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'RED WARRIORS' AND OLYMPIC TEAM TO BEGIN PREPARATORY CAMP ON MONDAY

P13

OMAN MOVING AHEAD WITH PRIVATISATION, PPP STRATEGIES

P18

MASTERING THE ART OF HAPPINESS

OMAN

HM GREETINGS TO LEADERS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings along with best wishes of good health and happiness to the President. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to Sir Rodney Williams, Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the Governor-General and the friendly people of Antigua and Barbuda. — ONA

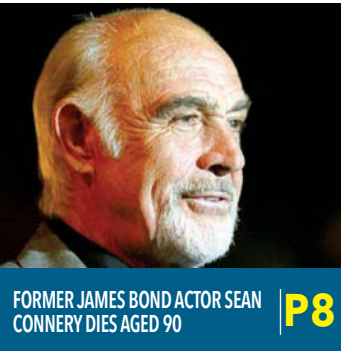
REGION

TURKEY QUAKE TOLL RISES TO 30

BAYRAKLI: Rescuers raced against the clock to save people trapped under rubble in Turkey and Greece on Saturday as anguished mourners buried the first victims of a powerful earthquake that claimed 30 lives. The 7.0-magnitude quake killed 28 people and injured nearly 900 in Turkey after striking on Friday afternoon near the west coast town of Seferihisar in Izmir province. Also killing two teenagers on their way home from school in Greece, it caused a mini-tsunami on the Aegean island of Samos and a sea surge that turned streets into rushing rivers in one Turkish coastal town. DETAILS ON P6



INSIDE



Sultanate advances 11 ranks on Government AI Readiness Index

LONDON: The Sultanate has advanced 11 positions on the Government Artificial Intelligence (AI) Readiness Index-2020 compiled by UK-based consultants Oxford Insights and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

The Sultanate ranked 48th globally at the Government AI



Readiness Index scoring 52.099 points compared to the 59th ranking at last year's index.

This year's index was topped by the United States of America, followed by the UK, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Singapore.

The index examines how well-placed nations are to take advantage of the benefits of AI in their internal

operations and the delivery of public services. This year, 172 countries were reviewed.

The index is based on three major indicators and 33 sub-indicators mainly presence of national AI strategy, web services, innovation capacity and data protection and privacy laws.

— ONA

SCHOOLS BEGIN BLENDED CLASSES

Steps to guarantee the safety of students and staff

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The new academic year with a mix of classroom and online learning will begin for the students of government and private schools in Oman today amid coronavirus pandemic.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is taking all steps to guarantee the safety of students, teachers and other staff. It is expected that around 676,943 students, including 334,889 girls, will take part in the blended education under the guidance of 56,613 teachers even as the nation continues to battle the COVID-19 which has delayed the start of the academic year by nearly two months.

The Supreme Committee had announced that the school year will begin on November 1, and also endorsed blended learning.

According to Abdullah al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education: “The ministry continues to work with telecommunication companies to provide Internet packages for schools. School hours for students from Grades 1-4 will be between 11 am and 2 pm, Grades 5-11 between 8 am and 11 am, and for

The ministry continues to work with telecommunications companies to provide Internet packages for schools

ABDULLAH AL BUSAIDY
Ministry of Education

Grade-12, between 8 am and 2 pm.”

Oman TV will telecast lessons for Grade 12 daily on weekdays between 2:30 pm to 6:30 pm. Schedules for school classes on TV are available on the ministry website.

It is estimated that around 82 per cent of the schools will implement an e-learning system, while 10 per cent will follow blended education and the rest will have full attendance in schools.

If the parents prefer to educate their children (Grades 1 to 12) completely

through distance education system due to safety concerns, they have to submit a written application to the school.

“This is the first-time experience for me as a parent though I have been working from home for the last six months. Just hope it works fine and that it guarantees the right of education of our children”, said Laila al Balushi, a parent of four.

“It is going to be an extraordinary year. Parents will be real and key partners, this time, in teaching. I am a mother of two and they are both in the first cycle. We got our laptops ready but still tensed about how it is going to be. The classes will be simultaneously from 11 to 2. So I have to keep an eye on the process of learning from A to Z. Praying to make the most of it after all these efforts”, Zainab, another working mother said.

The MoE has coordinated with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to provide laptops and Internet packages for needy students. The offers start from RO 90 to RO 500 and can be paid in 12 month instalments.

TURN TO P3



Next to oil, the hospitality and tourism sectors play major role in contributing to the Sultanate's GDP. In fact, major efforts are made to improve these sectors and around a dozen more hotels are expected to come up in the country in the next five years. Oman has for centuries delighted visitors with its dazzling souqs, stunning nature and culture. Above all, it's warm and welcoming hospitality and mesmerising charm has and will continue to attract travellers from across the globe. DETAILS ON P20

80 per cent COVID-19 cases are from community

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttyvp

Majority of the COVID-19 cases in Oman are caused by individuals within the society, said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, at a media conference last week. About 80 per cent of the cases were from the community, while the remaining are from institutions, the minister said during the briefing.

“We did not reach the second wave, and what happened actually is a fluctuation in the numbers between high and low. The Ministry of Health

follows the principles of transparency in the announcement of laboratory confirmed cases”, he said.

While condemning the unruly gatherings like weddings and other activities, Dr Al Saeedi said that these kind of evasive attitudes undermine the efforts of the health sector.

“We have been reiterating on the need to maintain social distancing and avoid going to public places. All these are doable and possible acts”, he said, noting, “the night lockdown has yielded excellent results, and that we expect the death toll to come down”.



According to him, no country, no groups, no individuals wish to go back to a lockdown life — whether fully or partially.

Why do we have to resort to such actions that deprive other people, who follow the precautionary measures, of their privileges, he asked, saying that “we take such measures because some people do not follow the laws risking the lives of others as well”.

He said that there is a significant decrease in the number of infected persons in both the intensive care units and also in hospital admissions.

While expressing concerns that the health sector in Oman is paralysed due to this pandemic, Dr Al Saeedi said that unfortunately a number of healthcare programmes are on hold.

“Many operations have been delayed because most doctors are spending their time to look after people infected with the coronavirus. Some of the primary healthcare programmes, about which we are proud of, have also been put on hold as we need the services of the health staff in the COVID-19 wards”, he said.

Shops, establishments urged to keep registry of customers

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Shops and other commercial establishments must adhere to the safety guidelines and precautionary measures against COVID-19, the Supreme Council has urged.

In many shops, there is nobody assigned to take the temperature of customers nor are their names recorded in the registry that is mandated by the SC. Though shops insist on masks and provide sanitisers, many shops are even allowing children below 12 into the premises.

“Keeping a person exclusively for checking the temperature of the customers is an expensive affair,” said a shop owner who had made 3 of his staff redundant in the wake of the Coronavirus impact.

“We had to ask 3 of our staff members recently to leave owing



to lack of business and even now, business has not come back to covering operational costs. Had it not been the case, we would be able to keep a staff just for temperature checking.”

The Supreme Committee has urged all companies, shops and other commercial entities that

safety of staff, employees and other workers is the responsibility of the management.

“Limiting the number of customers to two, checking the temperature of those who enter the shop, registering their names as well as the entry and exit times, and social distancing are

a few basic factors that need to be followed at the workplace,” a senior official at Muscat Municipality said.

The shops can act as a breeding ground for the virus as many people come in everyday gather in lobbies and wander through the aisles.

PASI issues guidelines for JSF applications

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 31

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has issued the steps to submit an electronic request for the job security fund, which will be implemented from Sunday.

As per PASI, the applicant must submit a benefit disbursement request, including activating the electronic authentication of your ID card or mobile phone number, log in to the online portal of the Ministry of Labour or the Public Authority for Social Insurance or the General Federation of Oman Workers.

The applicant can also find out whether he or she is eligible for the fund.

The committee on Job Security System (JSS) called upon private sector employees entitled to JSS benefits, whose services were terminated beyond their will, to apply for the benefits.

The applications will be received from November 1 and the benefits will be given out on dates of monthly pensions, said the Ministry of Labour.

The benefits will be disbursed to those who are entitled on monthly

basis, the committee confirmed, emphasising on the importance of applying the conditions of disbursement to the entitled persons. Aiming at facilitating the process, an electronic system has been designed to help the applicants know their entitlement without the need to go to the headquarters of the authorities concerned, abiding by the precautionary measures in the light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The authorities represented by the Ministry of Labour and PASI worked to develop practical frameworks to ensure the achievement of goals and contribute in supporting this initiative.

They designed the system to ensure the availability of job security for workers in various sectors, especially with the increasing impact of the economic crises in general and the effects of the pandemic on the labour market in particular.

The system contributes in ensuring the necessary and appropriate care for those who lost their jobs for any reason and to guarantee a decent life to them and their families, as well as training and assisting them in finding another job opportunity.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Birkat Al Mouz

Traditional village untouched by modernisation

DR PRITI SWARUP
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With natural beauty, architectural attractions dating back to thousands of years, warm & kind-hearted people and some great adventures, Oman has a lot to offer.

As part of my three-year stay at Oman for work, after a lot of deliberations, I drew a list of places to visit and things to do. My first expedition with this lovely country tuned out to be something that will stay especially close to my heart forever.

If someone relishes being taken back into time and enjoys spending some time alone, then the traditional village and ruins of the Birkat Al Mouz, is the place to be. It is approximately 90 minutes’ drive from Muscat.

The place is hidden and a bit tricky to reach. Irrespective of the recent modernisation, the beautiful village that is hinged between a plain and mountain, has retained its aged charm and naturalness. An incessant reminder of the beauty of Oman, the site consists of the ramshackle of the mud-brick fortress and some intricately painted colourful Omani doors.

The drive through Birkat Al Mouz shall reveal the magnificent village plantation.

As you go further, the area unfolds into thick banana and dates plantation which is worth the visit.

The shade at many places can be quite enjoyable on hotter days. Locals can be seen who are willing to guide one through for a better experience of the whole area.

Its old yet active Falaj

Irrespective of the recent modernisation, the beautiful village that is hinged between a plain and mountain, has retained its aged charm and naturalness



Irrigation system (falaj meaning ‘split into parts’ as it divides the water among the inhabitants via gravity and multiple channels), is listed as Unesco World Heritage. The literature says that the system is known to be made of ancient water channels from 500 AD and are examples of a system that dates back 5,000 years.

The system is so clean that tiny colourful fish can be spotted in the small water streams interspersed between the ruins, which gives

a definite sparkle to the eyes, especially for the little travellers. Mine had actually started running along with the streams to catch the alluring site a little more. One needs to be careful though, to avoid accidental slipping and hurting oneself.

If one wishes to experience an aerial view, you may climb up the stairs and reach the top of one of the houses and catch a breathtaking view of the mountains and the plantations.



We got some good captures with the camera while posing as if playing peek-a-boo, peeping the head or hand out from behind a broken window. It can be a good canvas for the shutterbugs!

Since the ruins are quite old, delicate, and also rough in many places, wearing good quality shoes is advisable.

If one is keen on exploring the high located areas, a certain level of fitness shall be required as it involves a lot of climbing

and steep rocky surfaces at places. Carrying a water bottle with a headcover or a cap is needed to beat the heat and direct sun rays. If you are photo savvy, adorning a colourful scarf to get some beautiful captures amidst the ruins can be life-long memories.

It is a wonderful experience to explore the winding streets of Birkat Al Mouz that makes one imagine how life was lived in a simple fashion.

It’s fascinating to imagine how

Omanis have managed to live in a dry climate such as this. As you wander through the streets, one can always feel the nice colder breeze coming up from there bringing total peace of mind.

A must stop-over that represents hope and resurrection while you are on the way to the Jebel Akhdar mountains.

This shall stay my favourite while reminiscing the time spent in this hospitable and generous country.

■ ANNUAL CAMEL FESTIVAL KICKS OFF IN THAMRAIT



THAMRAIT: The second phase of the 18th season of the annual Camel Festival 2020-2021, organised by the Royal Camel Corps at the Royal Court Affairs, kicked off in the Wilayat of Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate, on Saturday and lasts for six days. Camel milking competitions began today and will last for two days followed by four-day camel beauty competitions. The winners of the top 10 positions will be presented with cash and in-kind prizes. – **ONA**

Pay for car park by SMS or online

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 31

Muscat Municipality will remove parking meters in several important parts of Muscat from Sunday. The places include Central Business District (CBD), the Business Square, Ruwi Souq, Al Fursan Street, Muttrah Souq and

Sea Road and Wadi Kabir.

Vehicle owners should instead use online or mobile services to book and pay parking charges.

Motorists can book for parking by sending SMS with car plate details to 90091.

The user will receive a text message stating the reservation confirmation and including the

ticket number, car number and code, and time.

If the user wants to extend the time, he only has to send another message to 90091 and follow the same steps.

More areas in Muscat were brought under the ‘paid parking zone’ in 2018, making vehicle owners shell out more money, even at their residences and work places.

City bus services resume in Salalah



MUSCAT: Mwasalat will resume its city services in Salalah from Sunday, after temporarily halting services to stop the spread of coronavirus.

In the first phase, bus services between cities were resumed from September 27, while operations in Suhar will be announced later.

The service in Salalah is between the airport and the Port of Salalah.

The company will levy an additional 100 baisa to the ticket fares of city services and 500 baisa to the intercity services for

sterilisation and cleaning procedures.

The precautionary measures to be followed for the safety of employees and passengers are: the sterilisation of buses before the start of the trip and after its completion, measuring the temperature of passengers for trips between cities, no standing passengers, wearing masks all the time while using the bus, and providing hand sanitisers inside the buses.

Personal protection equipment (PPE) tools will be provided to all drivers.

■ TRAILER TRUCK OVERTURNS



Traffic heading to Wadi Rawnab was blocked after a trailer truck overturned on the road cutting off traffic to the region. “The road between Rima Roundabout and Al Jazer Roundabout has been closed after a trailer deteriorated. Please take caution and use alternative roads,” a statement issued by ROP said.

Schools begin offline, online

FROM PAGE 1

As per the blended education adopted for the academic year 2020/2021, the attendance of students will be rotated weekly.

As for the days when students are not attending the classes, they must take the e-learning according to schedules, which are prepared by the school administration.

The exams will be conducted at the end of the school year. “We have reduced the percentage weights of exam scores and increased the percentage in the continuous evaluation, which includes three standardised short tests for all groups,” the ministry said.

The health protocol includes clear precautionary measures provided by the MoE such as checking the temperature, sterilisers, face masks and a one and a half metre physical-distancing in classes.

Cleaning staff will not be allowed in schools in the presence of students, the ministry added.

The Ministry of Education has issued guidelines for private schools, including kindergartens.



