



His Majesty issues 3 Royal Decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued three Royal Decrees on Thursday.

Royal Decree No 65/2020 appoints a Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Article (1) stipulates that Dr Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi shall be appointed as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. Royal Decree No 66/2020 enacts appointments to some official positions. Article (1) appoints Yaqoub bin Khalfan bin Khamis al Busaidi as Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for Fisheries.

Article (2) appoints Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi as Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture for Heritage Affairs.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. Royal Decree No 67/2020 appoints a Vice-Chancellor for Sultan Qaboos University.

Article (1) appoints Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda bin Majid al Said, as Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, with the Special Grade.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — **ONA**

COVID-19 SURVEY FROM JULY 12

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: With more than 9,000 new COVID-19 cases and 43 deaths in a single week, the government said it will launch a national survey to measure the prevalence of the coronavirus among citizens and residents. The survey, which will be carried out in association with the National Centre for Statistics and Information, will start on July 12.

During the Supreme Committee meeting on Thursday, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, expressed alarm over the COVID-19 situation in the Sultanate.

The minister said during the first months of the pandemic outbreak, the government managed to limit the number of infections with the cooperation of all people

and their adherence to precautionary measures set by the Supreme Committee but in the last week there was a setback due to the action of some people. "It is really sad that our experience suffered a radical setback over the past 6 months as a result of the nonchalance of some people, leading to an astonishing surge in new cases of infection, hitting higher than 9,000."

EQUAL TO MURDER

The minister said it is the collective responsibility of the government, institutions and individuals to curb the spread of infections. The failure to follow preventive guidelines leads to spread of the infection to people having chronic diseases or elderly people which may cause death, he said. The minister vowed to act firm with offenders. "It is high time we acted firm with



offenders. Their names should be announced. The deliberate offence of causing infection is considered an equivalent of murder," he said.

The minister urged all those with COVID-19 symptoms to immediately quarantine themselves at homes. In case the symptoms become more serious, the patient should visit the nearest health centre. He advised all those to have mingled with infected persons to quarantine themselves for two weeks.

NEW HOSPITAL

Al Saeedi pointed out that intensive care units are experiencing immense pressure due to surge in cases.

He added that there is cooperation between government and private health establishments to deal with the situation. **TURN TO P2**

9,000 NEW CASES,
43 DEATHS IN A
SINGLE WEEK

FOLLOW
PRECAUTIONS,
WEAR MASK

RO 20 PENALTY
MAY GO UP

GATHERINGS
REASON FOR SPIKE
IN CASES

SURVEY TO IDENTIFY COVID-19 CARRIERS

FROM PAGE 1

A plan is under way to set up a field hospital in Muscat Governorate for non-critical cases, with a capacity ranging between 250 and 300 beds.

FINE MAY GO UP

Speaking at the meeting, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Futaisi, Minister of Transport, said the Royal Oman Police will intensify raids to book people without face masks in public. Noting that the penalty of RO 20 for not wearing a mask is no longer a deterrent, the minister said the government is planning to increase the fine.

Al Futaisi said that Oman Air has been hit like other international airlines due to the pandemic. The losses in this sector are big. In this context, he referred to the formation of an emergency committee to cut down these losses. "We have already shrunk the operational budget for 2020 by 43 per cent, which led to the alleviation of losses," said the minister. Al Futaisi pointed out that the government will not allow the aviation sector to collapse and will not hesitate to support it. He said that international organisations estimate that the recovery of the aviation sector in the Middle East will take 3-4 years.

NEWSPAPER PRINTING

Speaking about other business activities, the minister said the decision to resume newspaper printing was entrusted to a technical team. It will be taken by the Supreme Committee in the next meeting, which will discuss the 5th list of commercial activities to be unlocked.

Al Futaisi said sports will not be opened, except for camel training. But the Supreme Committee is looking at opening gyms in hotels and other places.

INTEREST-FREE LOANS

The government is planning to give interest-free emergency loans to taxi owners, driving instructors and women who run beauty parlors and nurseries to ease the impact of the pandemic. Dr Abdul Aziz al Hinai, CEO of ODB, said, "Following the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to provide interest-free emergency loans to help business establishments that took the brunt of the pandemic, the Supreme Committee has entrusted the programme to ODB, which will coordi-

nate with other departments concerned, notably Riyada and Al Raffd Fund."

The scheme will also cover small and medium enterprises whose owners hold Riyada cards, borrowers from Al Raffd Fund and micro business firms. The period of repayment will range from four years to 6 months, said Al Hinai, who called upon the those who need the loan to submit their applications via ODB branches from Sunday.

