

HM REVIEWS RELATIONS WITH BAHRAIN’S PM

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday reviewed bilateral relations and existing cooperation between the Sultanate and the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain during a telephonic conversation with Bahrain’s Prime Minister Khalifa bin



Salman al Khalifa. The Bahraini premier expressed his heartfelt wishes of good health and happiness to His Majesty the Sultan. He wished Omani people further progress and prosperity under His Majesty’s wise leadership. His Majesty Sultan

Haitham reciprocated the gesture, wishing the Bahraini Premier good health and happiness. He also wished the people of Bahrain further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa, King of Bahrain. — ONA



Native American stone tool technology found in Oman

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Ancient tools dating back to 8,000 years have been reportedly unearthed in Oman and Yemen by a group of archaeologists. The stone tools, discovered in Ad Dahariz in Oman and Manayzah in Yemen, have familiar flute-like grooves textured on the sides of the stone points, reveals a study published by *PLOS One* journal. The new study states that until the early 2000s, these fluted points were unknown elsewhere on the planet, with the first isolated examples of these objects now being found in Yemen and, more recently, Oman.

TURN TO P2

IT IS BETTER TO POINT THE DEVICE AT WRIST OR ELBOW FOLD

THERMOMETERS AT FOREHEAD OR WRIST?

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Thermometers being pointed at the forehead as one enters a shopping mall or any premises to measure the body temperature these days is not safe in the long run, according to health experts. Some research conducted on these devices have shown the risk of directing infrared rays to the forehead over a period of time. Instead, infrared thermometers can be used at the wrist or elbow, to measure the body

temperature. “Infrared thermometers shouldn’t be pointed at the forehead to measure the temperature. Instead, the device can be pointed out at the wrist or elbow fold to measure the body temperature for much more accurate results, and which is much less harmful,” a statement issued by the SQU Hospital (SQUH) has said. “There are basically two types of thermometers,” Dr Renchi Mathew, Consultant Physician, Royal Oman Police.

TURN TO P2

Lebanon government resigns amid outrage

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s prime minister announced his government’s resignation on Monday, saying a huge explosion that devastated the capital and stirred public outrage was the result of endemic corruption. The August 4 detonation at a port warehouse of more than 2,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate killed at least 163 people, injured more than 6,000 and destroyed swathes of the Mediterranean capital, compounding months of political and economic meltdown. In a televised address, Prime Minister Hassan Diab said he backed calls by ordinary Lebanese for those responsible for “this crime” to be put on trial. Diab made the announcement after the cabinet, formed in January with the backing of Hezbollah group and its allies, met on Monday, with many ministers wanting to resign, according to ministerial and political sources. **SEE ALSO P7**

OMAN

Native American stone tool technology found in Oman

FROM PAGE 1

“We recognised this technique, most probably as the most famous of the prehistoric techniques used in the American continent,” said lead researcher Remy Crassard, head of archaeology at the French Centre for Archaeology and Social Sciences.

PLOS One is a peer-reviewed open access scientific journal published by the Public Library of Science.

Fluted tools are an advanced form of projectile points, typically spear heads and arrowheads.

The manufacturing technique involves chipping an elongated flake along the length of the projectile point, leaving a distinctive groove at the base of the tool.

“This work involves excavations from 2004 and 2005 in Yemen and from surveys in Oman in the early 2010s. We really wanted to make new discoveries from a place of the world that is barely explored,” Rémy was quoted as saying by ZME Science.

Thermometers at forehead or wrist?

FROM PAGE 1

“The one is using a laser beam and the other is using infrared. Laser beam thermometers are not supposed to be used on the human body because they are meant for industrial purpose and used to assess surface temperature,” he adds. Infrared thermometers which allow one to collect data at a distance are fast and provide results indicating body temperatures instantaneously.

“Our forehead is selected to measure temperature because the best source of body temperature is mouth, from under the tongue. Forearm peripheral temperature will be less and that's why forehead is chosen.”