OMAN **Observer** DAILY

For Advertisements

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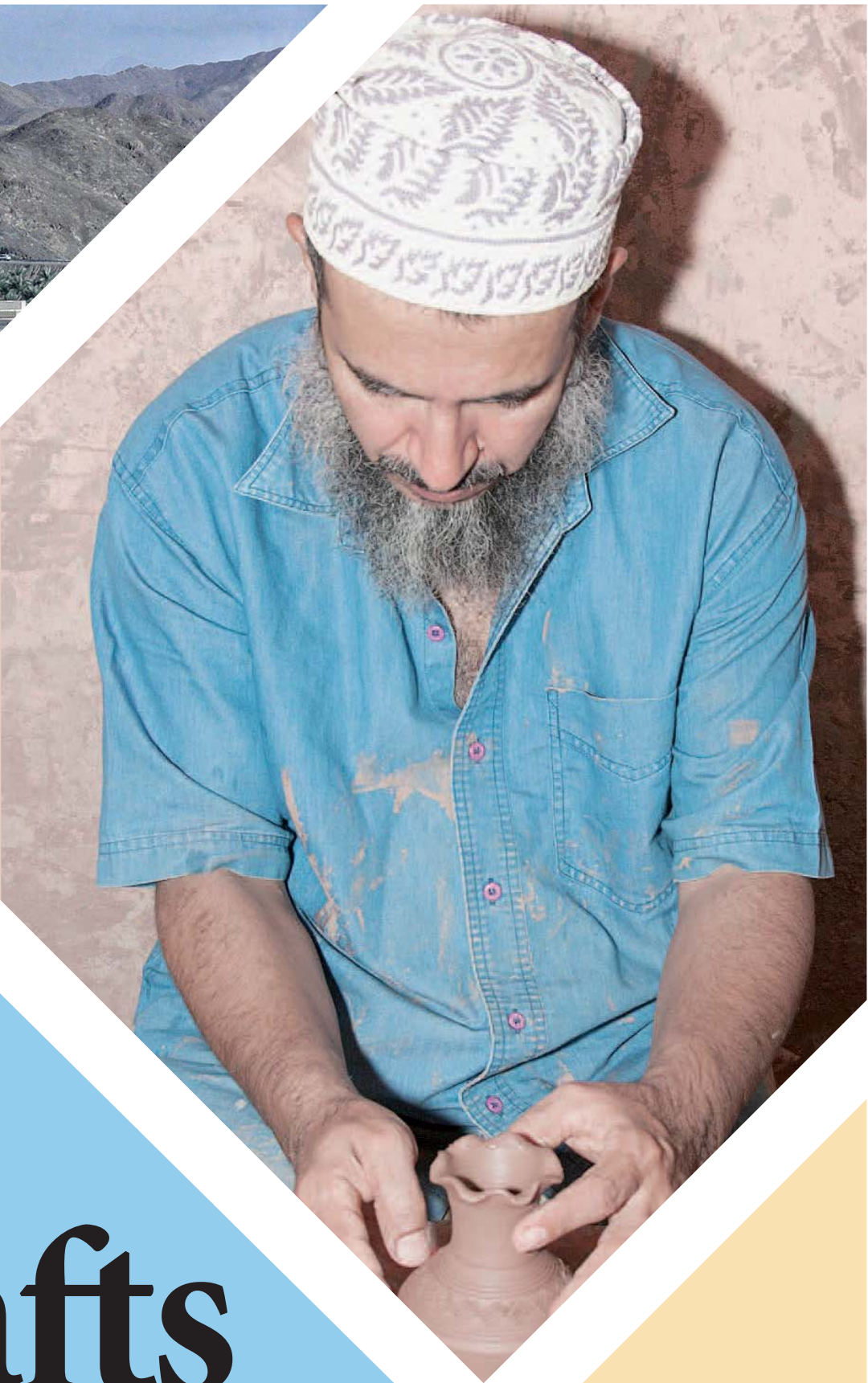
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#Living_with_COVID19

Bahla



Like pearls in a necklace, 61 wilayats adorn the Sultanate with its unique customs, traditions and legacy. Starting with Bahla, *Observer* is taking readers to a tour of these wilayats of the Sultanate to reveal the march of development and progress. It is a time travel as we offer glimpses of its colourful past and a peek into the promising future as Sultanate celebrates 50th National Day on November 18.

Cradle of crafts

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 31

Bahla is one of the oldest wilayat in the Sultanate, which is known for its ancient heritage and is home to landmarks that plumb the depths of the Omani civilisation. Bahla has one of the oldest fortresses in the country; the 13th century Bahla Fort, which is now a Unesco World Heritage site. The fortress and the town are enclosed by extensive remnants of a 12 km long fortified wall. Most buildings are constructed of traditional mud brick, many of them are hundreds of years old. A short distance beyond Bahla

lies the Jabreen Fort, a massive three-storey structure built during Al Yaruba dynasty in the mid 17th century. The castle is a fine example of Islamic architecture with beautiful wooden inscriptions and paintings on its ceilings. The Gate of Bahla is considered one of the most prominent landmarks that give an aesthetic touch to the entrance of the wilayat. The gate overlooks the entrance to the wilayat and is directly opposite Bahla Castle. The gate, along with its unique design inspired by Omani heritage mixed with Arab engineering creativity, rises to 23 metres. It consists of four floors and service

facilities such as restrooms, restaurant, museum, lounge for visitors and a reception hall. Despite fierce competition from machine-made imports, the ancient business of traditional weaving, pottery and metalwork is still thriving in the inner towns of the Sultanate. One such place is Bahla. The wilayat in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is famous for many traditional industries and handicrafts that the people of the wilayat still hold as part of their cultural heritage. One of the most prominent traditional industries is pottery and the Wilayat of Bahla has been its centre. The first pottery

industry found in the Sultanate dates back to the beginning of the third millennium BC. The pottery industry in Bahla has been very popular since ancient times. The Bahla Oasis is one of the main centres of this industry. Archaeologists have identified a special method known as “Bahla pottery method” to differentiate it from other pottery in the Sultanate, whether local or imported. In order to preserve and pay attention to this craft, the government has established a special centre for the training and production of pottery and ceramic in Bahla.

The wilayat has many ancient neighbourhoods with their well-established buildings and traditional architecture characterised by simple construction and use of local materials. Among the old neighbourhoods in the wilayat is Harat Al Nadwa. It is located in the centre of the wilayat on the west side of the famous Bahla Castle. Harat Al Nadwa was a major centre of the textile industry in the wilayat as the people of the Harat Al Nadwa were famous for the textile industry through the spinning of yarn and wool.

UN: Climate pledges from Asia send 'extremely important' signal

LONDON: Pledges by China, Japan and South Korea to slash carbon emissions to net zero are "extremely important" signs of leadership in reviving global efforts to tackle climate change, the United Nations climate chief said on Friday.

Patricia Espinosa (pictured), executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), welcomed this week's announcements by Japan and South Korea that they would target carbon neutrality by 2050, and China's pledge in September to hit the goal by 2060.

"These signals of very strong commitments by countries that are very important, and that have a real impact on the level of emissions globally, are extremely important," Espinosa said in a video interview.

"And it's also very important to recognise that they are coming at a time when we need this kind of



leadership," she said. Diplomats had begun 2020 hoping this would prove to be a pivotal year in implementing a global accord to slow climate change brokered in Paris in 2015.

But the COVID-19 pandemic threw those plans into disarray, forcing officials to postpone a

major climate conference that had been due to take place in Glasgow in November by a year.

Climate diplomacy has been further overshadowed by last year's move by US President Donald Trump to withdraw the United States from the accord.

That decision takes effect the

UNFCCC chief says Asian net-zero pledges had boosted hopes that more countries would take bolder climate action

day after US presidential elections on November 3 — the earliest date the country could leave due to way the pact is designed.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has pledged to return the United States to the deal if he wins.

Espinosa said the Asian net-zero pledges had boosted hopes that more countries would take bolder climate action.

"It's really a significant contribution towards bringing the international community in line to achieving the goals under the Paris Agreement," she said. "And that means the future for humanity in this planet." — Reuters

Australia to spend \$351m to buy vaccines for region

SYDNEY: Australia plans to spend 500 million Australian dollars (\$351 million) to secure coronavirus vaccines for its regional neighbours, the government said on Saturday.

Canberra will commit 500 million dollars over three years towards a regional vaccine access and health security initiative, the government announced in a news release.

The country will secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for Australia, the Pacific and Southeast Asia via advance purchase agreements with manufacturers and participation in Covax, an international initiative to distribute COVID-19 vaccines fairly across the globe.

The Australian government said it will supply safe and effective vaccine doses and deliver technical support. "The funding will further help ensure that the countries of the Pacific and Timor-Leste are able to achieve full immunisation coverage, and will make a significant contribution towards

meeting the needs of Southeast Asia," the statement added.

"A fast, safe vaccine rollout in the Pacific and Southeast Asia will mean we are able to return to more normal travel, tourism and trade with our key partners in the region."

Meanwhile, residents in Australia's second largest city of Melbourne on Saturday enjoyed their first weekend of relative freedom after an almost four-month lockdown as coronavirus case numbers continued to dwindle.

As Melburnians have flocked to parks, tennis courts, restaurants and shops, officials reported just one new COVID-19 case in Victoria state and no deaths.

That was well down from average daily new cases of around 700 in July and early August. "We need to enjoy our lives after three months of really constrained activity," Victoria Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton said at a press conference on Sunday.

— Agencies

Spain rocked by violent protests



A police officer hits a demonstrator with a baton during a protest against the closure of bars and gyms, amidst the COVID-19 outbreak in Barcelona. — Reuters

MADRID: Multiple cities across Spain were racked by overnight clashes between authorities and people protesting the latest coronavirus controls, Spanish media reported on Saturday.

Unrest was seen in cities including Barcelona, Bilbao, Burgos and Leon. In many cases, the violence seemed to be instigated by right-wing groups associated with football clubs.

Daily newspaper *La Vanguardia* and state broadcaster RTVE reported that hundreds of people fought with police in Barcelona late into the night.

Broadcast images showed protesters throwing bricks at police officers, trash bins were set on fire and media reported that some stores were looted. There were 12 arrests.

Police blamed members of the Boixos Nois (Crazy Boys) fan club, which is linked to football club FC Barcelona.

There were similar scenes in other cities. In Vilafranca del Penedes in southern Catalonia, about 120 young people chanted for "freedom" from the coronavirus restrictions and attempted to storm city hall, reported *La Vanguardia*.

Spain has been one of the European countries hardest hit by the pandemic. On Thursday, parliament approved the extension of a nationwide state of alarm — the third-highest state of emergency — through May 9. Multiple regions have shut themselves off to travel.

People in Catalonia are not allowed to leave their town or city during weekends.

Many cities, Barcelona included, have implemented night-time curfews. Schools and kindergartens remain open, but restaurants, theatres, cinemas and fitness clubs are shuttered. — dpa



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Unaudited condensed financial statements 30 September 2020

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

The Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company is pleased to submit their report together with the financial statements of the Company for the 9 month period ended September 30 2020.

Health & Safety

There has been no Loss Time Incident during the first 9 months of 2020 and the Health and Safety performance has been excellent. On September 30 2020, Sohar Power has accumulated 2,802 days without loss time accident.

The Company has closely monitored the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic and the directions and decision issued by Supreme Committee dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). In line with its role as an "essential service", the Company and the plant Operator have activated the Business Continuity Plan and implemented different measures to ensure the safety of the staff and the continuity of the business during the exceptional situation.

Operations and Maintenance

The plant achieved a very good reliability level of 99.45% and 98.75% for power and water respectively for the 9 month period ended September 30 2020..

The Company exported a net power of 96 GWh and delivered 0.53 million m3 of potable water to its customer. The load factor of the power plant represented 2.5% of its maximum capability and 1.3% of the water plant maximum capability. The production level is much lower than the production of 51.6% and 63.2% for the power and water plants, respectively, in the same period of the previous year. This is due to the water demand being fulfilled mainly by the new desalination plant commissioned around August 2019. The plant has been kept under preservation after undertaking the Annual performance Test in March 2020. It is available for startup as and when required to meet power and water demand.

All Gas turbines and water units underwent regular annual inspection during the last winter outage.

Financial Results

Revenues at the end of September 2020 amount to RO 21.2 million as against RO 44.1 million at the end of September 2019, reduced mainly due to lower load factor.

The Direct costs for the first 9 months have decreased from RO 29.2 million in 2019 to RO 5.9 million in 2020. The decrease in direct cost is mainly due to lower gas fuel cost due to lower consumption.

The Company recorded a net profit of RO 1.6 million during the period, compared to a net profit of RO 1.2 million in 2019.

Long term loans were repaid and swaps were settled on their due dates. Year to date; a total of RO 1.9 million was repaid to the lenders under the cash sweep mechanism in place since 2015. The hedging deficit on Company's swap agreements, at the close of business at September 30 2020 was RO 4.0 million, in comparison with valuations as of December 31 2019 of RO 4.2 million. As per IFRS, hedging deficit is calculated on each balance sheet date and it represents the loss, which the Company may incur, if it opts to terminate the swap agreements on this date. However under the terms of loan agreements, the Company is not permitted to terminate its swap agreements and, as such, the loss is considered to be notional.

The term loan facilities agreement contains mandatory cash sweep prepayment provisions effective since September 30 2015, consisting in accelerating the repayment of the long term loan during the duration of the contract with our customer. As a consequence, no further amount will be available for distribution as dividend to shareholders until the full repayment of the loans.

We expect the Company to operate safely, reliably, and deliver a reliable supply of power and water to meet the dispatch instruction during the winter period started on October 1 2020.

The Company is preparing for and engaged with the development of the electricity spot market the trial of which is planned in Q1 2021.

Following the qualification and issue of RfP in October 2019, for the 2022 Power Procurement process launched by OPWP, SPC has been following the timeline in terms of submission of various documents as called for in the RfP in order to secure a long term contract post April 2022. OPWP decision is still awaited.

Luciano Guffantid
Chairman of the Board

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

Unaudited condensed statement of financial position as at 30 September 2020

	September 2020 RO'000	December 2019 RO'000	September 2020 USD'000	December 2019 USD'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	84,895	93,630	220,506	243,196
Right-of-use assets	263	376	683	976
Total non-current assets	85,158	94,006	221,189	244,172
Current assets				
Inventories	818	705	2,125	1,831
Trade and other receivables	15,970	14,650	41,481	38,052
Bank balances	2,655	4,998	6,896	12,982
Total current assets	19,443	20,353	50,502	52,865
Total assets	104,601	114,359	271,691	297,037
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,305	4,148	11,182	10,774
Accumulated Losses	(7,764)	(9,177)	(20,166)	(23,836)
Shareholders' equity	18,642	17,072	48,421	44,343
Hedging deficit - net of tax	(2,783)	(3,140)	(7,229)	(8,156)
Total capital and reserves	15,859	13,932	41,192	36,187
Non-current liabilities				
Hedging deficit	3,973	4,152	10,319	10,784
Non-current portion of long-term loans	46,578	57,777	120,982	150,070
Provision for decommissioning costs	1,763	1,676	4,579	4,353
Non-current Portion of deferred revenue	733	1,881	1,904	4,886
Non-current Portion of Lease Liability	290	236	753	613
Deferred tax liability	8,422	9,261	21,875	24,055
Total non-current liabilities	61,759	74,983	160,412	194,761
Current liabilities				
Current portion of long term loans	9,232	8,649	23,979	22,465
Current Portion of Lease Liability	113	150	294	390
Current Portion of deferred revenue	1,531	1,533	3,977	3,982
Trade and other payables	15,071	13,795	39,146	35,831
Amount due to a related party	212	235	551	610
Provision for taxation	824	1,082	2,140	2,811
Total current liabilities	26,983	25,444	70,087	66,089
Total equity and liabilities	104,601	114,359	271,691	297,037
Net assets per share	0.084	0.077	0.219	0.201

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 30 September 2020

	30 September 2020 RO'000	30 September 2019 RO'000	30 September 2020 USD'000	30 September 2019 USD'000
Revenue	21,224	44,068	55,127	114,462
Cost of revenue	(14,716)	(38,044)	(38,224)	(98,816)
Gross profit	6,508	6,024	16,903	15,646
Other income	223	209	579	543
	6,731	6,233	17,482	16,189
Expenses				
General and administrative expenses	(954)	(681)	(2,477)	(1,770)
Finance costs	(3,958)	(4,113)	(10,280)	(10,682)
	(4,912)	(4,794)	(12,757)	(12,452)
Profit/(loss) before tax for the period	1,819	1,439	4,725	3,737
Income tax expense	(249)	(244)	(647)	(632)
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	1,570	1,195	4,078	3,105
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.007	0.005	0.018	0.014

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 30 September 2020

	30 September 2020 RO'000	30 September 2019 RO'000	30 September 2020 USD'000	30 September 2019 USD'000
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	1,570	1,195	4,078	3,105
Other comprehensive income: Items that may be reclassified into profit and loss				
Fair value gains on interest rate swaps	155	(716)	402	(1,860)
Related taxation	-	107	-	278
Total other comprehensive income for the period	155	(609)	402	(1,582)
Total comprehensive income for the period	1,725	586	4,480	1,523



Sudan agrees with US on restoring sovereign immunity

KHARTOUM: Sudan and the United States signed an agreement to restore the African country's sovereign immunity, the Sudanese Ministry of Justice said on Friday.

The ministry said in a statement the agreement will settle cases brought against Sudan in US courts, including for the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, for which Sudan has agreed to pay \$335 million to victims.

The deal is part of a US pledge to remove Sudan from its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, which goes back to its Islamist ruler Omar al Bashir when Washington believed the country was supporting militant groups.

President Donald Trump said this month that the United States will remove Sudan from the list as soon as Khartoum sets aside the \$335 million it has agreed to pay to American victims of militant attacks and their families.



Sudan's Prime Minister in the transitional government Abdalla Hamdok. — AFP

To avoid new lawsuits Sudan needed its sovereign immunity restored, which it lost as a designated sponsor of terrorism. The designation makes it difficult for its transitional government to access urgently needed debt relief

and foreign financing as it fights an economic crisis.

Sudan has under US pressure also agreed to normalise ties with Israel, making Khartoum the third Arab government after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to

The Justice Ministry said the agreement will settle cases brought against Sudan in US courts

establish relations with Israel in the last two months.

Meanwhile, Khartoum said it is to organise a week of negotiations on Ethiopia's controversial dam on the Nile that has riled downstream neighbours Egypt and Sudan, following a three-way video conference Tuesday.