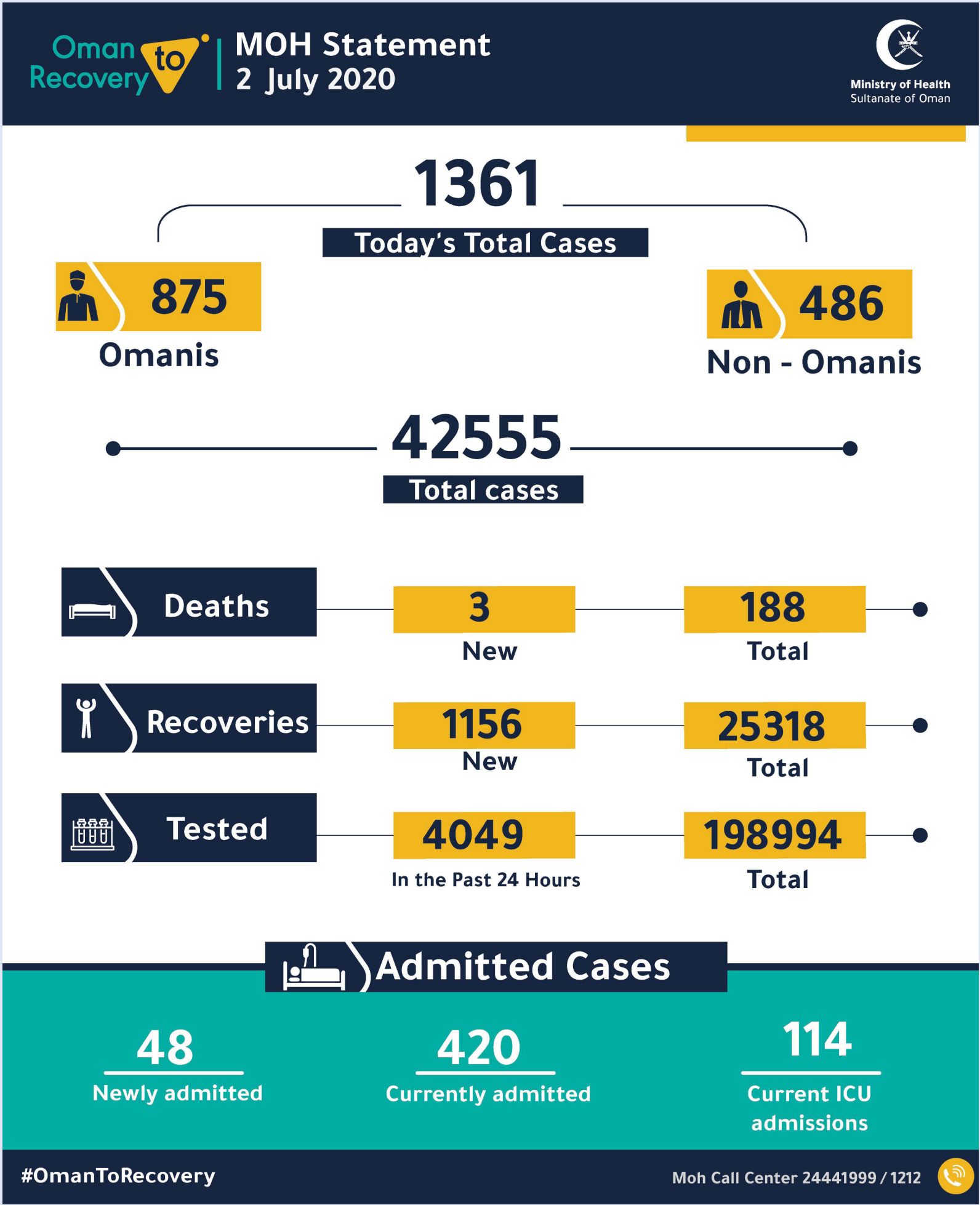
Al Hinai pointed out that the government's directives are clear on the issue of loans. He added that loans granted by ODB have been rescheduled for a period of 6 months and will be revised, if necessary. He pointed out that priority is given to SMEs that have large numbers of employees whose salaries have been slashed, as well as owners of beauty parlors. "We welcome all applications, depending on priorities and capacities," he said.

NO FIXED SUM

Al Hinai explained that the emergency loans programme does not have a fixed sum for beneficiaries. He added that the volume of loss incurred by the beneficiary is the main factor in considering loans. He said that more than 25,000 applicants benefited from the emergency loan programme. Dr Saif bin Salim al Abri, Director-General of Disease Control and Surveillance, said he requested people's cooperation on the national COVID-19 survey.

GATHERINGS CULPRIT

Dr Ali bin Abdullah al Maqbali, Director, Disease Control and Surveillance, North Al Batinah, said gatherings caused a recent spike in infection in North Al Batinah Governorate. He cited examples of wedding parties which, he said, made hospitals on the verge of being overwhelmed. Sohar Hospital alone has 26 COVID-19 patients who have been put under ventilators and 6 in intensive care units.



1,361 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) has announced 1,361 new cases of COVID-19 in the Sultanate, including 875 Omanis and 486 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases to 42,555. Three new deaths were also reported due to COVID-19, taking the total toll to 188. According to the MoH, a total of 4,049 people were tested in the past 24 hours. The ministry also reported that 1,156 patients recovered from COVID-19 during the past 24 hours, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 25,318 in the Sultanate. A total of 48 people were admitted to the hospital on Thursday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 420, including 114 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

NDC drill ‘Decision Making-7’ concludes

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) on Thursday concluded the strategic exercise ‘Decision Making- 7’, which was carried out by the NDC seventh batch from the various military, security and civil institutions in the country. The closing ceremony was held under the patronage of Shaikh Al Fadhil bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. The chief guest and attendees were briefed on the progress of the exercise by Brig Mohammed bin Yarub al



Sifi, NDC Assistant Commandant. The event was attended by Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and Chairman of NDC Board, Dr Mohammad bin Saif al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Diplomatic Affairs, and Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). — ONA

Auction for date palm produce ends



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries held an electronic auction to sell date palm crops at agricultural stations and their affiliated research farms in the wilayats of Nizwa, Bahla, Barka, Al Kamil W’al Wafi and Suhar. The auction, published on Mazad Oman electronic website, came as part of an initiative to endorse online marketing against the backdrop of exceptional conditions prevailing in the Sultanate and the world at large due to the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. The electronic auction, which listed the number of date palms, their types and their location, ended on Thursday. — ONA

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CARING FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN

DURING THE PANDEMIC, BOTH THE CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS NEED SUPPORT FROM SOCIETY, AS THEIR REQUIREMENTS ARE DIFFERENT FROM NORMAL CHILDREN AND IT TAKES TIME FOR THEM TO ADAPT TO THE NEW SITUATION



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Among various problems being faced due to the COVID-19, the plight of the parents of special children needs to be understood. Both the children and their parents need support from society, as their requirements are different from normal children and it takes time for them to adapt to the new trend of online classes.