“There are basically two types of thermometers,” Dr Renchi Mathew, Consultant Physician, Royal Oman Police. “The one is using a laser beam and the other is using infrared. Laser beam thermometers are not supposed to be used on the human body because they are meant for industrial purpose and used to assess surface temperature,” he adds. Infrared thermometers which allow one to collect data at a distance are fast and provide results indicating body temperatures instantaneously.

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“Prolonged exposure to sun's infrared rays is harmful, but measuring body temperature with infrared thermometers is a transient one and will not harm in the short run,” said Dr Renchy.

“Although no substantial studies have come out indicating the harmful effects,” says Dr Viresh.

“I don't think if your temperature is checked once a week in a mall or supermarket, you will develop serious side effects. It is about minimising your moving outside to the least minimum,” says Dr Nigel Kuriakose, SQU Hospital.

“I feel it's better to test on hands and I always do at hand not forehead. Although the contact is for just few seconds, it is better to avoid frequent contact with infrared rays,” says Dr Dilip Singhvi.



RO 15-RO 50 for COVID-19 tests in private hospitals

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health in Oman has revised the costs of COVID-19 tests in private hospitals. It has also waived additional RO 5 charged on each sample. Earlier tests used to cost RO 14-RO 45.

The RT-PCR (costs RO 35) uses a nasal swab to detect the virus. The time taken to get the result is over 120 minutes and the report is issued within two to three days.

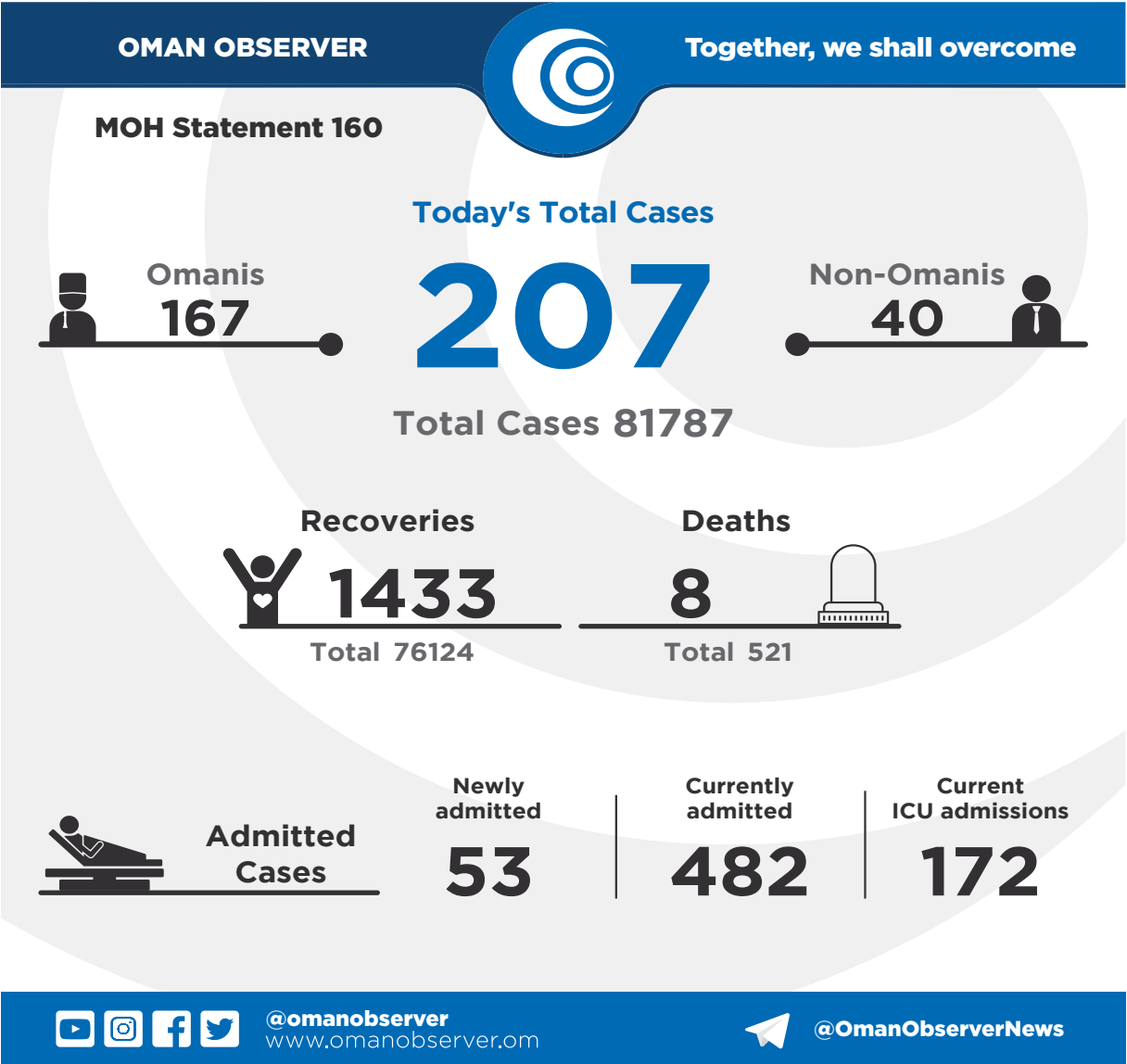
The Point-of-Care-PCR automated test, which also uses nasal swab, costs RO 50. It takes 45 minutes and the report is issued in one day. The serological test looks for past infections using a blood sample and needs one hour to get the