"The three countries have agreed on Sudan organising, soon as possible, a meeting to submit to the African Union presidency a report on the means to make tangible progress" in AU-sponsored negotiations which were suspended in August, the Sudanese irrigation ministry said.

It said the next round of negotiations would run for a week but it gave no dates. — Reuters

Germany asks Libya's Sarraj to delay resignation

BERLIN: Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Friday urged the head of Libya's UN-recognised government to delay his resignation to ensure "continuity" in the political talks that have started following a ceasefire deal.

Fayez al-Sarraj, who heads the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), plans to step down on October 31 as part of the landmark deal to end years of conflict with a rival administration dominated by military commander Khalifa Haftar.

In a statement released after a phone call with Sarraj, Maas welcomed last week's signing of the permanent ceasefire and the launch of a political dialogue as "a real chance" for peace in the north African country.

"In light of the start of the political talks, however, we would like to see Mr al-Sarraj postpone his resignation and remain in office for the duration of the dialogue forum," Maas said, adding that Chancellor Angela Merkel backed his plea.



"From our point of view, this would be important in order to guarantee institutional and executive continuity" in the "crucial weeks" ahead, he added.

The two warring sides have already launched talks via videoconference but are due to hold in-person negotiations on November 9 in Tunisia, with the goal of holding national elections.

The GNA in a statement said Sarraj has received several requests to stay in his post longer to avoid a "political vacuum", including from "leaders in friendly countries", UN officials and civil society groups. — AFP

In brief

■ ISTANBUL

FORMER TURKEY PREMIER YILMAZ, 73, DIES



Former Turkish prime minister Mesut Yilmaz, who oversaw three governments in the 1990s as the country lurched between political crises, died Friday of cancer at the age of 73, his family said.

A conservative with a pugnacious style and trademark square glasses, Yilmaz also served as foreign minister in the 1980s.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's office called Yilmaz "one of the pre-eminent figures of Turkey's political life".

Yilmaz's terms in office covered years of unstable coalitions, political scandals and a growing conflict with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

His last premiership in 1997-99 was punctuated by a growing rift with neighbouring Syria.

■ TEHRAN

IRAN EXPANDS ANTI-VIRUS MEASURES

Iran announced Saturday the expansion beyond Tehran of measures against COVID-19, amid growing calls for a full lockdown after the country posted a string of record highs in deaths and infections.

The measures would take effect on Wednesday and last for at least a week, Alireza Raisi, spokesman for Iran's anti-virus taskforce, said in televised remarks.

They would force the closure of beauty salons, cafes, education centres, gyms, mosques, museums, swimming pools and theatres in 25 provincial capitals and 46 counties, Raisi said.

■ BEIRUT BLAST

Cinematic tributes stream online



An aerial view of the Lebanese capital Beirut and the Mediterranean Sea in the background. — AFP

BEIRUT: A distressed son looks for his father, a lazy beach day ends in tragedy: Lebanese can now stream short films about this summer's devastating port blast — but some say it's just too soon.

Only months after the August 4 explosion killed more than 200 people and ravaged large parts of the capital, the Shahid VIP streaming platform says its aim is to pay tribute to the victims.

But some say they do not want to relive the trauma shown in the "Beirut 6:07" pm series, named after the exact time a huge stash of ammonium nitrate detonated in a dockside warehouse after it caught fire.

Mazen Fayed, one of the project's producers and a director of one of the films making their online premiere this month, said the intention was to honour those killed.

"We have the responsibility to talk about them and to keep the memory of these people alive," he said.

"We didn't have to look very far, the stories were in front of us, we were hearing about them every day."

The explosion, which also injured thousands, was the latest blow to Lebanese already reeling from an economic crisis that sparked mass anti-government protests.

In the short film Fayed co-directed with Nadia Tabbara, a young man desperately runs around the ravaged port, looking for any trace of his father who works there.

The explosion, which also injured thousands, was the latest blow to Lebanese already reeling from an economic crisis that sparked mass anti-government protests

Just a few hours earlier they had argued, we learn, as flashbacks recount the story of this Shiite family of modest means.

The father, who fought in the 1975-1990 civil war, had despaired to see his son caught up in sectarian politics and taking part in violent counter-protests.

In another film, filmmaker Caroline Labaki imagines what could have happened if the explosion had been prevented. It shows Beirut firefighters celebrating a birthday, before rushing out to put out a fire on the docks.

A news report announces the blaze has been put out before reaching the massive stockpile of fertiliser, averting disaster.

But in real life, the explosion could not be prevented and 10 firefighters were among those who lost their lives in Lebanon's worst peacetime disaster.

Directors worked pro-bono to make the 15 films each 10 minutes long, produced by Big Picture Studios and Imagic, Fayad said.

The streaming platform covered the production costs including pay for part of the crews. — AFP

 Mسندم للطاقة MUSANDAM POWER			
Musandam Power Company SAOG Po Box 228, Pc 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate Of Oman. www.musandampower.com			
Unaudited statement of financial position as at 30 September 2020			
	30 September 2020	31 December 2019	
	RO '000	RO '000	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	72,414	73,883	
Other receivables	63	253	
Total non-current assets	72,477	74,136	
Current assets			
Inventories	3,194	3,532	
Trade and other receivables	13,369	11,068	
Due from a related party	19	-	
Cash and bank balances	3,339	8,659	
Total current assets	19,921	23,259	
Total assets	92,398	97,395	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Share capital	7,039	7,039	
Legal reserve	1,016	706	
Retained earnings	2,691	1,848	
Total equity	10,746	9,593	
Non-current liabilities			
Senior facility loan	61,015	62,997	
Deferred tax liability	2,744	2,193	
Lease liability	111	108	
Provision for asset retirement obligation	166	160	
Provision for end of service benefits	-	6	
Total non-current liabilities	64,036	65,464	
Current liabilities			
Senior facility loan	3,652	3,571	
Lease liability	6	3	
Trade and other payables	13,958	7,090	
Short term loan facility	-	3,000	
Due to related parties	-	8,674	
Total current liabilities	17,616	22,338	
Total liabilities	81,652	87,802	
Total equity and liabilities	92,398	97,395	
Net assets per share	0.153	0.136	
Unaudited statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the nine months period ended 30 September 2020			
	30 September 2020	30 September 2019	
	RO '000	RO '000	
Revenue	15,001	15,197	
Operating costs	(8,497)	(8,285)	
Gross profit	6,504	6,912	
General and administrative expenses	(491)	(936)	
Other income	21	-	
Finance costs – net	(2,387)	(2,598)	
Profit before tax	3,647	3,378	
Tax expense	(551)	(583)	
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	3,096	2,795	
Basic and diluted profit per share for the period	0.044	0.040	

Thai students pose with 'dissidents' in graduation protest



Students during a graduation ceremony at Thammasat University in Bangkok. – Reuters

BANGKOK: Some students at Thailand's Thammasat University posed with cardboard cutouts of well-known critics of the monarchy on Saturday in a protest as King Maha Vajiralongkorn was to present degrees amid growing calls for royal reform.

Youth and student-led demonstrations that began in July by demanding the ousting of former junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha as prime minister have increasingly called for curbs on the king's powers, breaking a longstanding taboo.

State broadcaster Thai PBS quoted a source as saying only around half of this year's 9,600 Thammasat graduates joined rehearsals that are essential for those attending the degree ceremony. Last year, it said, only 10 per cent missed the final ceremony. The Palace has made no comment since the protests began.

Prayuth warned students on Friday not to disrupt the graduation ceremonies at Thammasat, long seen as a centre of radicalism. — Reuters

DIRECTORS' REPORT

Overview

United Power Company (SAOG) was formed and registered as a joint stock Company on January 9, 1995. The Company was awarded concession for a project consisting of a 90 MW gas fired power station consisting of 3 open cycle gas turbines near Manah on a build, own, operate and transfer (BOOT) basis and a related network of interconnection and transmission facilities on a build, own and transfer (BOT) basis. It was commissioned in October 1996.

In 1999, the Company was awarded concession to carry out extension of plant by installing additional 180MW capacity. The extension project went into commercial operation in May 2000.

According to the concession agreement which expired on 30th April 2020, OPWP had formally advised UPC that Electricity Holding Company (Nama Holding), as representative of the Government's interest in the electricity sector, has instructed OPWP that the Manah Plant would be transferred to Nama Holding (or its nominee). Effective 1 May 2020, the Manah Plant was transferred to GPDCo (a nominee of Nama Holding).

The Board of directors of the Company ("Board") on the 4th of May 2020 decided to undertake all works associated to closure of all outstanding commitments and on its completion, will proceed with the liquidation of the Company.

As the liquidation would take a couple of years, the Company decided to approach CMA to allow conversion of the Company and allow return of equity to market shareholders. Accordingly, we have now received response from CMA to follow CMA Circular No. E/8/2017 "Controls regulating the transformation of public joint-stock companies". This was disclosed to the market on 13th October 2020.

The Company and its shareholders will organize itself to fully comply with the above mentioned law. Once we are in position to assess the process, the Company will re-approach CMA and then call an extra-ordinary meeting of the shareholders to consider all options which would include among other things approval of the liquidation or the conversion of the legal status.

Operations

As the Manah Plant was transferred on 30th April 2020, there is no additional operations data to be shared, other than what was disclosed in the Directors Report uploaded on 15th June 2020.

Financial Results

The Financial Statements disclosed on 15th June 2020

الشركة المتحدة للطاقة UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOG)



P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24400600, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.upcmanah.com

UNAUDITED CONDENSED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

Unaudited condensed Financial statements of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 30 September 2020

	30 Sept 2020 RO'000	30 Sept 2019 RO'000
Income		
Revenue	1,130	3,188
Financial income	185	531
	146	-
	1,461	3,719
Expenses		
General and administrative expenses	(1,958)	(3,716)
Net Finance Income/(Charge)	23	-
	(1,935)	(3,716)
(loss) / Profit before tax for the period	(474)	3
Income tax expense	(95)	(7)
Net (loss)/ profit after tax	(569)	(4)
Basic (loss)/earnings per share (RO)	(0.285)	(0.002)

incorporated the financial results for the period upto 30th April 2020. There was no movement in the Profit & Loss Account in the Financial Statements approved and uploaded in the Board of Directors meeting held on 25th July 2020.

During the three months ended 30 September 2020, the financial statements which were approved in our meeting held earlier today incorporate income and expenses in line with the financial information disclosed to the shareholders on 24 September 2020.

United Power Company thanks His Majesty, Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, his Government, the Authority of Electricity Regulation, OPWP, MOG, Statutory entities like MECA, the CMA for the opportunity to serve the community through the Manah Power Plant. The Company is proud to be part of this historical journey in contributing to the security and stability of the Sector.

Murtadha Ahmed Sultan
Chairman

Unaudited condensed Financial Position for the period ended 30 September 2020

	30 Sept. 2020 RO'000	31 December 2019 RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Deferred tax asset	-	207
Total non-current assets	-	207
Current assets		
Inventories	-	37
Trade and other receivables	176	1,093
Current portion of financial asset	-	1,318
Cash and bank balances	3,353	3,706
Total current assets	3,523	6,154
Total assets	3,523	6,361
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	2,000	2,000
Legal reserve	667	667
Retained earnings (Accumulated losses)	(563)	2,306
Total capital and reserves	2,104	4,973
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,323	849
Taxation	102	539
Total current liabilities	1,425	1,388
Total equity and liabilities	3,529	6,361
Net assets per share (RO)	1.052	2.487

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days.



OMAN UNITED INSURANCE CO. SAOG

P. O. Box 1522, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman - Tel: 24477300, Fax: 24477323, E-mail: info@omanutd.com - www.omanutd.com - C.R. No.: 1/23725/0

COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the Un-Audited Financial Statements of the company for the Nine months' period ending on 30 September 2020.

Insurance operations and underwriting results:

The Gross premium income of all insurance branches amounted to OMR 24.63 million compared to OMR 25.43 million in the same corresponding period of the year 2019 registering a decrease of (3.1%).

The underwriting profits (before administrative expenses) amounted to OMR 6.19 million compared to Underwriting profits of OMR 5.79 million in the corresponding period of last year registering a growth rate of 6.9%.

Investment income:

Because of the ramifications of Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19) that led to put many pressures and negative impact on the economies of all countries that coincided with the lower oil prices, all together affected the performance of MSM30 index. Accordingly, the MSM30 Index slumped down and lowered by (9.21%) to close at 3,614.64 points, compared to 3,983.66 points as at 31/12/2019. Notwithstanding the above, the company was able to achieve a gross investment income of OMR 2.88 million as against OMR 2.54 million in the corresponding period of last year registering a growth rate of 13.4%. To this effect, the net investment income after deducting the unrelished investment losses amounted to OMR 1.72 million as against investment loss of OMR (40.43) Thousand in the corresponding period of last year registering a growth rate of 4335.5%. The adopted investment strategy of the company succeeded to avoid the volatility risk in the prices of the stock markets. Therefore, we increased our exposure in fixed-income assets and accordingly our investments in fixed-income assets (Bank Deposits and Bonds) amounted to OMR. 57.74 million which is the highest ever since the company commenced operation. The said investments generating fixed and constant income without any interruption.

Net profit:

The company's net profit after tax amounted to OMR 3.49 million against a net profit after tax of

OMR. 1.66 million in the corresponding period of last year, registering a growth rate of 109.9%, accordingly the earnings per share amounted to 35 Bzs against 17 Bzs in the corresponding period of last year. It is worth noting that the net asset value per share amounted to 297 Bzs compared to 273 Bzs in the same period of last year with a growth rate of 8.5 %, this is despite the continuous distribution of dividends to the shareholders, as the dividends during this year amounted to OMR 3 million.

Business risks:

Honorable shareholders: As you know, insurance business is exposed to natural and other risks that are governed by fate and destiny, (Such as the pandemic of Coronavirus, Covid19) and on the other hand, the performance of the investment portfolio is very much influenced by the prevailing economic and political conditions.

However, the management has been exerting its utmost efforts by adopting a conservative risk management mechanism that mitigates the effects of the risks related to the activity.

Future vision:

The company's management always seeks to find other sources of income; therefore, it seeks to search for new products and increases the market share of its insurance products. Acknowledgement:

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the shareholders, our loyal customers, reinsurers and employees. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also extended to Capital Market Authority for their tremendous support in regulating and developing the local insurance sector and for their assistance, which has led to the smooth functioning of operations.

Finally, our sincere thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimur. We all pray to Almighty Allah to shower His Majesty with blessings, keep him in good health and give him long life. Our sincere thanks and appreciation extended to His Majesty's rational government and we wish to the Omani people always Progress and prosperity.