A parent of a special child, who preferred not to be named, admitted that she tried to set a room for a virtual class for her son who is suffering from autism. "It is not easy to make him sit and focus. He misses his classmates and wants to go out for some activity or the other."

She admitted that the course was outsourced. In the beginning, there were some hassles but gradually he started liking interaction with the trainers who suggested some equipment and made him learn how to set

his own study table. "There are some games and exercises, which really helped and the setting looks better now. If you don't engage your special child in some activity he tends to become lethargic and not interested in doing anything," she said.

She, however, emphasised that the virtual classroom may be a good idea for the normal kids but not for the special ones.

"The one-to-one setting is the best for them. They have a routine to follow. Getting up early and preparing for school make them disciplined. So, I prefer normal schools, which are meant for special children."

Naif Ahmed Said al Shanfari, Chairman of Dhofar branch of the Omani Special Olympics Committee, admitted the issue and said this was forced upon everyone. "We do not have any choice but to cope up with the situation."

"I call upon the parents of the special children to keep their wards engaged in some activities and manage a regime of exercise daily. In a normal situation, we organise activities, but any activity that requires gathering is not possible now... Continuity is a must for them to cope with," he said.

A special child's father advised other such parents to be in touch with reality and give them quality time. "I got to know that my child has autistic disorder a year-and-a-half after his birth. It was hard to believe that your child, who was developing normally, is suddenly regressing. Like every parent, we were also in denial initially. Very soon, I and my wife came to terms and did research. We came to know about some association and it is helping." "Now that is closed due to the pandemic, but we try to keep him engaged in some home activity or the other," he said.



SULTANATE STANDS THIRD AMONG ARAB COUNTRIES IN UN REPORT

High ranking in sustainable development

NEW YORK: The Sultanate ranked third among Arab countries in the 2020 Sustainable Development Report issued by the UN Development Institution. The report, published by the institute on Tuesday, said that Oman occupied

76th position globally and won 69.76 points. Sweden took first place, followed by Denmark and Finland in the rating, which comprises 193 countries. Taking insights from the achievements made in the 2015 Sustainable

Development Goals, the report monitored the performance of all UN member states in terms of Sustainable Development Standard, the extent to which they achieved the goals of development and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The report noted that COVID-19 had its toll on many goals of sustainable development, particularly the goals targeting the elimination of poverty and hunger and the improvement of health, welfare, employment opportunities, economic prosperity and equality. The report showed that, in some areas, the lasting

effects of COVID-19 are not clear and that the pandemic brought about immediate relief to some regions in goals of sustainable development like responsible consumption/production and climate affairs. The report recommended the significance of using low-carbon emission vehicles and cautioned against relaxing automobile emission criteria. It also stressed the need to expedite research and development in the aviation sector and proposed intensifying personnel training and investment in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. — ONA

Al Jisr signs pacts to support health sector

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Al Jisr Foundation has signed agreements with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to fund the purchase of medical equipment and materials as part of its sustainable projects in the health field. These agreements also aim at strengthening the

health sector and to enhance the services provided to citizens. Two agreements stipulated funding medical equipment for the General



Directorate of Khoula Hospital and the Royal Hospital. The Foundation also signed a funding agreement with the MoH, represented by the Directorate-General of Specialised Medical Care, to

purchase respiratory equipment for low-income patients and those on social security. "Supporting the health sector has always been a key priority and part of the Foundation's strategic vision to enhance healthcare in the Sultanate," Dina al Khalili, Head of Al Jisr Foundation, said.



Over 160 people dead in Myanmar mine landslide

HPAKANT: The battered bodies of more than 160 jade miners were pulled from a sea of mud after a landslide in northern Myanmar on Thursday, after one of the worst-ever accidents to hit the treacherous industry.

Scores die each year while working in the country's lucrative but poorly regulated jade trade, which uses low-paid migrant workers to scrape out a gem highly coveted in China.

The disaster struck after heavy rainfall pounded the open-cast mines, close to the Chinese border in Kachin state, where billions of dollars of jade is believed to be scoured each year from bare hillsides.

A slice of mountain collapsed, sending a churning torrent of mud into an aquamarine-coloured lake of mine waste water as workers scampered uphill.

"There are so many people floating in the water," said a bystander.

Dozens "were smothered by a wave of mud", the Myanmar Fire Services Department said in a



Rescuers recover bodies near the landslide area in the jade mining site in Hpakant in Kachin state on Thursday. — AFP

Facebook post.

Rescue workers, including the fire department and local police, worked throughout the day to pull bodies out of a mud lake under a continuous deluge of heavy monsoon rain. "By 7:15 pm, 162 bodies were found," said the department, adding that 54 people were injured and sent to nearby hospitals.

Mud-slaked and bloodied bodies of miners were laid out in grim rows under tarpaulins, some missing shoes as a result of the force of the wall of mud which hit them.

A woman grieved over the recovered victims, as rescue workers held her up. Working through a torrent of heavy rain was a chal-

lenge, police superintendent Than Win Aung said, as it could spark another mine collapse on the unstable terrain.

The workers were scavenging for gemstones on the sharp mountainous terrain in Hpakant township, where furrows from earlier excavations had already loosened the earth. — AFP

Palestinian factions unite against annexation

RAMALLAH: The rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas put on a rare show of unity on Thursday in a video conference aimed at working together against Israeli plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

Jibril Rajoub, Secretary-General of the Fatah Central Committee, spoke from Ramallah and Salah al Arouri, head of the Hamas political bureau, from Beirut.

The Palestinians have furiously rejected US President Donald Trump's controversial Middle East plan.

An Israeli annexation is expected to be based on that plan, which would give Israel sovereignty over some 30 per cent of the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967. The Palestinians would be left with a discontinuous state on the remaining 70 per cent.