result. The report is issued within two hours for RO 15.

The decision assumes significance as countries that open up for travel often insist on PCR tests to avoid mandatory institutional isolation. Even India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said that travellers with a negative Real-Time (RT) -PCR test can seek exemption from the mandatory institutional quarantine.

Egypt too has banned entry into the country without proof of having had a PCR test for the coronavirus from this Saturday.

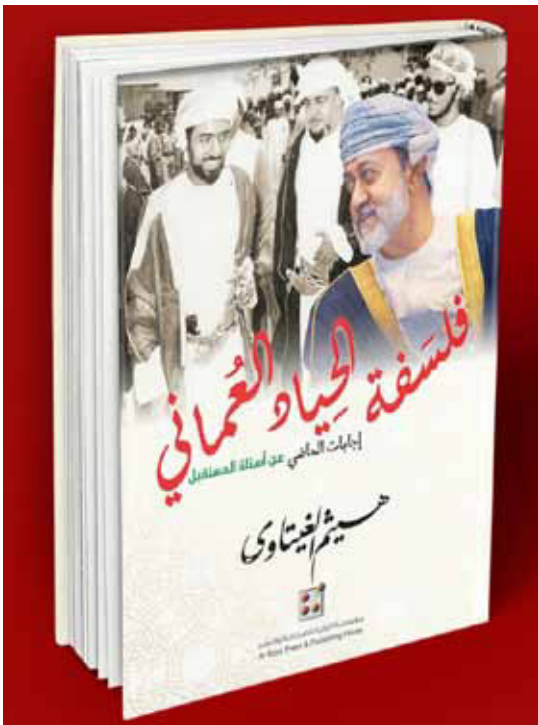
The test must come back with a negative result no more than 72 hours before entering the country, according to the Egyptian government.



Book traces history of Oman’s diplomacy

MUSCAT: With the aim of documenting the challenges of quiet diplomacy of the Sultanate in half a century, Al Roya Press and Publishing House has released a new book entitled “The Philosophy of Oman Neutrality: Past Answers of the Future Questions”.