Thank You and Kindest Regards

Salim Bin Nassir Al Busaidi
Chairman
October / 2020

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

(Amounts in Rial Omani)			
DESCRIPTION	30th September 2020	30th September 2019	31st December 2019
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, furniture and equipments	1,401,530	1,710,690	1,606,480
Investment Property - Land & Buildings	2,160,859	2,234,494	2,215,979
Available-for-sale investments	1,262,399	2,039,353	1,655,444
Deposits	36,350,000	35,650,000	43,150,000
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	6,937,221	7,686,777	7,918,000
Total Non-Current assets	48,112,009	49,321,314	56,545,903
Current assets			
Financial assets at fair value through income	4,470,889	8,535,465	6,509,162
Insurance & other receivables	8,722,754	9,885,903	7,798,841
Deposits	20,498,616	11,545,191	7,886,505
Cash & Cash equivalents	-	555,651	474,973
Reinsurance Contracts	27,212,414	27,706,300	27,005,880
Total current assets	60,904,673	58,228,510	49,675,361
Total assets	109,016,682	107,549,824	106,221,264
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Share Premium	871,519	871,519	871,519
Retained earnings	5,133,510	2,902,523	4,644,868
Legal reserve	3,333,334	3,333,334	3,333,334
Contingency reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
General reserve	100,000	100,000	100,000
Fair value reserve	223,850	125,814	304,739
Total capital and reserves	29,662,213	27,333,190	29,254,460
Non-current liabilities			
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	8,387,221	9,365,075	9,573,000
Employees' end of service benefits	842,162	876,816	892,029
Deferred tax liability	45,875	58,099	96,042
Total Non-current liabilities	9,275,258	10,299,990	10,561,071
Current liabilities			
Bank Overdraft	148,183	-	-
Insurance Contracts	52,641,033	53,651,265	51,420,707
Trade and other payables	16,505,584	15,509,402	13,963,436
Provision for Income Tax	784,411	755,977	1,021,590
Total current liabilities	70,079,211	69,916,644	66,405,733
Total liabilities	79,354,469	80,216,634	76,966,804
Total equity and liabilities	109,016,682	107,549,824	106,221,264
Net asset per share	0.297	0.273	0.293

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.01.2020 TO 30.09.2020

(Amounts in Rial Omani)		
PARTICULARS	2020	2019
Income		
Gross Written Premiums	24,634,127	25,433,006
Net underwriting result	6,194,951	5,794,523
Investment income - net	1,425,430	(323,093)
Other operating income	294,961	282,666
Total Income	7,915,342	5,754,096
General and administration expenses	(3,730,325)	(3,388,069)
Operating Profit before taxation	4,185,017	2,366,027
Taxation	(696,375)	(703,979)
Net profit for the period	3,488,642	1,662,048
Other comprehensive income:		
Available for sale investments fair value gain/(loss)	(80,889)	336,553
Total comprehensive income for the period	3,407,753	1,998,601
Earnings Per Share	0.035	0.017

SALIM BIN NASSIR AL BUSAIDI
CHAIRMAN

NASSIR BIN SALIM AL BUSAIDI
CHIEF MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE

	Location	Telephone	Fax
B R A N C H E S	Head Office	2447 7300	2447 7323
	Darsait	2470 3991	2479 6327
	Al Qurum	2456 2105	2456 2074
	Barka	2688 6687	2688 6698
	Buraimi	2565 0105	2565 0096
	Ibra	2557 2386	2557 2387
	Ibri	2569 2386	2569 1840
	Nizwa	2541 0330	2541 2392
	Salalah	2329 5040	2329 8405
	Seeb	2442 1771	2442 1770
	Sohar	2684 1533	2684 0016
	Sur	2554 3229	2554 2454
	Bidaya	2670 9545	2670 9548



Trump targets Pennsylvania in US election finale

MILWAUKEE: Barack Obama will join forces with Joe Biden in Michigan as Donald Trump goes all-in on the crucial state of Pennsylvania on Saturday and the two candidates dig deep on the final weekend before Tuesday’s US presidential election.

For the first time since the start of the campaign, Biden, 77, will be joined on stage by his former boss and most popular campaigner, former President Barack Obama. They’ll put on two drive-in rallies in the cities of Flint and Detroit in Michigan. Stevie Wonder is expected to be the musical guest of the evening.

Trump, 74, won the industrial state by a narrow margin of 0.2 points in 2016 — but this year the former vice president leads by seven points. That puts him in pole position to take its 16 electoral votes, a sizable leap towards the 270 he needs to win the White House.

For the past week, Obama has put his popularity at the service of his former vice president, hosting several rallies at which he repeatedly slammed Trump’s response to the coronavirus pandemic, notably in Florida and Pennsylvania.

But Trump — who has dismissed Obama’s rallies as much smaller than his own — will himself head to Pennsylvania Saturday, where he will host three rallies, a sign of how key the state is to his own path to 270 votes.

He won Pennsylvania, where Biden was born, by a razor-thin margin against Hillary Clinton in



US President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at Manchester-Boston Regional Airport in New Hampshire. Democratic Presidential candidate and former VP Joe Biden delivers remarks at a voter mobilisation event in Ohio. — AFP

2016. Every ballot will therefore count on November 3 if he hopes to claim its 20 electoral votes once more.

Biden will follow suit there both Sunday and Monday in a clear sign that his campaign also sees the Keystone State as absolutely crucial to victory.

On Friday the two candidates battled over the American Midwest, barnstorming three heartland states each as they chased every last vote in a region that propelled the Republican to victory in 2016.

But the race was overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic, with infections spiking across the country. More than 94,000 new infections were recorded Friday — a new high for the second day running — and total cases passed nine million.

Nevertheless, Trump, who has long said the virus will “disappear,” remained defiant at rallies in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

“We just want normal,” he told supporters — many of them unmasked — at an outdoor rally near Detroit as he pushed states to relax public health restrictions and resume daily life.

He again bucked the advice of his own administration’s health experts and downplayed the threat of the coronavirus, saying “if you get it, you’re going to get better, and then you’re going to be immune.”

The virus has killed nearly 230,000 Americans. US hospitals are bracing as infections soar in nearly every state, with winter flu season looming.

The outbreak has ravaged the

Biden will be joined on stage by his former boss and most popular campaigner, former President Obama

economy, and while there have been signs of recovery, millions remain jobless.

Trump has touted the economic successes of his presidency, including positive GDP figures Thursday. But US stocks closed out their worst week since March, highlighting concerns about a shaky recovery.

And with voters concerned about the health hazards of crowded polling stations on November 3, a record 86 million have already cast early ballots by mail or in person.

After a campaign largely muted by the pandemic, Biden is on the offensive, pushing Trump onto the back foot in unexpected battlegrounds like Texas, a large, traditionally conservative bastion now rated a toss-up by multiple analysts.

On Friday, the state reported that a staggering nine million residents had already voted, surpassing its 2016 total.

Biden’s running mate Kamala Harris visited Texas Friday in a bid to turn the state Democratic for the first time since president Jimmy Carter in 1976.

Biden winning there would be a major blow to Trump, but the president dismissed the notion, saying: “Texas, we’re doing very well.” — AFP

■ TRIBUTE TO NICE VICTIMS



A black banner is seen on the logo ‘I Love Nice’ in tribute to the victims of a deadly knife attack in Nice, France. — Reuters

Turkey quake death toll hits 26, over 100 rescued

IZMIR: A mother and three of her children were pulled to safety on Saturday after being trapped for almost 18 hours under a building in the western Turkish city of Izmir that was flattened in a powerful earthquake.

Rescuers were continuing efforts to free the woman’s fourth child, as the Aegean port city’s major said around 180 people remained trapped. “In the meantime, we are delighted to be hearing miracles happening as a result of diligent work by rescue teams,” Mayor Tunc Soyer told television channel Fox TV.

Friday’s quake killed 26 people in Turkey and two on the Greek island of Samos, officials said. It destroyed at least 20 buildings in Izmir, causing panic in the city and setting off tidal waves that slammed into coastal areas and islands.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, speaking in a televised address, said 885 people were injured, 15 of them critically. In Izmir, the rescue work was punctuated by frequent

aftershocks, of which Turkey’s disaster agency recorded around 520.

By Saturday afternoon search operations had been completed in eight buildings and were continuing in nine others, officials said. One resident said both her parents were still trapped. “I couldn’t get any news. I couldn’t get any news,” the woman said when asked about attempts to reach them.

As bulldozers removed debris from collapsed buildings while rescuers dismantled walls by hand, Environment Minister Murat Kurum said some 100 people had been rescued so far. The first 300 of 900 tents provided for those made homeless were erected in the city. In a rare show of warmth between Turkey and Greece — caught up in a bitter dispute over energy exploration rights in the eastern Mediterranean — Erdogan and his counterpart in Athens, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, exchanged solidarity messages on Friday. — Reuters



Search and rescue teams carry a victim on a stretcher after pulling her out of the rubble of a collapsed building in Izmir, after a powerful earthquake struck Turkey’s western coast and parts of Greece. — AFP

■ GLOBAL FIRST

Slovakia begins mass virus testing

BRATISLAVA: Slovakia on Saturday began a programme to screen its entire population for coronavirus in what would be a global first but medical professionals have warned it could lead to an increase in cases.

Some 45,000 medical workers, army and police are being deployed to carry out the tests in the EU member state of 5.4 million people, collecting swabs at around 5,000 testing points.

Socially distanced queues could be seen forming in the streets of the capital Bratislava even before the points opened at 0600 GMT.

“The world will be watching,” Prime Minister Igor Matovic said



A healthcare worker collects a swab sample from a person at a COVID-19 testing site during nationwide testing in Trencin, Slovakia. — Reuters

this week.

He said the measure would save “hundreds of lives”.

The programme will use antigen tests, which give quick results — something within

minutes.

But antigen tests are not seen as being as reliable as the PCR test for which nasal and throat swabs have to be sent to a lab for analysis.

Participation in the testing is not mandatory but anyone who is not able to produce a negative test certificate if stopped by police could get a heavy fine.

Anyone who tests positive has to go immediately into quarantine for 10 days.

“This will be our road to freedom,” Matovic said, hinting that virus restrictions could be eased once testing is complete, or reinforced if the programme is not carried out in full. — AFP

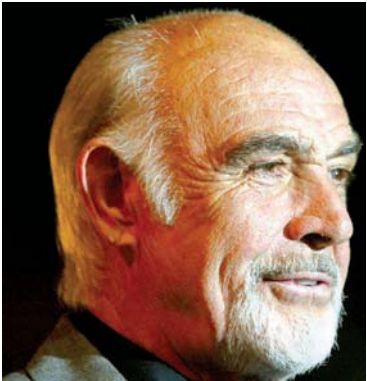
LONDON

Sean Connery, favourite James Bond, dies

Sean Connery, the actor considered to be the definitive James Bond by many, has died at age 90, British broadcaster BBC reported on Saturday, citing a family statement.

Though the Scottish actor is best known as 007, starring as the dashing spy in seven films, he was able to nab an Oscar in 1988 for his role as best supporting actor in “The Untouchables.”

Born on August 25, 1930, in Edinburgh, Connery landed his big breakthrough as James Bond



in 1962, after deciding to be an actor at age 23 and starring in a string of made-for-TV movies.

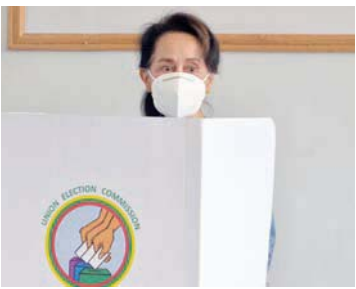
NAYPYIDAW

Suu Kyi kicks off advance voting for elderly

Myanmar’s civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi cast her ballot Thursday ahead of election day next week with hundreds of thousands of elderly voters across the country expected to follow suit to reduce the risk of coronavirus.

Wearing a face mask, rubber gloves and her trademark flowers in her hair, Suu Kyi was one of the first in the country to vote in the capital, Naypyidaw.

The 75-year-old’s National League for Democracy (NLD) is



widely expected to be returned to power in the November 8 polls — only the second election since the Southeast Asian nation emerged from outright military rule.

TBILISI

Georgians elect new parliament

Georgians voted for a new parliament on Saturday in an election seen as a test of credibility for the ruling party and a way to form a more diverse parliament.

Voting, which got underway at 0400 GMT, was brisk, with lines forming outside several polling stations in the capital Tbilisi.

A fifth of Georgian territory remains under the control of pro-Russian separatists following a short war with Russia in 2008.

A majority of polls suggest the ruling Georgian Dream party



— founded and funded by the country’s richest man, Bidzina Ivanishvili — is leading, but it is not clear whether it will be able to get more than 40 per cent of the votes needed to form a single-party government.

Let’s not throw out the baby, with the bath water!

Very few teachers, lecturers or students are at ease in this current COVID-19 educational environment. It is quite simply, only a sticking plaster, for a savagely beaten, bruised, and somewhat crippled patient that is the global education system.

First, I am not suggesting that anyone, anywhere, is not doing their best to come up with solutions that will keep teachers and students safe in the classrooms, and keep their families safe when they return home at the end of the day, for that must be the absolute focus of any concept of returning to the classroom. They need solutions, not sticking plasters.

And second, I am not at all critical of the efforts service providers and educational authorities and institutions, all over the world, are putting in to try to come up with effective online teaching resources that can cater to the pedagogical, or teaching practice and theory needs of the teachers, and the learning experiences that will continue to develop the learner’s abilities to function at something approaching their full capabilities. For now, sticking plasters will have to do!

The fact is, however, no matter how hard everyone tries, it is not working, and the patient, while not terminal, is causing concern. Teachers have no way of implementing those educational



Ray Petersen
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IT IS NOT REALLY INCUMBENT UPON US ALL TO BECOME ‘TECH-SAVVY-WEB-BASED-INTERNET-GURUS,’ OVERNIGHT

techniques and parameters they have spent years after their training and qualifications personalising, achieving their very individual and personal balance, the methodology that fits their personality, that, because it is delivered with an organic authenticity, is appreciated and accepted by students in hundreds of thousands of classrooms as being educationally legitimate. They didn’t need a first aid kit!

There is no way, currently, of producing this quality of educational experience now, because there is not enough time, not enough interaction, and not enough emotional investment. It is nobody’s fault; it is just this miserable hand we have been dealt! Although appreciating the perspective of some educators that teachers and learners must just embrace online learning because this is ‘the way it’s going to be from now on,’ that is fatalist. The patient will recover.

Disappointment is keenly felt among teachers who are aware that a culture of educational responsibility in terms of task completions, integrity and motivation within the learner landscape, yes learner, not learning landscape, as too few learners have embraced the concept of task and assignment completions. This lack of intensity, the lack of motivation, the lethargy, are social, not educational issues however, and require more than sticking plasters.

Timely attendance, failures to stay on camera, failure to dress appropriately for class, distractions off-camera, background noises, using phones to log in to classes, microphones and cameras that “don’t work,” insufficient language to understand instructions or teaching, are just a handful of the frustrations that teaching online throws up, and use up lots of little sticking plasters, every day!

It is not really incumbent upon us all to become ‘tech-savvy-web-based-Internet-gurus,’ overnight, but we all have a duty to deal with what is here and now as effectively as we can, and the key element of this is will. As the saying goes... “If there is a will, there is a way.” It may not all be perfect, and not everything is going to work out well. Not every teacher can deal with the technology, and not every student wants to ask questions online, or do assignments without help, or even be on camera, but being willing to participate will ensure a full recovery.

I do not believe that education requires reformation, to revise teaching and learning theories or practice. Education, teaching and learning has developed immeasurably based on social, cultural, and psychological research during the last hundred years, to say reform must happen because of COVID-19 is an unrealistic response to a crisis. Let us not throw out the baby, with the bath water!

TRAILBLAZER

On the cusp of making US election history

JOSHUA MELVIN

Kamala Harris is on the verge of what would be a double-dream for US Democrats: becoming the nation’s first woman vice-president and ending Donald Trump’s turbulent rule. Harris comes into the November 3 election already a repeat trailblazer as California’s first Black attorney general and the first woman of South Asian heritage elected to the US Senate.

But winning the vice presidency, a heartbeat away from leading the United States, would be the most significant barrier she has broken yet and a stepping stone to the ultimate prize. With the 77-year-Biden expected to serve only a single term if elected, Harris would be favoured to win the Democratic presidential nomination four years from now. That could give her a shot at more history-making — as the first female president of the United States.

“My mother raised me to see what could be, unburdened by what has been,” Harris, 56, wrote on Twitter.

Since being tapped as Biden’s running mate in August, she has slammed President Donald Trump on his chaotic handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also racism, the economy and the president’s crackdown on immigration.

Time after time, when progressives urged her to embrace criminal justice reforms as a district attorney and then the state’s attorney general, Ms Harris opposed them or stayed silent

LARA BAZELON
Law professor

Harris was born to immigrants to the United States — her father from Jamaica, her mother from India — and their lives and her own have in some ways embodied the American dream. She was born on October 20, 1964 in Oakland, California, then a hub for civil rights and anti-war activism.

Her diploma from historically Black Howard University in Washington was the start of a steady rise that took her from prosecutor, to two elected terms as San Francisco’s district attorney and then California’s attorney general in 2010.

However, Harris’s self-description as a “progressive prosecutor” has been seized upon by critics who say she fought to uphold wrongful convictions and opposed certain reforms in California, like a bill requiring that the attorney general probe shootings involving police.

“Time after time, when progressives urged her to embrace criminal justice reforms as a district attorney and then the state’s attorney general, Ms Harris opposed them or stayed silent,” law professor Lara Bazelon wrote in *The New York Times* last year.

Yet Harris’s work was key to forging a platform and profile from which she launched a successful Senate campaign in 2016, becoming just the second Black female senator ever. Her stint as attorney general also helped her forge a connection with Biden’s son Beau, who held the same position in the state of Delaware, and died of cancer at the age of 46 in 2015.

“I know how much Beau respected Kamala and her work, and that mattered a lot to me, to be honest with you, as I made this decision,” Biden said during his first appearance with Harris as running mates.

A veteran campaigner, Harris oozes charisma but can quickly pivot from her megawatt smile to her prosecutorial persona of relentless interrogation and cutting retorts. — AFP

HIGH-STAKES

With improved leverage, North Korea’s Kim awaits winner of US vote

HYONHEE SHIN

North Korea’s Kim Jong Un awaits the winner of this week’s US presidential election armed with greater leverage in high-stakes nuclear diplomacy, thanks to a more powerful and versatile arsenal of weapons than at the start of the Trump presidency.