Rajoub said that together the factions would decide on tactics to achieve an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. The last time Hamas and Fatah held substantial talks about Palestinian unity was in 2017 in

Cairo. A deal never materialised.

Fatah's Rajoub mentioned an Intifadha, or Palestinian uprising, as a means to an end, but also said he seeks to end the Israeli occupation "without bloodshed."

"We should put aside all differences and agree on a strategy," Al Arouri said, declaring "the beginning of a new era in which our strategy is to serve our people."

The press conference came a day after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was expected to begin a

process of annexation. The day came and went, however, with just a statement from his office saying that talks between him and US officials on a plan are ongoing.

Netanyahu can proceed with the move by either bringing proposals on annexation before the Israeli cabinet or parliament for a vote.

Regional Cooperation Minister Ofir Akunis said on Wednesday that annexation "will definitely happen in the month of July." — dpa



E-waste levels surge 20 per cent in 5 years: UN

PARIS: Humans discarded more than 50 million tonnes of electronic waste last year — an increase of 20 per cent in just five years — making tech refuse the world’s fastest growing waste problem, the United Nations said on Thursday.

In its annual report on e-waste — tossed away smartphones, computers, white goods and electronic car parts — the UN said that materials worth more than \$55 billion (50 billion euros) were being wasted every year.

In 2019 only 17 per cent of the year’s 53 million tonnes of e-waste was recycled, with the rest ending up in scrap heaps or landfill.

With its unreclaimed deposits of gold, silver, copper and platinum as well as highly-prized rare Earth metals, non-recycled e-waste means more must be mined to equip con-

sumers with new products.

The report’s authors blamed ever-shorter device lifespans and a lack of recycling infrastructure for the ballooning e-waste problem.

In 2019 only 17 per cent of the year’s 53 million tonnes of e-waste was recycled, with the rest ending up in scrap heaps or landfill.

“E-waste quantities are rising three times faster than the world’s population and 13 per cent faster than the world’s GDP during the last five years,” said Antonis Mavropoulos, president of the International Solid Waste Association.

“This sharp rise creates substantial environmental and health pressures and demon-

strates the urgency to combine the fourth industrial revolution with circular economy.”

According to the report, Asia generated the greatest volume of e-waste in 2019, with 24.9 million tonnes, followed by the Americas (13.1 Mt) and Europe (12 Mt), while Africa and Oceania generated just 2.9 Mt and 0.7 Mt respectively.

Europe had the highest e-waste figure per capita. To put the numbers into perspective, 53 million tonnes is substantially heavier than every adult in Europe put together, or as much as 350 cruise ships the size of the Queen Mary 2.

It equates to more than seven kilograms of e-waste for every human on the planet.

The UN warned that e-waste contained a number of toxic substances known to be harmful to human health. — **AFP**

NO INDIA TRIAL FOR ITALIAN MARINES BLAMED FOR DEATHS

ROME: Two Italian marines accused of killing two Indians should be tried in Italy and not in India, an international court of arbitration ruled on Thursday.

Marines Salvatore Girone and Massimiliano Latorre were arrested in India in 2012, suspected of accidentally shooting dead two Indian fishermen during anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean.

MARINES SALVATORE GIRONE AND MASSIMILIANO LATORRE WERE ARRESTED IN INDIA IN 2012, SUSPECTED OF ACCIDENTALLY SHOOTING DEAD TWO INDIAN FISHERMEN DURING ANTI-PIRACY OPERATIONS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Hague ruled that the pair had immunity when the incident happened, therefore India has no jurisdiction over them, according to a press release from the court.

“It is very positive news,” Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Facebook. “Today marks the final end to a long agony,” he added.

The PCA also said Italy should compensate India for the loss of human lives and other damages, and urged the two countries to reach an agreement on the issue.

“Italy is ready to comply with what has been settled by the Court of Arbitration, in a cooperative spirit,” the Foreign Ministry in Rome said in a separate statement.

After their arrest, the Italian marines were eventually released on bail and allowed to return to Italy, but the affair has for years been the cause of diplomatic friction between Rome and New Delhi. — **dpa**



LUJÁN SCARPINELLI

Uruguay's president was recently photographed surfing in the early morning ahead of a cabinet meeting, symbolising his government's relief that a policy of "freedom with responsibility" in containing the COVID-19 pandemic is succeeding.

Photos of 47-year-old Luis Lacalle Pou emerging from the South Atlantic in a wetsuit with a board under his arm and a smile on his lips hit the newsstands on Tuesday, as Europe reopened its borders to 15 countries.

The list included only one Latin American country: Uruguay. With less than 1,000 registered novel coronavirus cases and just 27 deaths, the country of 3.4 million is a notable exception in a region that has become the epicenter of the global health crisis.

Uruguay currently has just 83 active cases, while its giant neighbour Brazil is the world's worst-hit country after the United States. This success is especially remarkable as there

never was an official lockdown. Instead, amid industry furloughs and school and border closures, officials urged people to stay indoors and strictly adhere to social distancing.

Infectious diseases specialist Alvaro Galiana attributes Uruguay's success to early tracing. "The early appearance of well known cases, at a time when the circulation of the virus within the population was very limited, led to adequate measures being implemented — even if at the time they seemed exaggerated — right at the start of the school year," Galiana said, referring to the southern hemisphere's school year.

Uruguay's demographics were also in its favour, given a low population density and the absence of large urban centres outside of the capital Montevideo.

Uruguay chose to ease back to normal gradually, beginning in April with the return of 45,000 construction workers. Later, cafes and restaurants reopened, followed by gyms in May.

Shopping centres reopened in mid-June and football, the national passion, is due to resume on August 15, though in empty stadiums.