Haitham al Gheitawi, journalist and author of the book, explains how the tolerant image of the Sultanate abroad is a reflection of its principles of coexistence and tolerance. Al Gheitawi said that the idea of the book emerged from an Al Roya Newspaper report.



The author has reviewed Oman’s diplomatic journey since the beginning of the Renaissance era, and highlighted the challenges faced by the late Sultan. “After analyzing 98 official speeches, 51 press interviews of the late Sultan, and the texts of the royal decrees related to foreign affairs specifically over 50 years, I felt that I rediscovered the personality of the late Sultan Qaboos. Moreover, I felt that I am re-discovering Oman. I had lived about 6 years without getting close enough to its memory, spirit and history, said Al Gheitawi. — ONA

E-learning mixed blessing for students and teachers

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The online classes are forced new normal for the students and teachers after the spread of COVID-19, but it has its limitations as some students are complaining about problems of understanding while teachers are overburdened with preparations for the online classes.

There are two types of students. Some students are enjoying the online model and others are just trying to cope up with the system for the sake of regularity and not lag. In the first category, the students have a better technological edge over others in terms of taking notes and saving the lectures for future reference. The other category of students are struggling with the technology and are hard-pressed to cope up with the class schedule by giving extra time to understand what was taught in the previous class. A Class XII student of Indian School admitted he was very comfortable with the online mode because he was able to go through the topic to be taught in the next class, took notes and simultaneously saved the content taught in the class.

“Initially I was having problems and was lost. I sat with my parents and discussed the difficulty. They suggested that I go prepared for the class and have a thorough look at the topic to be taught in the next class. It helped me a lot as my grasp improved and I was able to take better notes. After the class I revised which made me understand the lesson in a better way,” he said.

He, however, admitted that the effort to understand the lessons multiplied as he was not used to an online model and if he had any doubts, he would ask for time from the



subject teacher to clarify the doubts.

Another student from the same school, but in the junior grade, admitted that it was very difficult for him to understand the lessons. “This is because neither I nor my parents are techno-savvy. Suppose I missed some steps in the online class, there is no scope to take help from my bench-mate. The link breaks and I end up confused and frustrated.”

Even though five months have passed since the teachers started thinking of online classes and got them implemented finally, it is a hard job for them to make every student understand. “Our work has multiplied but we feel that the delivery is not that perfect. May be due to our training of classroom interaction and the very bond that we develop while taking classes,” said a humanities teacher.

He admitted that in proper classroom teachers sometimes deviate from the syllabus to make the students understand. “But in the online mode, most of us are becoming conscious. Apart from the students, many others including parents, are watching us.” For him, in terms of understanding, there is no alternative to classroom teaching, as apart from teaching a campus gives the students much more than the formal lessons. “It is a different matter that we have to adopt this online mode as a safety measure against the pandemic,” he said.



وزارة النقل
Ministry of Transport

Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport in Al Khuwair invites for the Following Project:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Date of Publishing	Last Date to Purchase Tender Document	Submission Date	Companies Who Should Participate in this Tender	Document Price
(MOTs/HQ-19/19/2020)	The designation of a Law Firm to represent the Ministry of Transport In Arbitration Cases	11/8/2020	18/8/2020	30/8/2020	LEGAL OFFICES REGISTERED WITH THE TENDER BOARD IN (FIRST CLASS)	(25/-) Twenty Five Omani Riyals (Non-Refundable)

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to (Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee). And hard copy of the same should be submitted manually to the Tenders Section, Tenders and Contracts Department (1st Floor), Ministry of Transport Building at Al Khuwair.

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24166670
e-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om



INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE

<http://www.transport.gov.om>

Keep anxiety at bay, stay calm

DON'T HESITATE TO MEET PSYCHIATRISTS OR PSYCHOLOGISTS IN CASE OF STRESS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: The COVID-19 impact on mental health is not just fear of getting infected but also apprehensions over job security, salary cuts and uncertain future.