While Donald Trump boasts of having prevented war and exchanged “beautiful letters” with Kim, the US president has not wrested a single significant commitment from the North to roll back its weapons of mass destruction programme, according to Seoul officials and analysts.

For Kim, Joe Biden poses a more challenging negotiating partner, more likely to pen a “Dear Jong” letter than engage with him in person — even though the bar for summit diplomacy is lower due to the precedent set by Trump, the officials say.

Pyongyang embarked on an unprecedented series of weapons tests in 2017, declaring itself a nuclear power after undertaking its biggest nuclear blast and longest-range intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches. After months of tightening sanctions and trading threats, Trump then became the first sitting US president to meet with a North Korean leader at a summit in



A public security officer uses a red flag to stop a taxi for disinfection as part of preventative measures against the COVID-19 coronavirus, on a road at the entrance to Wonsan, Kangwon Province. — AFP

FOR KIM, BIDEN POSES A MORE CHALLENGING NEGOTIATING PARTNER, MORE LIKELY TO PEN A “DEAR JONG” LETTER THAN ENGAGE WITH HIM IN PERSON

Singapore in 2018.

“Kim Jong Un has been doing what he needs to stay in power, and nuclear weapons are the most powerful means of survival,” a South Korean official who is familiar with the diplomacy said, asking not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue.

The official called it a “Trump effect” that Biden did not rule out a summit with Kim, even as the

Democratic challenger called the North Korean leader a “thug” and said a meeting is possible only if Pyongyang rolls back its nuclear capability.

“Whoever wins the election, he has to solve the question of how to derive substantive denuclearisation under an agreed roadmap that clarifies an end state of the programmes,” another Seoul official said. — Reuters

DJOKOVIC

suffers heaviest loss to lucky loser Sonego in Vienna



For sure it's the best victory of my life. Novak is the best in the world. Today I played so, so good. It's unbelievable. It's amazing. I played the best match in my life. I'm so happy for this

LORENZO SONEGO

VIENNA: Novak Djokovic suffered his heaviest defeat in a three-set match on Friday when he was knocked out of the Vienna ATP tournament by lucky loser Lorenzo Sonego, stalling his bid to wrap up the year-end world number one ranking for a sixth time.

Italian Sonego, ranked 42 and who had initially lost in qualifying last weekend, is the first lucky loser ever to beat Djokovic.

His 6-2, 6-1 quarterfinal stunner was 33-year-old Djokovic's heaviest ever defeat.

The only other time he had won just three games was at the 2005 Australian Open at the hands of Marat Safin in a best-of-five set encounter.

Friday's defeat means Djokovic will have to wait a little longer before he completes the formality of equalling Pete Sampras's all-time record of ending the season top of the rankings for a sixth time.

"For sure it's the best victory of my life. Novak is the best in the world. Today I played so, so good", Sonego said.

"It's unbelievable. It's amazing. I played the best match in my life.

I'm so happy for this."

Sonego fired 26 winners past the Serb who lost for only the third time in 2020.

Djokovic, a 17-time major champion, managed just seven winners against 25 unforced errors.

Second seed and defending champion Dominic Thiem also lost Friday, going down 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 to Russian world number eight Andrey Rublev.

Rublev hit 30 winners past the US Open champion and goes on to face South Africa's Kevin Anderson for a place in the final.

"I came here with the mood that I have nothing to lose", said Rublev who is chasing a fifth title of the year.

"I had already a really great season. I came here with zero expectations, just wanting to do my best. To try to fight every match. At the end, I am here in the semifinals."

Anderson made the semifinals by accounting for Russian fourth seed Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 7-6 (7/5).

It was Anderson's first top 10 win in two years. — AFP

Italy's Lorenzo Sonego returns the ball to Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their quarterfinal match of the ATP tennis tournament in Vienna, Austria. — AFP



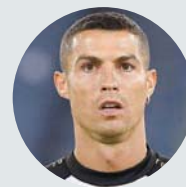
Lorgat named to CSA interim board

Former cricket South Africa (CSA) chief executive Haroon Lorgat was included Friday in a nine-man interim board tasked with restoring the image of the scandal-tainted organisation. —AFP



Gayle fined for flinging bat

West Indies batsman Chris Gayle has been fined for throwing his bat in frustration after missing out on a record-extending seventh IPL century by one run. —AFP



Ronaldo recovers from coronavirus

Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo has tested negative for coronavirus after nearly three weeks, the club confirmed on Friday. Ronaldo first tested positive for COVID-19 on October 13. — AFP

‘Red Warriors’ and Olympic team to begin preparatory camp on Monday

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, OCTOBER 31

The Oman national and Olympic football teams will be back to action on Monday through internal camp in Muscat. The camp will begin one day after the completion of the top-tier domestic league which will conclude on Sunday for the 2019/2020 season.

In addition, the first division league reached the final stages as it unveiled on Friday the two teams which earned the direct tickets to Omantel League including Nizwa and Al Ettihad clubs while Al Mussnah and Al Shabab will fight for the third spot.

The head coach of the national football team, coach Branko Ivankovic, has called up 28 players for the domestic camp including Faye al Rushaidi, Mohammed al Musalami, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al YAhyaie, Ahmed al Khamisi, Yazeed al Mashani, Moutaz Saleh, Ahmed Faraj, Eid al Farasi, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbri, Khalid al Buraiki, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Omar al Fazari, Essam al Subhi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ali al Rushaidi, Fahmi Said, Ibrahim Saleh, Mohammed al Dheeb, Arshed al Alawi, Abas al Hashami, Mohsin Jawher, Khalid al Hajri, Omran al Hedi, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Ali al Busaidy.

The announced list of Red Warrior included many new faces including Muscat's star Abas al Hashami, Dhofar's Yazeed al Mashani and Ahmed Al Khamisi.

According to the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic in previous statements to Oman Daily Observer that the warm-up camp was decided to be held in Muscat after the cancellation of the overseas camp in Dubai in November due to the mandatory quarantine period of 14 days after each travel.



The national players who are playing abroad will not take part at the forthcoming camp due to the restriction after travel and home quarantine procedures while Al Nahdha and Dhofar's players will join the camp after the semifinal matches of the HM Cup.

On the other hand, Oman Olympic (U-23) football team will begin an internal camp in the same period of the national team. The head coach of the

team, Dario Basic and his assistant Mohammed Khamis al Oraimi, announced the probables of the camp including Yousef al Malki, Essam al Makhzoomi, Husaain al Shari, Awadh al Shari, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Omar al Salti, Mahmood al Alawi, Mohammed al Alawi, Basil al Jabri, Qasim al Mubarek, Essa al Balushi, Sultan Basheer, Najeeb al Sujaibi, Yousef al Shiyadi, Islam al Hinai, Ahmed al Oraimi, Mouadh al Jahdhami,

The national players who are playing abroad will not take part at the forthcoming camp due to the restriction after travel and home quarantine procedures while Al Nahdha and Dhofar's players will join the camp after the semifinal matches of the HM Cup

Hamed al Jabri, Irfan al Salmi, Al Azhar al Balushi, Mohammed al Buraiki, Mohammed al Ghafri, Mousab al Mamari, Muhannad al Hamrashdi, Majid al Ghunaimi, Moyad al Balushi, Abdulaziz al Zaabi and Mohammed al Hinai.

The scheduled camp for the Olympic team is the third camp for the Croatian coach who was appointed in earlier of the existing year. The first two warm-up camps were an introductory gathering for the players with the

head coach. It is expected from this camp, the technical staff will start the implementation of the technical and tactical training sessions with more focusing on some players to grow up until forthcoming events. The national Olympic team will be part of the GCC Gulf Games in Kuwait in March next year. The organisers decided to postpone the event from December to March and April next year due to COVID-19 pandemic.

ENGLISH FOOTBALL ACTION

Wolves beat Palace 2-0, climb to third in Premier League

LONDON: Wolverhampton Wanderers moved up to third in the Premier League after beating Crystal Palace 2-0 on Friday thanks to goals from on-loan teenage wingback Rayan Ait-Nouri and Daniel Podence.

France under-21 international Ait-Nouri gave the hosts the lead in the 18th minute after latching on to a clearance and driving a bouncing shot into the far corner for his first goal in senior football on his Premier League debut.

Wolves midfielder Leander Dendoncker then hit the post

with a powerful shot before Portuguese winger Podence made it 2-0, meeting Pedro Neto's cross from the right with a superb cushioned volley in the 27th minute.

Palace had several VAR decisions go against them, with a Michy Batshuayi goal disallowed and a penalty award overturned, both for offside.

Wolves substitute Adama Traore had a great chance to put the game out of reach in the 83rd minute but he fired a powerful shot straight at Palace keeper Vicente Guaita who parried it



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Max Kilman in action with Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha. — Reuters

away to safety.

Palace suffered a further setback when Luka Milivojevic was given his marching orders in the 87th minute after a review showed a nasty foul on Joao Moutinho.

The win puts Wolves on 13 points from seven games. They trail leaders Everton and second-placed Liverpool on goal difference. Palace are ninth on 10 points. Podence, whose only other league goal for Wolves also came at home to Palace, praised fellow scorer Ait-Nouri, 19, who joined on a season-long loan,

with the Midlands club having an option to buy, from Ligue 1 Angers earlier this month.

"He has a great left foot. He has a lot of quality. He showed everyone what he can do (and) we are here to help him," Podence said, adding that Wolves would not be getting carried away by their lofty league position.

"We play game-by-game. We are improving since the first game. We had a difficult pre-season. We can do better, and we are trying to be perfect," he added. — Reuters



‘No chance’ of playing Big Bash League, says bubble-weary Smith

LONDON: Australian batsman Steve Smith has ruled out participating in the country’s domestic Twenty20 Big Bash League this season, saying that continuing to play in bio-secure bubbles amid the COVID-19 pandemic will take a toll on his mental health. Smith has already experienced life in different bubbles, first when the Australian T20 squad toured England and now with the Rajasthan Royals in the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL), which is being played in the United Arab Emirates.

The Big Bash League is set to start in December and run till February, with Australia’s national-team players expected to play for their domestic sides in the latter stages after India’s tour of Australia — which will also be played in bio-secure bubbles.

“I’ll be honest with you, absolutely no chance,” Smith was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

“It’s still early days with the bubbles. We don’t know how long it’s going to last for. “There’s an uncertainty there. It’s just going to be about having open conversations with coaches, general managers, whoever, to ensure that people are keeping their head space in a reasonable

The Big Bash League is set to start in December and run till February, with Australia’s national-team players expected to play for their domestic sides in the latter stages after India’s tour of Australia -- which will also be played in bio-secure bubbles.

place.

“When guys are starting to find things a bit tough mentally from just living in the bubble, being able to get out — even if it might just be a few days of being normal might be a real help. Those conversations need to be had.”

Smith is not the first player to have concerns over players’ mental health in bubbles, with England’s limited overs captain Eoin Morgan also saying players may withdraw from tours if their mental health is at risk.

— Reuters



Brilliant Stokes keeps Rajasthan in intriguing IPL playoffs race

MUMBAI: A stroke-filled half-century from Ben Stokes helped Rajasthan Royals snap Kings XI Punjab’s five-match winning streak in the Indian Premier League on Friday, leaving the race for the playoffs spots intriguingly poised.

Opening the batting, England all-rounder Stokes hit six fours and three sixes in his 26-ball 50 to set up a comfortable chase for the Steve Smith-led Rajasthan, who overhauled a 186-run target with seven wickets and 15 balls to spare.

Stokes’ brilliance overshadowed Punjab’s Chris Gayle, who wrote his name into the history books by becoming the first player to smash 1,000 sixes in the Twenty20 format

before he was dismissed for 99.

Rajasthan skipper Smith hailed Stokes as “exceptional” and said he hoped his team was peaking at the right time. The season “has ebbed and flowed. It would have been nice to have a few more wins in the middle,” Smith said.

“The way the tournament plays you want to be peaking at the right time. Obviously we still need to do a bit to make the playoffs.” With the win, Rajasthan climbed to fifth in the eight-team league with 12 points from 13 matches to remain in the hunt for the four playoff spots in the tournament, which is being held in the United Arab Emirates due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stokes’ brilliance overshadowed Punjab’s Chris Gayle, who wrote his name into the history books by becoming the first player to smash 1,000 sixes in the Twenty20 format before he was dismissed for 99

“When you are in a position like we are as a team, there’s nothing to lose really. Just go out there and express yourself and give the best account of yourself,” Stokes said after picking up the man-of-the-match award.

Punjab and Eoin Morgan’s Kolkata Knight Riders have the same number of points with all three teams having one match left in the regular season before the playoffs start on Thursday.

Champions Mumbai Indians are the only side to have sealed their playoffs berth, having won eight of their 12 matches. The Royal Challengers Bangalore, led by India captain Virat Kohli, and Delhi Capitals are also in the mix with 14 points each.

— Reuters

■ FIRST ODI

Afridi leads Pakistan’s victory despite Taylor’s hundred

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Shaheen Shah Afridi grabbed five wickets and Wahab Riaz took four as Pakistan thwarted a fighting Zimbabwe to win the first one-day international by 26 runs in Rawalpindi on Friday.

Afridi finished with 5-49 while Riaz had figures of 4-41 as Pakistan survived a brilliant knock of 112 by Brendan Taylor, who put Zimbabwe briefly on course for an upset as they chased a daunting 282-run target.

The experienced Taylor lifted Zimbabwe from a struggling 115-4 with a solid partnership of 119 for the fifth wicket with newcomer Wesley Madhevere, who finished with a career-best 55.

Taylor knocked 11 boundaries and three well-timed sixes in his 117-ball knock, but holed out to Afridi at mid-off in the 47th over, leaving Pakistan to wrap up the last four wickets for just 15 runs.

The win gives Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the three-match series with the remaining matches at the same venue on Sunday and Tuesday.

They also claim 10 points in



Pakistan’s Shaheen Afridi (31) celebrates with team-mates after the dismissal of Zimbabwe’s Brian Chari (right). — AFP

the World Cup One-Day Super League, which determines qualifiers for the next World Cup in 2023.

Afridi had given Pakistan two early breakthroughs by bowling Brian Chari (two) and skipper Chamu Chibhabha (13) by the fifth over.

Taylor steadied the innings with a 71-run stand with Craig Ervine (41) for the third wicket before Ervine and Sean Williams (four) fell quickly.

Taylor completed his 11th one-day century with a sharp single on overthrow, raising his bat to the standing ovation from his team’s

dressing room.

Haris Sohail scored an attractive 71 from 82 balls while Imam-ul-Haq made 58 in Pakistan’s 281-8 after the hosts won the toss and opted to bat on a slow pitch.

Once opener Abid Ali departed for 21, Pakistan had high hopes with new captain Babar Azam,

regarded as one of the world’s best batsmen in limited-overs cricket.

But his debut as ODI skipper ended early after a clumsy-looking shot off pacer Blessing Muzarabani for 19.

Imam and Sohail took Pakistan past 100 and looked set for a big partnership until they were both

got out at the same end while taking a sharp single.

Imam’s knock had six hits to the boundary. Sohail, who hit two sixes and six boundaries, pulled a leg muscle and needed treatment on the ground.

Imad Wasim (34 not out) and Faheem Ashraf (23) added a quickfire 42 in their late partnership and Pakistan made 48 in the last five overs.

Zimbabwe’s spinners controlled the pace, with left-arm slow bowler Tendai Chisoro taking 2-31.

With this match, Pakistan’s Aleem Dar equalled South African umpire Rudi Koertzen’s record of officiating the most ODIs, with 209.

After the game, captain Azam was full of praise for Taylor’s innings, as well as his own side’s performance.

“Taylor’s knock was outstanding,” said Azam. “But I had confidence in my bowlers so I knew that once we got his wicket we would stop them from chasing the target.

— AFP



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FDI tops RO 15 billion

MUSCAT: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) soared to RO 15.064 billion by the end of the first quarter of 2020, bolstered by an inflow of RO 851 million over the corresponding period of 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The United Kingdom was the biggest contributor with RO 7.396 billion, followed by the

United States (RO 1.794 billion), UAE (RO 1.208 billion) Kuwait (RO 916 million), China (RO 760 million), Bahrain (RO 402 million), Qatar (RO 372 million), India (RO 323 million), and Netherlands (RO 304 million).