— AFP

Putin risks era of 'stagnation'

JONATHAN BROWN

President Vladimir Putin urged Russians to envisage the country they wanted to leave behind for their children and grandchildren during a historic vote this week to extend his rule.

But experts say that by pushing back the crucial question of who could someday replace him, Putin risks years of political stagnation that could fuel frustration with the Kremlin.

It was just such an era of stagnation — the infamous "period zastoya" between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s mainly under Leonid Brezhnev — that precipitated the end of the Soviet Union and threw Russia into chaos for years.

And like then, leaving Russians without the hope of change could be dangerous.

"The regime's weakness is that it doesn't have a mechanism to transfer power," says Maxim Trudolyubov, editor-at-large of the Meduza news website.

The president's cohort "strongly mistrusts" free and fair elections as a way to decide who may one day rule after Putin, he says. Putin, already in power for 20 years as president or prime minister, proposed a package of sweeping changes to the constitution in January

that included populist measures to boost pensions and the minimum wage.

They also enshrined conservative values long touted by the Kremlin, with a clause mentioning the country's "faith in God" and another effectively banning gay marriage.

Then Putin, 67, backed a last-minute amendment that would zero his presidential terms limits and allow him to potentially remain in power until 2036, a move critics denounced as a ploy for him to become "president for life".

Russians backed the reforms in a week-long vote that ended on Wednesday, with 77.92 per cent voting in favour.

Yet the overwhelming "yes" vote comes at a difficult time for Putin and does not reflect unbridled popularity for the Russian leader.

Putin's approval rating has plummeted to historic lows of 59 per cent in recent months, partly over the government's early handling of the coronavirus pandemic but also over long standing economic malaise.

Analysts say Putin wanted to get the vote over with before Russians — already suffering from several years of falling incomes — were hit by the full economic impact of the pandemic. — AFP

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BUSINESS



Grand Prizes

Maisarah Anniversary Prizes April	Monthly Grand Prizes	Yearly Grand Prizes		
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Oman set to be major egg production hub in Gulf

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A string of mega investments in table and hatching egg projects is set to position Oman as a player in egg production in the region, while also reinforcing the nation's food security objectives and sustaining the requirements of its burgeoning poultry industry.

In various stages of development are three major projects that, when fully operational over the next several years, will contribute to an exponential leap in Oman's combined egg production.

The biggest of these ventures is planned in Buraimi Governorate, which is emerging into a key food production hub in the Sultanate. Arabian Food Production, set up by a consortium of Omani, regional and international investors, is preparing to establish one of the Gulf region's biggest farms for the production of table eggs. Output from the proposed poultry farm, planned at Al Sunaina with an investment of around \$100 million, is projected at about 200 million eggs per year.

A key player in the venture is Modern Poultry Farms (MPF), which is well-known in the Sultanate for its popular brand of Dana Eggs. MPF already operates the Sultanate's biggest egg farm, located in Wadi al Maawil near Barka, with an annual capacity of over 125 million eggs.

Partnering with MPF in the establishment of



Arabian Food Production are: IFFCO Group, an integrated multi-foods chain based in the UAE; Oman Flour Mills, a partly Omani government-owned enterprise with strategic investments in milling capacity and industrial bakery style food production; Mizuho Gulf Capital Partners, a Dubai based investment management company; and ISE Foods, one of Japan's largest egg companies.

With strong facilitation support extended by the government's Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit (ISFU), Arabian Food Production has already secured key approvals necessary to progress the project. ISFU, set up under the auspices of the Diwan of Royal Court, has been tasked with fast-tracking approvals for projects and initiatives designed to accelerate

FOOD SECURITY:
THREE SIZABLE
POULTRY FARM
PROJECTS
CURRENTLY UNDER
DEVELOPMENT ARE
SET TO BOOST
PRODUCTION OF
TABLE EGGS FOR
CONSUMPTION
AND HATCHING
EGGS FOR THE
BROILER INDUSTRY

Oman's economic diversification.

Equally promising is a poultry farm currently in an advanced stage of construction at Ghaftain in the Wilayat of Haima in central Oman. Osool Poultry,

backed by mainly local investors, is setting up a modern facility with a capacity to produce annually around 150 million hatching eggs — a key requisite for the country's broiler industry.

"To help overcome issues of supply disruption and inconsistencies in demand, Osool Poultry project is aimed at facilitating a smooth supply of hatching eggs to the poultry industry at sustainable prices," said ISFU in its 2019 Annual Report documenting a substantial portfolio of projects and initiatives that it has helped fast-track in their implementation.

"Based in Haima, the breeder project will primarily supply its products within Oman to drive 80-85 per cent self-sufficiency, while creating jobs for Omanis in the farming sector. In addition, it will supply a percentage of production to the surrounding GCC countries from the forecast annual production of 150 million hatching eggs," the Unit stated.

In Dhahirah Governorate, government-backed A'Namaa Poultry also includes sizable hatching egg production capacity as part of its mega poultry project presently under construction at Al Safah in the Wilayat of Ibri. In addition to a planned output of 60,000 tonnes of white meat per annum, the project will also hatch 100 million eggs per year to meet its in-house needs, as well as the needs of small poultry farmers in the governorate.

BUSINESS

Oman Aviation Group cuts capex by 87pc

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT: Oman Aviation Group, the holding company of state-owned airline, airport management and aviation related businesses, has announced dramatic reductions in its operating and capital expenditures in response to the pandemic that has severely impacted the sector.

Operating costs are down 42 per cent, while capital expenditures have been slashed by 87 per cent, the Group said in a statement.

Since its founding in 2018, Oman Aviation Group has been actively empowering the aviation sector by implementing a series of operational efficiencies designed to generate economic benefits for the wider economy. Enabling travel and logistics, two key sectors that hold the promise of significant financial return for Oman and key levers of the sultanate's Vision 2040.

