A 15-second video of them walking in Sanlitun, one of Beijing's busiest shopping districts, wearing traditional qipao dresses and over-sized dangling fringe earrings, was viewed more than 50 million times in a day, according to local media. Since then, Lin Wei, Wang Xinghuo, Sun Yang and Wang

Nianwen, all aged over 60, have enjoyed dressing up and performing in videos on short-video platform Douyin for likes. “Your life is grey if you are always afraid of ageing and death,” said Lin Wei, 64, explaining her philosophy on growing older and enthusiasm for donning stylish clothes and makeup. “You are old, you have wrinkles, you don't have too much energy, or your figure becomes baggy. But this is something you can't go against, so you need to face it with positivity.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the group had to stay indoors, they reverted to creating videos about their lifestyle. They now have more than a million followers on Douyin. On Thursday, the stylish grannies, as they call themselves in Mandarin, turned heads as they walked in figure-hugging qipaos down a street like a catwalk, in Beijing's central business district of Guomao. “Beauty is in all ages,” said Liu Jing, a passer-by. “You can be young and stylish, or feminine. And you can also be elegant just like these grannies.”— **Reuters**

‘Dream destination’ cafes offer taste of paradise in blockaded Gaza strip



Mediterranean waves crash below patrons snacking on freshly-caught fish at the “Maldives Gaza” cafe, offering a glimpse of paradise to Palestinians confined to the blockaded strip. The new three-storey restaurant, protruding 15 metres over the rocky shoreline, also features the tropical juice drinks typical of the distant Indian ocean island after which it is named. Many of Gaza's 2 million Palestinians have never left the 360 sq km (140 sq mile) enclave, which Israel and Egypt have largely blockaded for years citing security concerns over its Islamist rulers Hamas. “The people of Gaza can't go to the Maldives, so we said to ourselves: Why don't we bring the Maldives to them?” said Emad Al-Bayya, co-owner of the cafe, which seats 1,200 and which he hopes to expand. It is one of several new sea-side cafes bearing the names of dream travel destinations, Marbella, Dubai and Sharm el-Sheikh among them. They offer a brief window onto a more exotic life to people “who have been subject to wars, pressures and blockades”, said Rola Al-Agha, one of hundreds of patrons packed into “Maldives Gaza” on a pleasantly breezy evening last week. —**Reuters**

Rundown Sudan National Museum to get face-lift

SUDAN NATIONAL Museum, which houses thousands of priceless antiquities dating back millennia, is to be closed for lengthy renovations after years of neglect, its director said.

The museum, which opened in the 1970s, is home to more than 2,700 objects including some dating back to the Paleolithic period and important pieces from the ancient Egyptian Pharaonic dynasties and from Nubian culture.

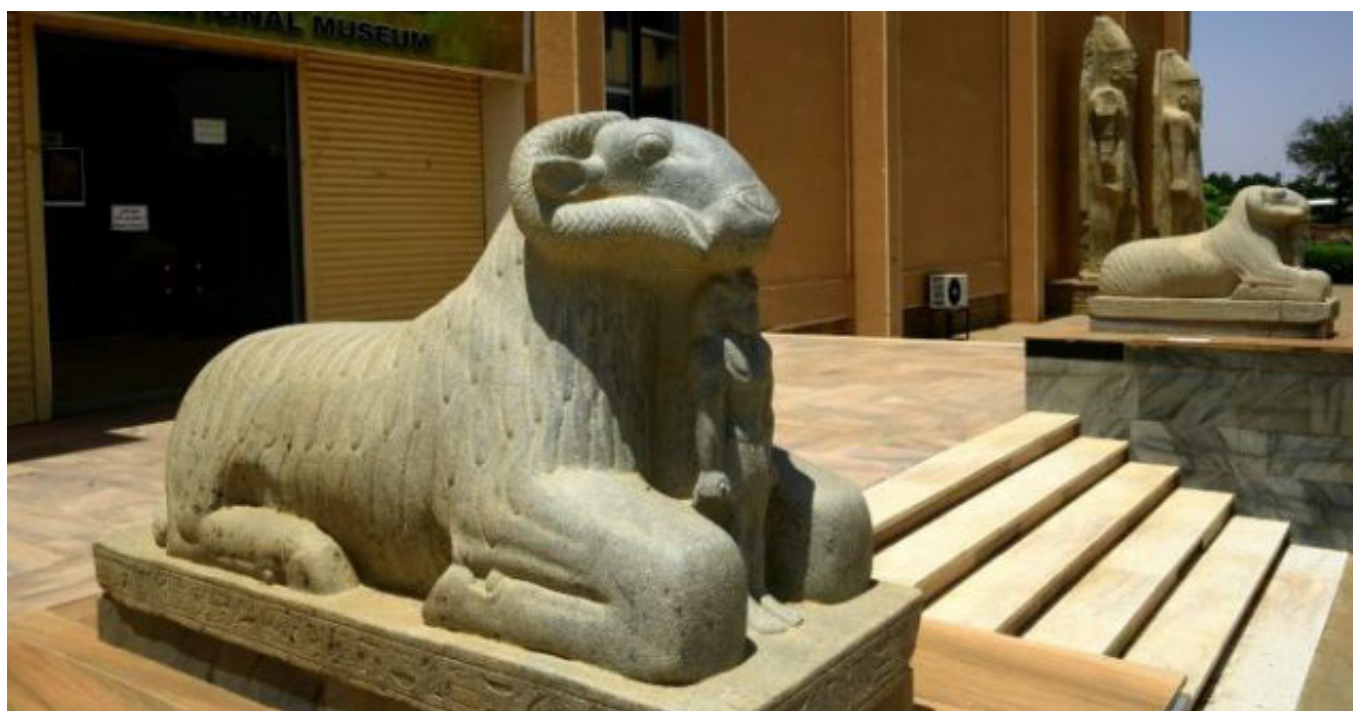
"All these pieces are originals, apart from a few statues which are copies because the originals are in the Kerma museum" in the country's Northern state, said Haitem el-Nour, new director of the national corporation of antiquities and museums.

A grant of a \$1 million has been put up by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation to fund the works, which will be carried out under the supervision of UNESCO.

"This is coming at the right time as the building really needs to be renovated as well as the display cases," said Nour.

The museum will close on September 1, with the renovations to be finished by either late next year or early 2022.

The irreplaceable items have been left collecting dust in the building for years, with no air-



The museum, which opened in the 1970s, is home to more than 2,700 objects including some dating back to the Paleolithic period and important pieces from the ancient Egyptian Pharaonic dynasties and from Nubian culture

conditioning to protect them from the scorching Sudanese temperatures.

Now they will have to be carefully removed from the building and placed into underground storage to protect them from light before the work begins.

When the museum reopens, Nour hopes to be able to put on display some other treasures which have been uncovered over the past decade and never shown to the public.

He also hopes the new museum will encourage tourism in the country, which has embarked on a new path since last year shaking off 30 years of iron-fisted rule under dictator Omar al-Bashir.—**AFP**