FDI in oil and gas exploration amounted to (RO 9.690 billion), followed by the manufacturing sector (RO 1.695 billion), and real estate (RO 1.14 billion). — ONA

Oman moving ahead with privatisation, PPP strategies

INVESTOR COMFORT: A statement issued by the Ministry of Finance late last week has sought to reassure local and international investors that an ambitious programme of PPP-based initiatives is on track for procurement and implementation

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Omani government has affirmed its commitment to embracing the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model to deliver infrastructure projects and services in partnership with the private sector.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Finance late last week has sought to reassure local and international investors that an ambitious programme of PPP based initiatives is on track for procurement and implementation, notwithstanding the government's recent decision to do away with, among other agencies, the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PPP).

The latter, hitherto the apex agency with oversight of Oman's landmark PPP and privatisation programmes, has been absorbed into the Ministry of Finance — part of a wider rejig of government ministries and departments aimed at, among other goals, cutting government expenditure and streamlining the work of public sector bodies.

"In accordance with Royal Decree 110/2020 abolishing the Public Authority for Privatisation



(Picture for illustration only)

Earlier this year, the Sultanate outlined an array of opportunities for private sector investment in as many as nine key sectors under a newly unveiled PPP regulatory framework.

and Partnership (PAPP), the Ministry of Finance would like to notify all its international and local partners that it is continuing to work on PAPP projects and agreements..." it said.

The Royal Decree, it noted, transfers to the Ministry of Finance all specialisations, allocations, assets, rights and obligations of the PAPP, as well as the Authority's employees. It also affirmed that the Tawazun Oman (Offset) Programme, as well as the Privatisation and PPP laws, continue to be in force in accordance with the laws and regulations already in place.

"The Tawazun Oman (Offset) Programme, and the privatisation and PPP projects will continue

to be implemented as per agreements, terms and conditions already agreed upon. The projects team at the (erstwhile) PAPP will continue to manage the projects," the ministry added.

Earlier this year, the Sultanate outlined an array of opportunities for private sector investment in as many as nine key sectors under a newly unveiled PPP regulatory framework. It announced an initial pipeline of 49 projects distributed across Healthcare, Education, Research and Development, Environment, Transport, Ports, Renewable Energy, Office Accommodation and Information Communication and Technology.

First to be floated for

procurement last December was a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) on behalf of the wholly government-owned wastewater utility Haya Water. Among the biggest PPP-based procurements is a package of 40-odd schools and related institutions for the Ministry of Education.

In the healthcare sector, the Ministry of Health is looking to establish a string of dialysis service centres around the country, along with a number of small hospitals and health centres, a drug rehab centre in Suhar and a Central Laboratory.

Private investment is also being sought in the development of a dual carriageway for trucks from Salalah to Thamrait, a number of fisheries ports, a mineral port at Manji in Dhofar Governorate, an integrated hazardous waste management facility in Suhar, slaughterhouses, and office blocks for government ministries.

BOOSTS STAKE

Tethys Oil acquires majority interest in Oman Block 56

GROWING PORTFOLIO: Swedish upstream energy firm set to assume operatorship of 5,808 sq km licence in southeast Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Ramping up its presence in Oman's upstream energy sector, Swedish firm Tethys Oil has acquired a majority interest in Block 56, a promising onshore concession located in the southeastern part of the Sultanate. Following the transaction, Tethys Oil is set to



take over operatorship of the block, adding to an expanding portfolio of operated assets in the Sultanate.

It follows an agreement reached

by the energy firm's wholly-owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Oman Onshore Limited with incumbent operator Medco Arabia Ltd, a 100 per cent owned subsidiary of PT

Medco Energi Internasional, a publicly listed Indonesian oil and gas company.

The pact allows for Tethys Oil to acquire an additional 45 per cent interest in the licence covering Block 56, up from 20 per cent originally. The deal, once ratified by the Omani government, will effectively raise Tethys Oil's interest in the licence to 65 per cent. Significantly, Medco Arabia, which retains a five per cent interest in the licence, will relinquish operatorship of the block to Tethys Oil Oman.

Block 56, spread over an area of 5,808 sq km, is located some 200 km south of the adjoining

Blocks 3 & 4, in which Tethys Oil has a non-operating 30 per cent interest. Output from the two blocks presently average around 45,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Tethys Oil says it is optimistic about Block 56's hydrocarbon prospects. Of 11 wells drilled to date in the Block, all but one have encountered oil or oil shows, although none have been determined to be commercial.

"Testing operations of three previously drilled wells were successfully completed in the first quarter 2020. One of the wells confirmed the presence of an active petroleum system with a crude oil quality of 20-25 degrees

API and medium viscosity, although the commercial viability is yet to be determined," said Tethys Oil in a statement.

The latest deal, announced over the weekend, marks a year since Tethys Oil first acquired a 20 per cent interest in Block 56 following an agreement with Biyaq Oil Field Services, an investor in the licence. Upon the finalisation of the most recent pact, Biyaq will hold 25 per cent and Intaj LLC and Medco Arabia Ltd 5 per cent apiece. The transaction also commits Tethys Oil to providing additional compensation to Medco Arabia in the event of a declaration of commerciality.

Sectors profiting from COVID-19 crisis (Part 1)

It is hard to define a comprehensive timeline of the pandemic. The origin of it can be traced back to when the World Health Organization declared it officially, on March 11, 2020.

In the statement, the WHO warned that “Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death.”

And indeed it created suffering and death, as well as enormous damage to the global economy. Some saw this as the de facto end of Globalization, a process started decades ago, and — according to this theory —

ended in a few months. In my opinion, though, I see it more as a transition from physical to digital, perhaps a sudden one, but if we had more non-pandemic years, it might have eventually happened.

Think for example of remote working. Does an accountant really need to commute to work every day? How about a graphic designer? And a lawyer? Indeed human connection is a large chunk of the work experience, but again, is that pivotal or accessory?

In Pareto's principle, meeting in person belongs to the 80 per cent that produces 20 per cent or to the 20 per cent that produces the 80 per cent? It is entirely up to debate.



Stefano Virgilli
stefano@virgilli.com

THEN THE ENTIRE EQUATION CHANGES. WORKING MORE FROM HOME MEANS THAT OUR HOUSES AND FLATS NEED TO BE DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE NEW TASKS AND NEW COMFORT

I am sure that there are jobs where a person stepping into the physical meeting changes the outcome drastically, but it is also true that for the majority of the white-collar jobs, a lot their duties can be performed from home.

This opened up a whole can of worms that suddenly hit some industries and transformed into profits for others. A clear example is real estate. Is it still worth investing in commercial/office buildings?

Looking at the tremendous amount of growth in online sales and the abrupt introduction of “work from home”, sounds like a bad idea to continue investing in such a segment of real estate. Property owners all over the

world are struggling to collect rent, for residential indeed, but more often than not those that are hurt badly are the commercial owners.

Then the entire equation changes. Working more from home means that our houses and flats need to be designed to accommodate new tasks and new comfort. I experienced it myself when I bought a new office chair for my computer desk at home. It is the first time in my life that I spend more than \$200 on a computer chair at home... In the past, I spent such an amount only when making my office more comfortable, but now, my home is my office.

Another sector that has benefitted is DIY. With more

time spent at home, things tend to break more easily than before, and with more time on hand — and perhaps less disposable income — we rather fix it ourselves than hiring a third party to do so.

A controversial industry that has been impacted is Food & Beverage. While truly physical restaurants have suffered a sudden drop in sales, it is also fair to point out that others have turned their kitchens into a food delivery business. While saving on the cost of waiting the tables, and perhaps downsizing on rentals, they managed to stay into profits thanks to takeaways.

[The columnist is a member of *The International Press Association*]



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Services and industrial sectors buoy MSM Index

MSM30 ended the week marginally higher by 0.01 per cent. Financial Index was down 0.40 per cent while Industrial and Service Index rose by 0.85 per cent and 1.52 per cent, respectively. Shariah Index was down by 0.14 per cent.

Gulf Investment Services (GIS) and Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) are discussing a potential merger.

The transaction is subject to the outcome of the due diligence, approval of both company shareholders and obtaining other regulatory approvals. GIS' equity post capital reduction and usage of legal reserve will be RO 6.66 million while OIFC (Parent) equity stands at RO 34.8 million as of June 2020.

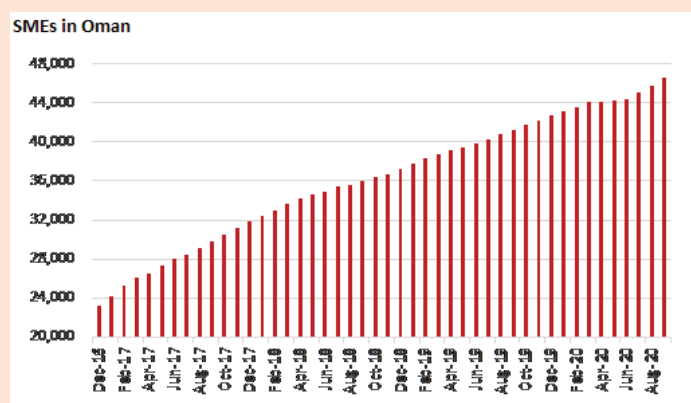
National Bank of Oman (NBO) decided that it will not exercise its option to call the \$300 million perpetual Tier 1 capital securities.

The Bank issued the capital securities in November 2015, with a 7.875 per cent per annum coupon and first call date on 18 November 2020.

The decision was taken considering market conditions, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as economic consideration in order to manage the bank's cost of capital.

The Directorate General of Customs (Royal Oman Police) announced last week that it has begun imposing anti-dumping duties on certain types of ceramic and porcelain tiles imported from China and India.

A statement issued by Director-General of Customs said, “The DGC announced that it has started imposing anti-dumping duties as of October 20, 2020 to June 5, 2025 on products such as ceramic and porcelain tiles



from China and India against the products included in the mentioned list.”

Gross Written Premiums of the insurance sector in Oman recorded RO 111.2 million in the third quarter of 2020 which decreased by (2 per cent) compared to the same quarter of 2019 when it was recorded RO 113.4 million.

The results showed that the direct premiums for property insurance increased by (0.4 per cent), the life insurance (group) increased by (3 per cent), the engineering insurance increased by (84 per cent), liability increased by (17 per cent) and other types of insurance increased by (48 per cent).

On the other hand, the insurance premiums of other classes decreased, such as marine insurance decreased by (34 per cent), the motor insurance decreased (third party) by (9 per cent) and motor insurance (comprehensive) decreased by (13 per cent), health decreased by (11 per cent), and life (individual) insurance premiums decreased by (12 per cent).

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of September 2020 reached 46,577, which is an increase by 13 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 33 per cent SMEs registered till September 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with

16 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah with 13 per cent, Dhofar with 8 per cent, and the rest of governorates with 30 per cent. The Governorate of Muscat had 15,591 SMEs registered at the end of September 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 7357, Al Dakhiliyah with 5896, Dhofar with 3882, South Al Batinah with 3477 and North Al Sharqiyah with 3142 SMEs registered. This was followed by Al Dhahirah with 2740 SMEs, South Al Sharqiyah with 2718 SMEs and Al Buraimi with 996 registered SMEs.

Sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation fell by 1.22 per cent in September 2020 compared to the same month of 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on the consumer price index.

The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages witnessed a rise of 0.40 per cent; health by 0.29 per cent; education by 2.21 per cent and restaurants and hotels by 0.27 per cent.

The prices of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels fell by 0.42 per cent; communication by 0.02 per cent; miscellaneous goods and services by 1.14 per cent; and furnishings, household equipment & routine household maintenance by 0.31 per cent in September 2020 compared to the same month of 2019.

(Courtesy:U-Capital)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

MoCIIP reduces patent registration fee to RO 200

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 31

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has stressed that those who want to register their patents with the Intellectual Property Department must follow the prescribed procedures.

This includes, filling application forms whether in Arabic and English providing a full description and a brief description of the invention in both languages, mentioning the elements of protection, providing drawings if any, and paying application fees RO 200 for individuals or companies. After that, they will get a receipt which will have application number and date.

This is followed by a formal test and then the form will be accepted, and the decision will be issued.

The substantive examination of the application will be conducted 18 months after the application is filed, for which fees will be paid within 26 days of filing the application.

The technical acceptance will be published after payment of fees and waiting for 120



The ministry urges innovators and small and medium enterprises to benefit from the reduction in patent fees

days for any opposition or objection. The acceptance will be published, and certificate will be issued, if there is no objection, after 120 days of the publishing of the acceptance.

The ministry urges innovators and small and medium enterprises to benefit from the reduction in patent fees.

The decision to reduce the fees was taken by the ministry to motivate and encourage this category of inventors and entrepreneurial business projects are in the products and

services in the market.

They should also focus on the protection of these innovations to ensure that they get financial returns for these innovations. They should come out with innovations which meet the requirements of the market or technical trade.

Ministerial Decision 206/2018 cuts patent service fees for industrial property rights for students of schools, colleges and universities and researchers in research centres by 90 per cent and small enterprises by 50 per cent.

This reflected positively and stimulated the targeted segments leading to an increase in the number of applications submitted by this segment.

MENA Energy Meet to kick off on November 2

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 31

MENA Energy Meet, a virtual expo and summit, will take place during November 2 – 3, 2020 under the auspices of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The marathon summit will run for 48 hours starting from November 2, 2020 (Gulf Standard Time - 10:00hrs or GMT+4) to cater to a global audience across multiple time zones.

The centrepiece is 'EXPOrience the Future' — a virtual event modelled on in-person shows with many of the physical features transferring across to the digital experience. “All you need is a desktop or laptop and you can digitally attend from the safety and comfort of your office or home. No app downloads are required,” said organisers White Paper Summits in



a press statement.

There are over 30 booths at the exhibition showcasing the latest products and services. At the Exhibition Booth, online visitors can chat and meet face-to-face via video/audio chat with sales representatives present at the booths.

The Conference Auditorium will feature a stellar line-up of over 65 speakers, presentations, case studies and panel discussions providing access to a wealth of industry-leading knowledge, information exchange, cutting-edge insights and outlooks with actionable takeaways. The speaker presentations are all recorded, allowing members of the online

audience to tune in to them at their convenience.

“The event is unrivalled in its scope, offering participants and attendees a definite platform encompassing a diversified energy mix and all facets of the energy industry across oil & gas (upstream, midstream and downstream) renewables, hydrogen, power, utilities and more. There is a Networking Lounge which will allow attendees to interact with the other visitors who are attending the event,” said White Paper Summits.

MENA Energy Meet is the ideal virtual meeting place for global and regional energy stakeholders, C-level executives, leading industry experts, decisionmakers, policymakers and government officials from across the value chain to engage in dialogue, discuss current challenges and business opportunities.



Alibaba's Lazada suffers data hack

Singapore e-commerce firm Lazada said that personal information including addresses and partial credit card numbers from 1.1 million accounts had been hacked. — **Reuters**



Inspire to buy Dunkin for \$8.76 bn

Inspire Brands Inc will buy Dunkin' Brands Group Inc for \$8.76 billion, bringing chains like Arby's and Dunkin' Donuts under the same umbrella. — **Reuters**



Apple to pay \$503m in patent case

A jury in Texas on Friday decided that Apple should pay \$503 million for infringing virtual private network technology patented by software security firm VirnetX. — **AFP**

New Boeing jet unlikely but depends on MAX return



A Boeing 737 MAX 7 is pictured in Renton, Washington. — **Reuters**

PARIS: Boeing is unlikely to launch a new plane in the near future but its options will depend in part on how successfully its grounded 737 MAX regains its position in the market, the head of one of its engine suppliers said.

The MAX is expected to win safety approval within weeks following a 19-month grounding in the wake of two crashes, Safran Chief Executive Philippe Petitcolin said.

"We are doing everything with Boeing to put the MAX back in service in the best possible conditions", he told reporters.

Boeing suppliers and leasing companies have pushed back against the idea of replacing it despite mounting cancellations.

But Boeing is expected to try to capture eye-catching orders to recover some of the share lost to Airbus, especially the increasingly dominant A321neo.