"However, with the arrival of COVID-19, Oman Aviation Group was required to fast track its projects on several levels to safeguard national aviation assets and the

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Oman Aviation Group implements sector-wide efficiencies to protect the country's value chain of aviation companies and ensure a strong post-COVID recovery

adjacent sectors which depend on aviation. The formation of a Crisis Management Board at the onset of COVID-19 in Oman was key to getting ahead of the crisis and mitigating further financial harm to its ecosystem of aviation businesses impacted by a significant drop in demand for passenger travel. The result has been a 42 per cent reduction in operating costs, and an impressive 87 per cent reduction in capital expenditures," it stated.

In line with recommendations set forth by the Supreme Committee entrusted with handling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandem-



ic, Oman Aviation Group successfully addressed restrictions in air travel and reductions in air passenger demand by expediting its operational efficiencies to save costs and ensure the sector's sustainability while at the same time implementing strategies that will ensure a strong recovery once borders reopen and demand for travel picks up.

These efficiencies have been carried over to a long-term plan that will see a

more sustainable, fit-for-purpose aviation sector aligned with the new economic reality of a post-COVID world.

"Aviation is a crucial sector for Oman and one that contributed an estimated RO 1.69 billion to the country's GDP in 2019. It remains an important economic catalyst that works as an enabling force, creating economic benefits which positively impact the country's wider economy," OAG further added.

OPAL hosts maiden meeting of Skills Sector Unit

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT: The first meeting of the Oil and Gas Sector Skills Unit (SSU) Governing Board meeting was held at the headquarters of the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) on Wednesday, in the presence of representatives of the sector and relevant government organisations.

This meeting, adhering to all COVID-19 safety precautions, follows the recent licensing of OPAL by the Occupational Standards Centre (OSC) as the Sector Skills Unit for the oil and gas sector. It particularly comes as a result of efforts by the Human Resources Committee for the In-Country Value under the auspices of Ministry of Oil



and Gas and its initiative to enhance the national framework by developing professional standards for the sector. This then paved the way for the adoption of the SSU as one of the labour market and employment initiatives in the National Economic Diversification Programme through the

Occupational Standards Center at the Ministry of Manpower.

Abdul Rahman al Yahyai, CEO of OPAL, explained that this license is the first of its kind in the Sultanate and a milestone for establishing entities which represent various economic sectors, enabling them to take

charge of monitoring the structure and needs of the labour market in different sectors, and translating them into knowledge products that would align education and training outcomes with these needs.

During the meeting, a presenter from the Occupational Standards Centre (OSC) presented a detailed presentation on the SSU role and responsibilities, followed by the Oil and Gas Sector Skill Unit (SSU) projects and operation plan presented by Abdullah bin Mohammed al Busaidy, the Oil and Gas Sector Skill Unit (SSU) Manager. Subsequently, the Governing Board Chairperson and Vice-chairperson were elected by the SSU Board members.

BUSINESS

Oil prices gain on fall in US crude stockpiles

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Thursday as a sharp drop in oil stockpiles outweighed concerns that a spike in US coronavirus infections and revived lockdown measures in California could stall a recovery in fuel demand.

Brent crude futures were up 21 cents or 0.5 per cent at \$42.24 a barrel by 11:14 GMT, after rising 1.8 per cent in the previous session.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose 20 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$40.02 a barrel, adding to a 1.4 per cent rise on Wednesday.

US crude inventories fell 7.2 million barrels from a record high last week, far more than analysts had expected, US Energy Information Administration data showed, as refiners ramped up production and imports eased.

"Typically a drop in inventories signals a positive development in demand or a negative move in supply. But as supply is fairly stable, the market assumes



A pump attendant wears a mask as he refuels a car at a gas station in New York. — Reuters

demand stands strong, despite the new COVID-19 infections and restrictions," said Louise Dickson, oil markets analyst at Rystad Energy.

"New lockdowns in California would have depressed the market any

other day, but yesterday's EIA inventory report balanced the bad news and prevailed."

New US COVID-19 cases rose by nearly 50,000 on Wednesday, according to a Reuters tally, in the biggest one-day spike since the

start of the pandemic.

California rolled back efforts to reopen its economy, banning indoor restaurant dining in much of the state, closing bars and beefing up enforcement of social distancing and other measures. — Reuters

EU court rules against BlackRock tax break claim

LONDON: BlackRock is not exempt from paying value added tax (VAT) on part of a service from an outside supplier to help manage its funds, a European Union court ruled on Thursday, dashing the fund sector's hopes for cost savings.

The world's biggest asset manager had argued that between January 1, 2010, and January 30, 2013, it should not have to pay VAT on all the service given that it included services for special investment funds, which are exempt from the tax.

Britain's tax authority disagreed and sought to recov-



The BlackRock logo is seen outside of its offices in New York City. — Reuters

er the unpaid VAT for that period.

The First Chamber of the Court of Justice ruled on Thursday that a "single sup-

ply of management services, provided by a software platform belonging to a third-party supplier for the benefit of a fund manage-

ment company, which manages both special investment funds and other funds, does not fall within the exemption provided for in that provision."

BlackRock said it respected the EU court's decision.

The court said that BlackRock in Britain receives services from a unit in the United States via a software platform called Aladdin that provides portfolio managers with market analysis to help make investment decisions.

These services constitute a single supply, whichever funds are being managed, it said. — Reuters

BUSINESS



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the Cushing oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

Traders thought Apple had 'the holy grail' of oil data

NEW YORK: Every day, energy merchants collect and scrutinise whatever information they can find on fuel demand to get a trading edge: from satellite data tracking oil tankers worldwide to thermal images from cameras on pipelines and storage tanks. Real-time data on fuel demand would be the ultimate prize.

On-the-spot gasoline consumption figures would change the way oil markets trade, because it is "the holy grail of metrics," said Patrick DeHaan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

A few weeks ago, the market thought it had found it. In mid-April, Apple Inc unveiled new data tracking human mobility trends, capturing user activity in searching for directions on smartphones.

The timing was perfect. Traders were chasing any clue to fathom the speed of recovery from the fastest and deepest collapse in fuel demand in history during coronavirus lockdowns. They relished the chance to incorporate mobility data into trading models. But US Memorial Day came, and the search data did not translate into activity. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) proxy for gasoline demand fell nearly 6 per cent for the week including the holiday. Gasoline futures, which had rallied into Memorial Day, fell after the holiday that kicks off the US summer driving

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season.

That disappointed traders, given roughly 70 per cent of oil consumption worldwide is via vehicles, and as current data for retail demand generally looks either at the previous week or earlier periods. Several traders said on background that the discrepancy caused them to discount Apple's index.

The sticking point, they said, was that Apple's mobility data is based on search information rather than miles traveled. Matt Sallee, managing director of investment firm Tortoise Capital Advisors, said that data has not correlated as strongly to demand as other indexes.

Settings for the iPhone include an

option to limit notifications when the device perceives someone is driving, but it is unclear if Apple intends to use that data to enhance its mobility index.

Sallee said he was still using Apple's figures, but combining them with other datapoints to make decisions as an energy-focused stock fund manager.

"The pandemic made everyone a lot smarter about sourcing and using real-time demand data, a trend I think is here to stay even after it subsides," Sallee said.

He also uses data from TomTom, the global location technology company, which monitors real-time traffic congestion in major world cities, along with the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank's mobility and engagement index. That index tracks various mobility metrics, including how far user devices travel in a day and how long they stay away from home. The figures are reported on a lagging basis.

On the retail side, the mainstays have long been GasBuddy, which monitors fuel prices and transaction volume at gas stations across the United States and Canada, and Oil Price Information Service (OPIS), which provides pricing and news information for a variety of refined products.

Apple's data purports to capture everyone that owns an iPhone, about 100 million people in the United States alone. — Reuters



RUSSIA MISSES DEADLINE TO PAY DOPING FINE

MOSCOW: Russia's suspended athletics federation said on Thursday it had missed a July 1 deadline to pay \$5 million of a fine to World Athletics, jeopardising the chances of its track and field athletes being able to compete internationally as neutrals.

World Athletics, the sport's global governing body, in March handed the federation a \$10 million fine for breaching anti-doping rules.

World Athletics at the time reinstated the process by which Russian athletes could apply to compete internationally as neutrals after demonstrating that they train in a doping-free environment.

It said, however, that this process would again be suspended if half of the fine was not

WORLD ATHLETICS AT THE TIME REINSTATED THE PROCESS BY WHICH RUSSIAN ATHLETES COULD APPLY TO COMPETE INTERNATIONALLY AS NEUTRALS AFTER DEMONSTRATING THAT THEY TRAIN IN A DOPING-FREE ENVIRONMENT.



paid by July 1.

The Russian federation told TASS agency on Thursday that the fine had not been paid as of July 2, a day after the federation's president said it did not have sufficient funds to do so.

The federation was suspended in 2015 after a report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) found evidence of mass doping among track and field athletes in the country.

Russia is also in the process of appealing a four-year ban on its athletes competing at major international sporting events under their flag as punishment for the alteration of laboratory data.

Its case will be heard by the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in November.

— Reuters

SPORTS



COVID-19 forces cancellation of 2020 OMAN by UTMB®



We fully support the organisers of OMAN by UTMB® in their decision to cancel this year's event. The health and safety of participants, staff, spectators as well as all the people and communities working on all UTMB® Group events are of the highest priority to us and it is our responsibility to do what we can to contain the ongoing threat the virus poses.

CATHERINE POLETTI,
UTMB® GROUP
PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: The organisers of OMAN by UTMB®, Oman Sail, have announced the cancellation of the 2020 edition of the Middle East's premier trail running event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the advice of the Omani Ministry of Health, the third edition of the event, which was due to take place from 5-8 December, will now be postponed until 2021, with the date to be announced in the coming weeks.

Of the participants already signed up to the 2020 event, 83 per cent are international runners. UTMB® Group are currently working closely with the organisers to finalise the date of the 2021 edition, as well as the terms of refund and transfer of entry for registered runners, which will be confirmed soon.

Catherine Poletti, UTMB® Group President, commented: "We fully support the organisers of OMAN by



UTMB® in their decision to cancel this year's event. The health and safety of participants, staff, spectators as well as all the people and communities working on all UTMB® Group events are of the highest priority to us and it is our responsibility to do what we can to contain the ongoing threat the virus poses.

"Our efforts are now focused on the next edition

in 2021, and on providing trail runners with the opportunity to discover the incredible landscapes of Oman, which are unlike anywhere else in the world."

OMAN by UTMB® offers 3 distances for runners who wish to experience an epic and technical adventure, including a 150 km ultra. In 2019, 2,000 runners from over 60 countries had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of Oman, experiencing trails that took them through deep wadis, high ridges, ancient villages, and more than 2,200 M of elevation gain onto Jebel Akhdar, the Green Mountain.

OMAN by UTMB® is part of UTMB® Group family of events, that includes Asian events Thailand by UTMB®, Panda Trail by UTMB® and Gaoligong by UTMB®, as well as European events Val d'Aran by UTMB®, and the pinnacle event, UTMB® Mont Blanc.