If airlines stop buying the MAX or fail to reabsorb it into their fleets, there has been speculation Boeing could obliquely begin the process of replacing it by first developing a replacement for the out-of-production 757. — **Reuters**

China's factory activity growth slows slightly but remains strong

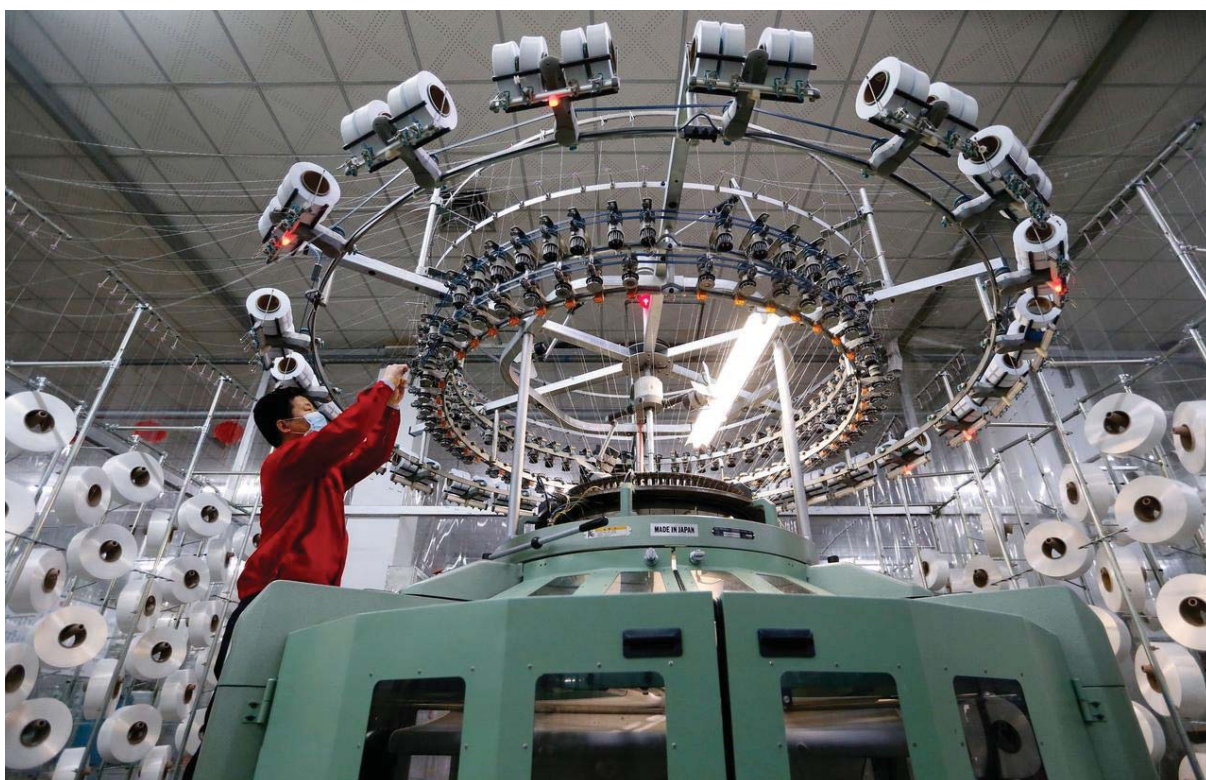
China's vast industrial sector is steadily returning to the levels seen before the pandemic paralysed huge swathes of the economy

BEIJING: China's factory activity expanded at a slightly slower pace in October but was slightly above analysts' expectations, suggesting a continuing economic recovery as the country rebounds from the coronavirus shock.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) fell to 51.4 in October from 51.5 in September, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Saturday, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

Analysts had expected it to slip slightly to 51.3 but said a broader recovery still appeared to be solidly on track.

The data, particularly new export orders, indicates October's trade figures should stay strong, Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said in a note. However, the epidemic's



A textile worker is seen on a fabric production line at a factory in Qingdao, Shandong province, China. — **Reuters**

spread overseas could increase uncertainties for China's exports over the next few months, said Zhou.

China's vast industrial sector is steadily returning to the levels seen before the pandemic paralysed huge swathes of the economy.

Pent-up demand, stimulus-driven infrastructure expansion and surprisingly resilient exports

are propelling the rebound, though the global outlook is dimming as many Western countries battle renewed surges in the virus that causes COVID-19, with some going back into virus lockdowns.

The official PMI, which largely focuses on big and state-owned firms, showed overall new orders remained steady at 52.8, while

new export orders rose to 51.0, improving from 50.8 a month earlier.

But smaller firms continued to struggle. A sub-index for those companies stood at 49.4 in October, slipping back into contraction from September's 50.1.

Companies also shed jobs for a sixth month in a row, and

at a faster pace. A sub-index for employment fell to 49.3 from September's 49.6.

"The manufacturing industry overall continues to pick up", said NBS official Zhao Qinghe, while noting that small companies face weak market demand.

Some companies reported that the resurgence of the epidemic overseas had lengthened procurement periods for imports of raw materials and increased transport costs, Zhao said in a statement released with the data.

China's economy grew a weaker-than-expected 4.9 per cent in the third quarter year-on-year. It is expected to expand around 2 per cent for the full year — the weakest in over three decades but still much stronger than other major economies.

The pandemic has been largely controlled in China, with daily life in much of the country returning to normal, although an outbreak emerged recently in the western region of Xinjiang.

A sister survey on the services sector showed activity expanded for the eighth straight month, hitting the highest level since October 2013, as the removal of restrictions on public gatherings and movement bolstered consumer demand. — **Reuters**

Russian rouble seen recovering in 2021

MOSCOW: The Russian rouble is expected to strengthen next year while the economy will return to growth following a contraction in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and low oil prices.

Analysts and economists suggested the rouble will trade at 70.30 against the dollar and 83.30 versus the euro 12 months from now.

The rouble lost more than 20 per cent of its value against the greenback in 2020, hammered by a drop in prices for oil, Russia's key export, and an increased sanction risk.

In early 2020, before the economic crisis sparked by the coronavirus and a crash in oil prices, the rouble had traded at around 62 against the dollar and 70 per euro. — **Reuters**

Reliance profit slides as crisis slams oil business

BENGALURU: Reliance Industries Ltd posted a 15 per cent drop in September-quarter profit on Friday as the coronavirus crisis hammered its oil business, although the Indian conglomerate reaped double-digit revenue growth at its Jio telecom service.

Reliance, led by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, has in recent years built massive retail and telecom businesses to tap into India's consumer boom and reduce its dependence on the energy sector.

Reliance, which operates the world's biggest refining complex,



A man walks past Reliance logo at a construction site in New Delhi. — **Reuters**

said consolidated profit slipped to 95.67 billion rupees (\$1.29

billion) in the three months to September 30, although it came

in comfortably above analysts' average estimate of 85.48 billion rupees, Refinitiv data showed.

Still, its energy business was hurt by a collapse in global oil demand as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts travel and business. Sales of refined products such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel have been hit, although demand within India has been picking up.

"Domestic demand has sharply recovered across our (oil-to-chemicals) business and is now near pre-Covid level for most products", Reliance Chairman Ambani said. — **Reuters**

■ COST-SLASHING

Chevron, Exxon cut spending as coronavirus hits demand

NEW YORK: US oil majors Chevron Corp and Exxon Mobil Corp cut spending aggressively in the third quarter in a race to offset weak trends in fuel demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, though the former managed a slim profit.

Exxon posted its third straight quarter of losses on Friday and reduced spending plans for the coming year.

In common with others in the sector, the two are laying off a substantial portion of their workforce and expect to cut costs



A view of the Exxon Mobil refinery is pictured in Baytown, Texas. — **Reuters**

The outlook for energy consumption "depends on when the world — this country and other countries — get control of the pandemic and those activities resume"

PIERRE BREBER
Chevron Chief Financial Officer

further as they try to reverse years of weak stock performance, worsened by the impact of movement restrictions.

US oil prices have dropped 41 per cent this year as the coronavirus forced billions of people into lockdowns. Demand recovered but nations including Germany, India and the United States are again tackling a surge in infections, dampening demand for gasoline, diesel and jet fuel.

The outlook for energy consumption "depends on when the world — this country and

other countries — get control of the pandemic and those activities resume. We don't know when that's going to be", said Chevron Chief Financial Officer Pierre Breber.

Exxon shares were down 1 per cent to \$32.62 on Friday. Chevron shares gained 1 per cent to \$69.50. Exxon shares have lost half of their value this year; Chevron's are down 40 per cent.

Chevron earned \$201 million in the most recent quarter, compared with a profit of \$2.9 billion for the year-earlier period. — **Reuters**

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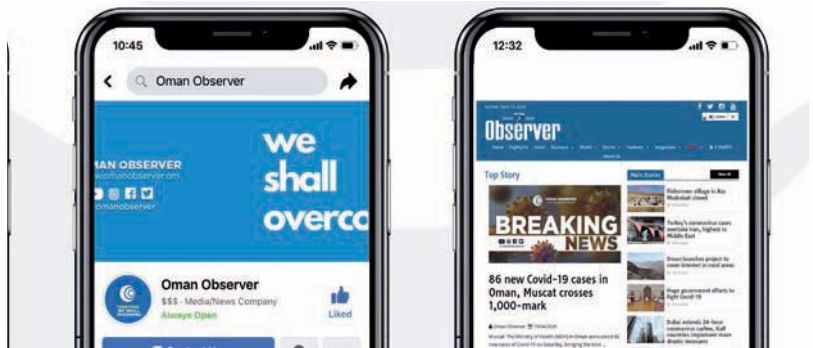
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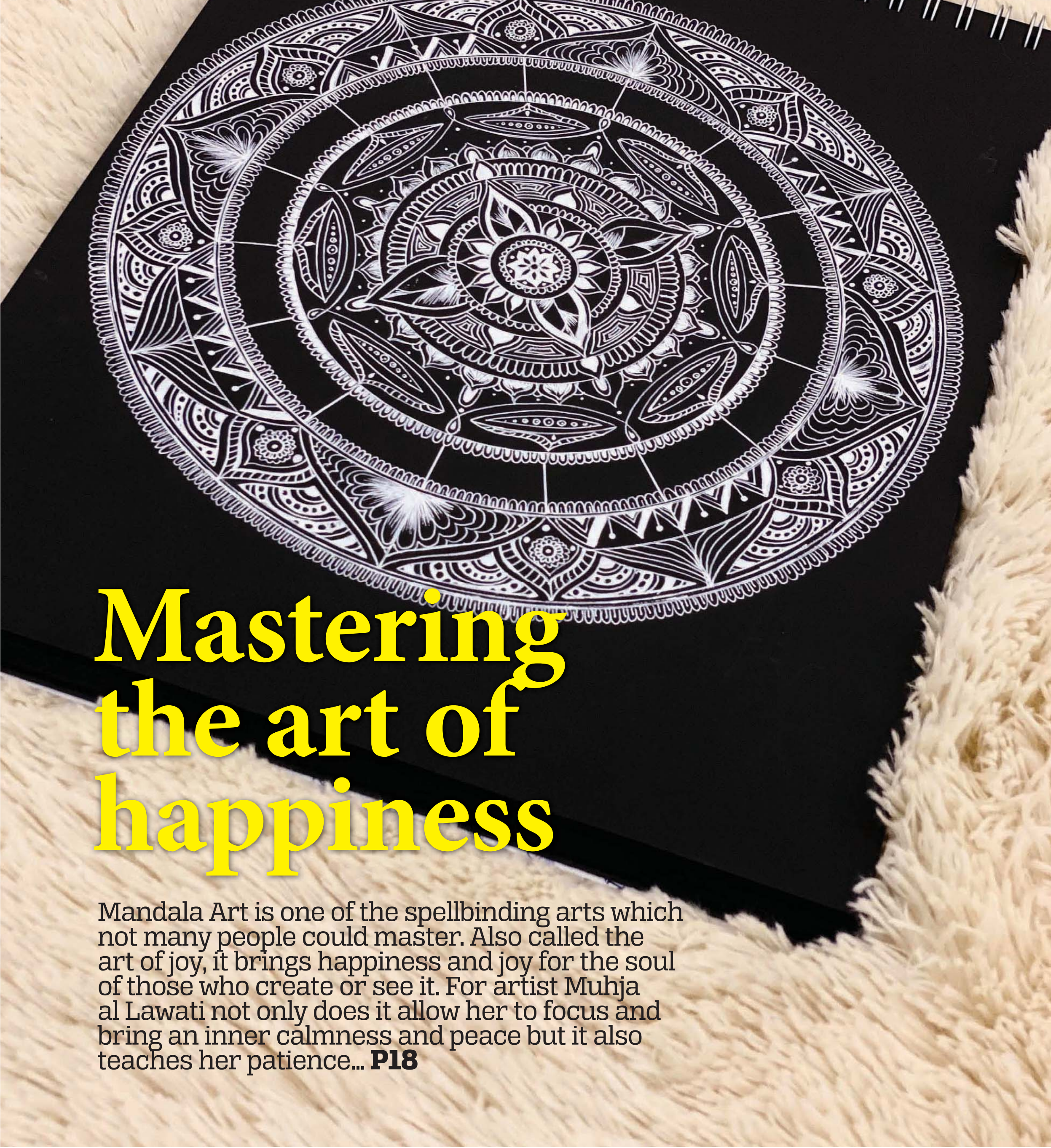
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Mastering the art of happiness

Mandala Art is one of the spellbinding arts which not many people could master. Also called the art of joy, it brings happiness and joy for the soul of those who create or see it. For artist Muhja al Lawati not only does it allow her to focus and bring an inner calmness and peace but it also teaches her patience... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

TRAVEL



WARMTH, HOSPITALITY, AND CHARM WILL KEEP BRINGING PEOPLE BACK TO OMAN

As the chief operating officer of Marriott International in the Middle East, Guido de Wilde has seen first hand the massive impact COVID-19 has in the tourism and hospitality industries... **Story on Page P20**

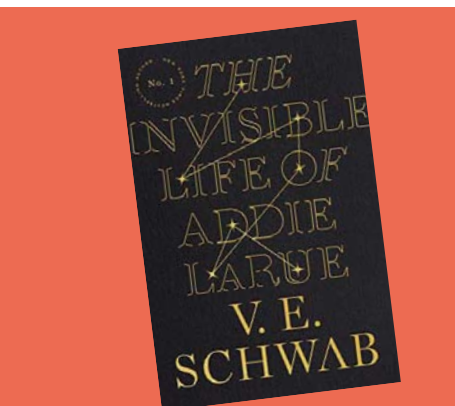
COOK LIKE A CHEF



BONIATO ZANAHORIA AL PLOMO WITH SALSA CRIOLLA

Chef Guido Ojeda, the head chef of Char is sharing this delicious recipe, something to surprise some friends over when they come for dinner... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE

BY V E SCHWAB

A Faustian bargain comes with a curse that affects the adventure Addie LaRue has across centuries.

ENTERTAINMENT



MONIKA LAKATOS, VOICE OF HUNGARY'S OLAH ROMANI

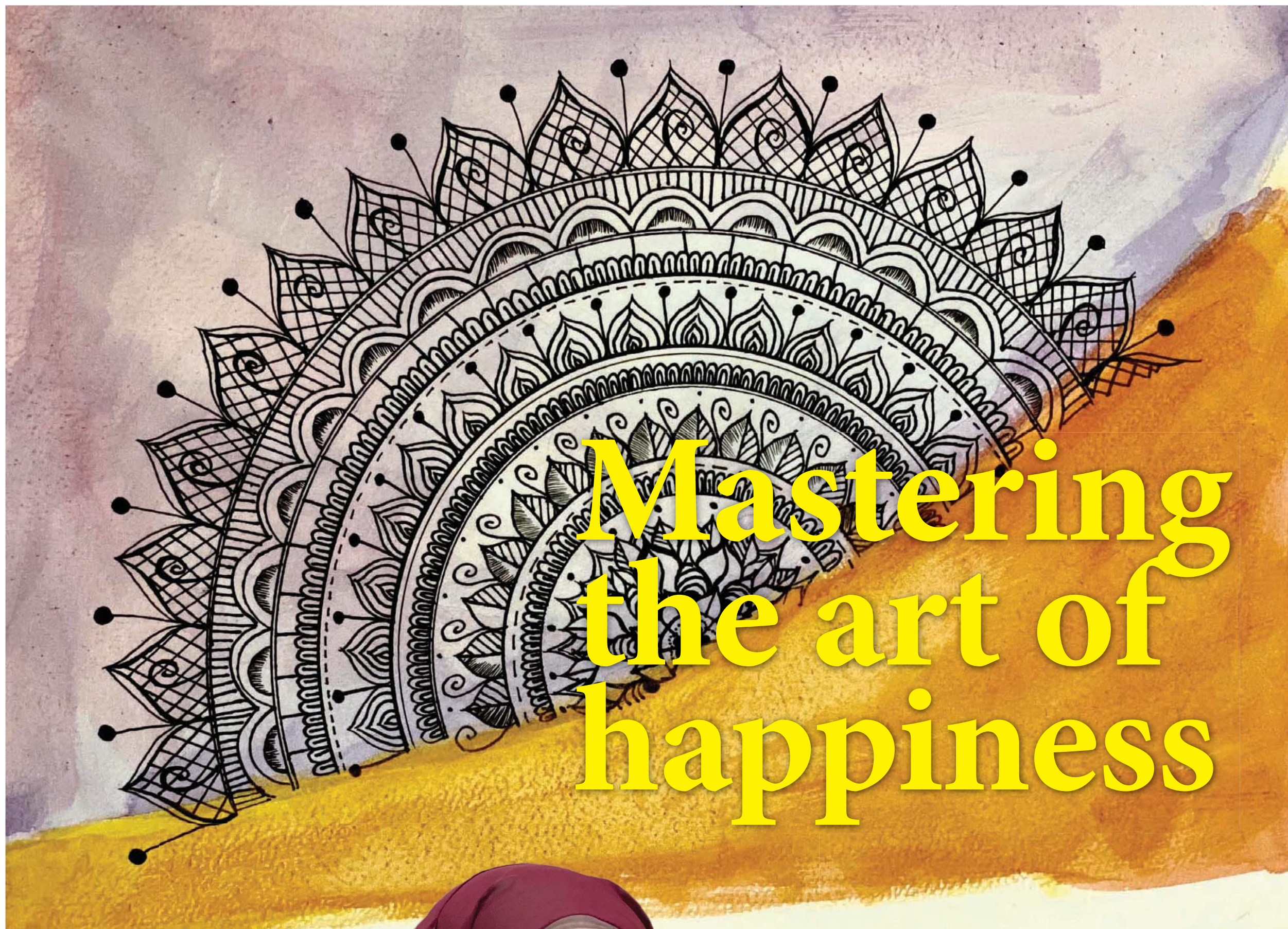
Monika Lakatos, a celebrated singer of "Olah Gypsy" music from Hungary, has become the first Romani artist to receive the prestigious World music Expo (WOMEX) lifetime achievement award... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



WORLD VEGAN DAY

Vegan Day is celebrated every November 1 to promote the benefits of a vegan diet. While everyone is quite aware of the word, some do not fully understand the difference between veganism and vegetarianism. To celebrate Vegan Day, check out your local vegan groups and learn the concept and how you can use it for your daily life.