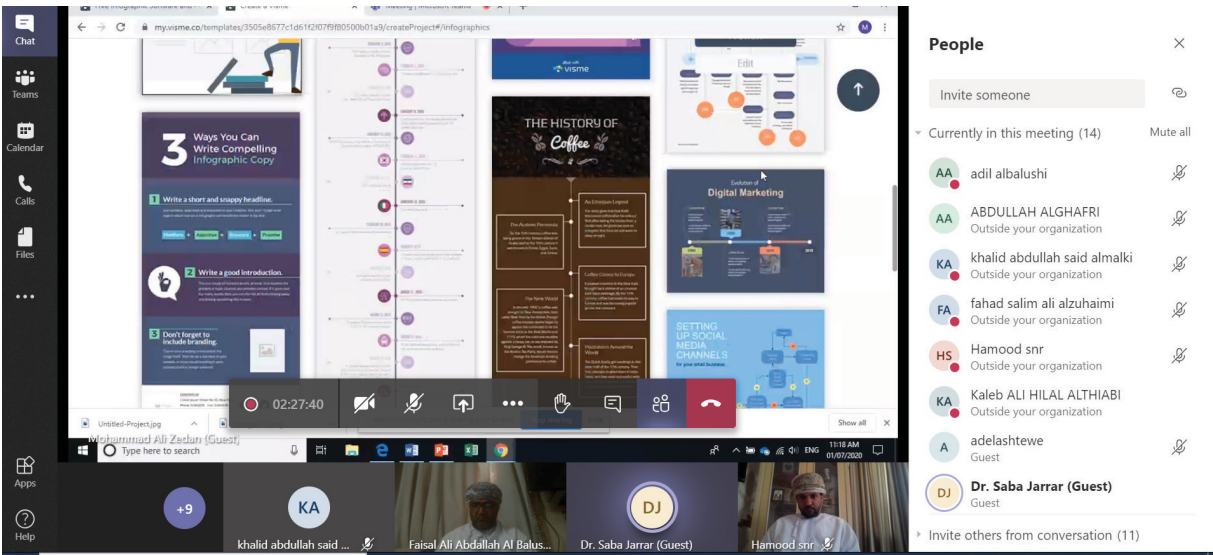


OOA conducts webinar on ‘Media Sports at the Information Age’

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) launched their first training courses remotely through “Media sports at the information age” topic on Tuesday. The webinar which concluded on Thursday was part of the OOA agenda for this year. As many as 15 participants from the different media organisations as well as the media coordinators from the domestic associations and committees took part at the webinar. The three days online course was delivered by Dr. Saba Jarrar, the dean of sports sciences at the Arabian American College in Palestine.

“Shifting to the modern media and using the advanced technology applications is must for all the organisations to be in line with the current development. However, the content should keep with its high level of trust, transparency



and credibility. The summarised stories, quick tweets and sharing the infographics are significant tools to deliver your message and this is the recommended way nowadays by the recipient,” **Dr. Saba Jarrar** said.

All the participants took an opportunity to use some of the applications as practical examples including “Adobe Spark” and “Visme” applications. The discussion topics featured also the definitions of the sports media with the latest changes occurred in this field due to the



advanced technology applications. Also, the lecturer explained the sports media map at national, regional and international level, the advanced sports media platforms including the social media, the features of each platform for the sports events coverage and the required skills for the journalists for speedy coverage and delivering the messages to the readers or beneficiaries. “Based on some international agencies statistics video is the preferred tool to deliver the message

quickly. Nearly 82% of twitter users watch video content on the platform. Also, it is observed that people around the globe spend over 500 million hours watching videos on YouTube and around 10 billion videos are watched by users on snapchat,” she added.

The third day of the webinar witnessed sharing of an experience by a qualified media coordinator at Asian Football Confederation. Ahmed al Ali, media coordinator in Palestinian Sports Council and AFC approved media coordinator, shared his experience on how to prepare all the media requirements for the match prior, during and after completion of the match. He explained the process of becoming an approved media coordinator by AFC through the domestic football association as well as the clubs who are competing at AFC competitions.



SPORTS

HAMILTON SAYS SILENCE CRITICISM WAS NOT AIMED AT F1 RIVALS

LONDON: Six times world champion Lewis Hamilton says he was not targeting Formula One rivals when he condemned the sport's silence on racial injustice and the lack of diversity.

Hamilton, who starts his bid for a record equalling seventh title in the season-opening Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday, has been vocal in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and racial equality.

The 35-year-old Mercedes driver, who will be in black overalls and driving a black car with the message 'End Racism' on it this season, last month criticised those who failed to speak out.

"I see those of you who are staying silent, some of you the biggest of stars yet you stay silent in the midst

**I REALLY WASN'T.
IT WAS TARGETED
AT THE WHOLE
INDUSTRY. AND IT'S
BEEN SOMETHING I'VE
BEEN AWARE OF FOR
A LONG, LONG TIME,
AND NOT REALLY
SEEN ANYONE DOING
ANYTHING ABOUT IT**

**LEWIS HAMILTON,
6-TIME F1 WORLD
CHAMPION**

of injustice," said the Briton, referring to the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died after a white US police officer knelt on his neck.

Hamilton, the sport's only Black driver, explained in a video released by Mercedes' parent company Daimler as part of a 'We Care, We do, We Move' series on Thursday that he was addressing the world of motorsport as a whole.

"People perceived it as (if) I was targeting drivers," he said.

"I really wasn't. It was targeted at the whole industry. And it's been something I've been aware of for a long, long time, and not really seen anyone doing anything about it.

"People being silent is something that I've experienced for such a long time, and now is not the time to be silent. This is a time to help spread the message, the time to pull

together. We need as many voices as we can to push for change.

"That was really a calling to people within the industry for accountability, for all the brands. They need to do more. The sport needs to do more. The (governing) FIA need to do more. We all need to do more. So that was really what the message was about."

Formula One drivers, who responded to Hamilton's initial comments with their own messages against racism, are expected to show further support this weekend.

McLaren's Lando Norris has suggested they could 'take a knee' as a gesture before the race at the Red Bull Ring. — **Reuters**