Mastering the art of happiness

BY ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

Art brings a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory or performing, expressing the author's imaginative, conceptual thoughts or technical skills. All these forms of arts are intended to be appreciated mainly for their beauty or emotional power. Artists narrate different stories of creativity out of their various talents. In other words, every artist describes a diverse story of art in a distinct form and with a different tool, expressing certain emotions or thoughts.

Therefore, artists' distinct inspiration is always reflected in what their magical hands portray and craft. They are inspired by nature while some are provoked by their emotions and thoughts. Else, counterpart artists or different schools of art could inspire other artists too. Inspiration is around every

word that means "circle". Mandalas generally have one recognisable centre point, from which comes a group of symbols, shapes and forms.

This art is represented in drawing a circle in which repeated circles intertwined with one another, forming different geometric patterns. The more the artist focuses on the circle, the more s/he reaches a deep inner focus and calmness, so that you feel a strong connection between the artist and the circle, attracting eyes, hearts, thoughts and focus eventually. Mandala Art is called the art of joy as it brings happiness and joy for the soul. Mandala artworks have become a popular symbol of meditation, which aids in enhancing focus, silencing thoughts while meditating, combatting stress and anxiety, appreciating the beauty of nature, and forming a greater connection with oneself. Only artists who are gifted with sharp fingers, patience and creative minds could get a perfect piece of Mandala as it should look like. One of those Omani Mandala-specialised artists is Muhja al Lawati. She started marking her footpath with art since her early days of childhood. It started out of a fun-making interest and not as a real hobby and talent, which has been discovered afterward.

Commenting on her talent, Muhja al Lawati said: "Art and the passion of drawing have grown up with me since years ago where I could discover my talent through the different scribbles of lines I used to draw. I was enjoying my free time with those scribbles, but I did not realise that I was a talented artist in the making!"

"My mysterious journey with art kicked off with my fingers drawing black geometrical shapes, writing and colouring names, and then learned the art of Graffiti. In 2016, the journey went on another path that was directed towards drawing different geometric patterns and repeated lines. Perhaps that was the start of developing the direction of a unique talent. At the beginning, it was not clear to me that this particular type of drawings is known as Mandala Art. Hence, with the persistence of practicing it and learning more about this art, I recognised that that was just the beginning of a promising journey with art, she explained.

Pointing out on her personal experience with Mandala, Muhja stated, "Through my personal experience of practicing this marvelous Mandala Art, I discovered that it helped me focus more and enjoy my inner calmness and relax, but notably it taught my patience. As a matter of fact, Mandala is a very beautiful art whose patterns could be used in different designs and decorations".

Muhja urges artists and other art enthusiasts to challenge themselves and test their skills and ability with art.

"All you need to try out this art is just a white paper and a pen of any colour you like and a caliper to turn that paper into an artistic painting that mesmerises the eyes and inspires the minds when looked at. Everyone can try this Mandala Art, so they could discover their skills and enjoy a relaxing inner peace", she commented.

As Mandala is known as the art of happiness, Muhja al Lawati expressed "Drawing a piece of Mandala always makes my day and puts me on cloud nine. This art brings not only happiness to its practitioners and enthusiasts, but it builds self-confidence and pride too".

All you need to try out this art is just a white paper and a pen of any colour you like and a caliper to turn that paper into an artistic painting that mesmerises the eyes and inspires the minds when looked at. Everyone can try this Mandala Art, so they could discover their skills and enjoy a relaxing inner peace

MUHJA AL LAWATI
Mandala Artist

corner; it's only people who should catch it and get inspired.

Mandala Art is one of the spellbinding arts, which not many people could master. Mandala is a complex abstract design, which is usually circular in form. In fact, "mandala" is a Sanskrit





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BONIATO ZANAHORIA AL PLOMO with SALSA CRIOLLA

(Sweet Potato with Creole Salsa of Chickpeas and Feta)



INGREDIENTS:



SERVES 2 PEOPLE

- 2 large sweet potatoes
- 1 red onion, diced
- 1 red capsicum, diced
- 1 green capsicum, diced
- 1cup cooked chickpeas
- 100gr feta cheese
- 2tbsp olive oil
- 2tbsp vinegar
- Coriander leaves
- Salt and pepper to taste

ENJOY DINING IN

W Muscat has some of Oman's best places for dining and offers the most sumptuous of food available in this part of the world. The chefs of W Muscat will be taking centre stage in the next two weeks offering some of the hotel's best creations. As a bonus, this month has seen the launching of Ba Ban, the newest addition to its fine restaurants that offer the spirit of 1920s and 30s Shanghai and life around the Bund, a by-gone era of entertainment and charm. Reservations are mandatory at Ba Ban which is open for lunch Tuesdays – Saturdays from 12 PM – 4:30 PM. Chef Guido Ojeda, the head chef of Char is sharing this family secret, also a favourite of popular soccer player Lionel Messi and something to impress your family with.

PREPARATION METHOD

Preheat oven to 180° Celsius
Wrap the sweet potatoes in aluminium foil and cook in the oven for one hour. Potatoes should be completely soft to touch when ready. Set aside and allow potatoes to rest for 20 minutes.
In a bowl, mix diced vegetables with olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Add the cooked chickpeas and mix.
Remove the sweet potatoes from the aluminum foil and cut at half. Place on serving plates and top with the salsa. Sprinkle feta cheese and coriander leaves on top and season to taste.



ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF GUIDO OJEDA

Executive Chef
Head Chef, CHAR
W Muscat Hotel

Guido joined W Muscat in 2019, becoming the Head Chef of signature grill-house, CHAR – a perfect fit for the Argentinian meat-lover. He brought with him over a decade of experience from kitchens across the world, most recently holding the position of Executive Chef at The Grand Hotel in Uruguay.
In his years working with private dining establishments, 5-star hotels and events catering companies, Guido has successfully managed fully-operational kitchens catering to hundreds of guests, bringing his fiery South American touch and love for celebrating life with good food.
After beginning his cooking journey with an Artisanal Baking course at the Argentinian Institute of Gastronomy, Guido went on to receive qualifications in Professional Pastry and Professional Gastronomy before undertaking specialised courses in Italian Gastronomy and French Cuisine.
True to his beloved Argentina, when he's not serving up flame-grilled treats at CHAR, you can find him immersed in all things football and recreating his grandmother's famous home recipes.

CHEF TIP

Serve this as a meat-free main course or as a side dish to go along with grilled meats.
Barbeque the sweet potato over charcoal, instead of in the oven, for an amazing smoky flavor.



ENTERTAINMENT

Monika Lakatos, voice of Hungary's Olah Romani



MONIKA LAKATOS, a celebrated singer of "Olah Gypsy" music from Hungary, has become the first Romani artist to receive the prestigious World music Expo (WOMEX) lifetime achievement award.
Soft-spoken but with a passionate singing voice, the 42-year-old hails from the tiny Olah Gypsy community, a branch of the Romani ethnic minority, Hungary's largest at around seven per cent of its population of 9.8 million.
"I am proud to win it as both a Gypsy and a Hungarian," the diminutive dark-haired singer, said on Saturday before she received the award at a WOMEX gala concert in Budapest.
Previous winners include Senegalese performer Cheikh Lo and Portuguese "fado" legend Mariza. The award was "timely" given the contribution of Romani artists to the world's musical culture, WOMEX jury member Balazs Weyer said.
Lakatos was recognised for her "outstanding artistry, as well as her social impact and personal dedication to keeping alive the Olah Gypsy tradition," Weyer said.
"Her pure voice has such an immediate effect, you can see the change in the eyes of people listening," he said. The distinctive Olah singing style emphasises tone and spontaneity, with a repertoire of lyrical "listening" songs and danceable "whirling" ones. Unlike more widely known strings-based Hungarian Gypsy music, the Olah version uses traditional percussive instruments like water urns, wooden tubs and spoons, as well as a beatbox-like sound called "vocal-bassing".
"The Olah style is the soul of Gypsy music, it's a living culture, life weaves the songs together," Lakatos said.

DECLARING LOVE
THROUGH SONG
Olah Gypsies migrated from

neighbouring Romania in the 19th century and now number only around 30,000 people. Most live in rural northeast Hungary near Nagycséd, a village 250 kilometres (155 miles) east of Budapest.
Traditionally horse traders and travelling salesmen, many Olah Gypsies now struggle with deep poverty.
Within its male-dominated community, Lakatos, born in Budapest but with roots in Nagycséd, says its members respect traditions like not holding hands or declaring love in public.
"We do that through song and dance instead," she said.
After learning traditional Olah Gypsy music with cousins and friends as a child, Lakatos won a national TV talent show in 1996 aged 17.
Now she fronts acclaimed ensemble Romengo and performs in a duo with her musician husband Mazsi Rostas.
A mother-of-one, her daughter also occasionally sings in another of her groups "Gypsy Voices", which promotes young, mainly female, Olah singing talents.
"It's important that this musical culture is passed on at home, in case later generations are only able to learn about it from books," she said.
Lakatos also celebrates what she calls her "dual identity as a Hungarian Gypsy".
The Romani, often on the receiving end of discrimination, face widespread exclusion from mainstream Hungarian society.
But "our common language of music is a link bringing people together," she said, adding that festival-goers in Hungary often tell her after concerts that they didn't know about Olah Gypsy music until seeing her.
"If people don't know a culture then maybe they can be afraid or suspicious of it," she noted.—AFP



Warmth, hospitality, and charm will keep bringing people back to Oman

BY YERU EBUE

As the chief operating officer of Marriott International in the Middle East, Guido de Wilde has seen first hand the massive impact COVID-19 has in the tourism and hospitality industries.

"COVID-19 is an unexpected mega-disruptor and has had a significant impact on the travel and hospitality sector around the globe. It has not only had a significant effect on our business but also on how we operate our hotels. It has required us to raise our exacting standards to an even higher level with new protocols for the current circumstances," he revealed in an exclusive email interview with *Oman Daily Observer*.

Next to oil, the hospitality and tourism industries perform major roles in uplifting the Sultanate's GDP. In fact, major efforts had been made to improve these industries and around a dozen more hotels are expected to rise in the country in the next five years — a clear testament as to how serious not only the government but the private sector is in growing the sector.

Operating four of the country's luxury hotels that include Al Bustan Palace, JW Marriott, Sheraton Hotel, and W Muscat, the hospitality sector has to contend with the impact of COVID-19 to society and how it has significantly altered consumer behaviour as well as how businesses are run in general.

Oman Daily Observer asked De Wilde five questions regarding Oman's condition as a travel destination amongst other high level insight into the ongoing efforts to revitalise the industry.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT OMAN AS A DESTINATION DURING THE PANDEMIC? ONCE THE BORDERS ARE OPEN, WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL DRIVE THE TRAVELLERS BACK TO THE SULTANATE?

Oman has done an incredible job in safeguarding its citizens and residents during this global pandemic and government has put into place detailed guidelines for businesses such as ours to

operate ensuring the safety of our guests and associates. We know and find comfort in the fact that Oman will always be prepared for such crisis situations and challenging times.

Oman has for centuries delighted visitors with its dazzling souqs, stunning nature and culture. Above all, it's warm and welcoming hospitality and mesmerising charm has and will continue to attract travellers from across the globe.

SHOULD PEOPLE IN OMAN EXPECT MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WAY HOTELS (PARTICULARLY MARRIOTT HOTELS) ARE RUN IN THE COUNTRY?

Covid has shifted travellers' expectations and has fundamentally changed human attitudes and behaviours. For an industry that thrives on empathy and human connection the impact of social distancing measures on the hospitality sector is significant — for both the hoteliers and the guests.

Interaction and involvement are key elements of the travel experience and of the hotel stay in particular. While we observe social distancing and are using technology for some elements of the hotel experience such as for check-in, we must also be able to continue to guarantee a personalised experience for our guests.

We hope that social distancing measures will be able to reduce in time as the impact of the virus decreases or a vaccine is found. However, cleaning and hygiene will continue to be a priority for us.

Our new cleanliness practices and protocols will be immediately evident to the guest. They will see increased cleanings in our hotel public spaces, with particular attention paid to high-touch items, and each hotel will have information available on the specific cleaning practices used in guest rooms between each guest.

We encourage guests to use touchless options across our properties such as the Marriott Bonvoy mobile app which has several functions guests can use to reduce personal interactions at check-in and throughout their stay. With the app, guests can check-in/check-out, unlock their door (in certain locations), proactively chat with hotel associates, request common items via a pick list, and place



Oman has for centuries delighted visitors with its dazzling souqs, stunning nature and culture. Above all, it's warm and welcoming hospitality and mesmerising charm has and will continue to attract travellers from across the globe.

GUIDO DE WILDE

COO, Middle East Marriott International

el again, when the time is right for them, through creative sales, marketing and loyalty campaigns. Our team have been working hard to drive 'Staycations', offering special rates, food and beverage offers and promoting our hotels to domestic travellers — and it's worked well.

We know health and safety is on their minds which is why we have elevated our measures across our properties. We are grateful for the trust our guests have shown us through the years and we want them to know that whenever they walk through the doors of one of our hotels, their health and safety is our priority.

In addition, in order to continue giving our guests flexibility as they plan and book travel, we have introduced flexible cancellation policies and have been updating these as the travel restrictions and the impact of COVID-19 has spread.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST TAKEAWAY OR LESSON FOR YOU AS A COO? HOW DID THIS IMPACT YOUR OUTLOOK AND ARE THERE BEST PRACTICES USED DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT WILL BE CARRIED OVER TO A POST-COVID-19 ERA?

What we as an industry have experienced this pandemic is like nothing we've ever seen before. We have taken on-board learnings from the current pandemic and will use them as we adapt whatever the future holds.

This 'new normal' will evolve and change to reflect government guidance and new societal expectations. What will never change is our commitment to keep a clean and hygienic environment for associates, guests and customers. We are living in a new age, and we want our associates and guests to clearly understand and embrace the changes we are making.

WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

We remain confident in the long-term prospects of the industry. For now, we are taking a careful approach to recovery, with a laser sharp focus on cleanliness; while rebuilding our business so we can continue to provide employment, service our communities and welcome our guests back.

food and beverage orders (in certain locations).

Guests can expect the same excellent standard of service from our hotels delivered by our highly trained and engaged associates in Oman.

THE TRAVEL, HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTOR HAD TO SHIFT FOCUS ON LOCAL TRAVELLERS. WHAT IS AN IDEAL STAYCATION SCENARIO FOR YOU?

We are beginning to see an inherent desire in local residents to get out and explore which has led to an increased demand for dining and staycations across our hotel portfolio in Oman. Many want that short escape for some relaxation and down time.

We have been and will continue to be focused on inspiring people to trav-