The reality is there could be many others who are not approaching psychiatrists or psychologists because they cannot or because they do not want to or due to the stigma attached to it.

Dr Anand Kumar, specialist psychiatrist, has been meeting patients who are facing anxiety, panic attacks and fear during this period.

"Most of the patients who are coming during this pan-



demical period are people who have issues with the adjustment with the current situation. These adjustment issues are expressed through anxiety problems or depressive syndromes, where some of them have sleep deprivation, while oth-

ers have low mood and other individuals who lack interest and motivation. There are others who are apprehensive about the future – worried about job security, viability and being in a vulnerable position."

There are also individuals

who go through overwhelming emotions triggered by the current situation.

"They go through medical symptoms such as tightness of the chest. It often turns out to be due to anxiety. Some people come to us just because of the lack of accessibility to the doctors as they are off the medication and now come back because of the relapse of the problem," he pointed out.

Dr Anand said one should stay clear of anxiety and fear. "People who practice stress management have a good chance of not developing anxiety and mental health issues."



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
133/2020	Implementation of Low Code Platform in Ministry of Health	13/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
134/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Cardiac)	20/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 09/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 27.500 Per set
135 /2020	Replacement of Air Cooled Condensing Unit at Haima Hospital in Al-Wusta Governorate	20/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 16/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
138/2020	Replacement of Steam Boiler and its Accessories at Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Governorate of Dhofar	20/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 16/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

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

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24166670

Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

TIPS TO STAY MENTALLY FIT

One must follow these tips apart from social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing masks in public to stay mentally fit to face the pandemic.

CONTROL

There are some things which we can control. others we cannot Don't worry too much or lose sleep over what we cannot control like government decisions, job security, opening of the schools and development of vaccines.

HEALTHY ROUTINE

For people who are stuck at home and have not gone back to the full-fledged work it is important to build on a daily routine. Five days of work and two days of relaxation will result in positive mental health.

LIMIT NEWS

Let us limit our exposure to COVID-19 stories or other stressful news to five to 10 minutes. Follow it from authentic sources as the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Ministry of Health and WHO.

STAY CONNECTED

Keep in touch with relatives and friends. Develop new hobbies or take up online courses. Listening to your favourite music, reading and indoor games are all good distraction techniques as well.

EXERCISE AND SLEEP

Taking care of physical fitness is extremely important. Good night sleep and at least 30 minutes of physical fitness should be incorporated into the lifestyle.

MEDITATION

Relaxation training for at least 15 minutes makes a lot of difference. It could be zen meditation or yoga. Any form of meditation provides great benefits.

Non-Omanis transfer ownership of over 1,500 properties

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As many as 1,500 plots and real estate properties owned by non-Omanis in certain specified areas have been transferred to the Omani nationals.

The transfer follows the recent executive regulations issued by the Minister of Housing Shaikh Saif bin Mohammed al Shabibi prohibiting ownership of land or real estate in some areas notified by the government.

According to figures available from the ministry, the properties include 748 in Buraimi, 170 in Musandam, 228 in North Al Batinah, and 297 Al Dhahirah, 67 in Al Wusta, 3 in Dhofar except Salalah, and 1 in Masirah Island.

The ministry reiterated, “non-Omanis, who are in the possession of land or real estate properties in places specified, should transfer them to Omani nationals on or before the deadline set in the statute”.

While pointing out that November 19, 2020 is the deadline for the transaction, the ministry warned that “failure to comply with order will result in legal action”.

3.59 million passengers use airports till May 2020

MUSCAT: The total number of passengers travelling through airports in the Sultanate (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm) till the end of May 2020 reached 3.59 million.

The number of flights landing and departing from Muscat, Salalah and Sohar International Airports till the end of May 2020 reached 24,555 flights, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

The total number of passengers at Muscat International Airport fell by 51 per cent to 3.22 million passengers at the end of May 2020, over the same period of the previous year. The total number of flights at Muscat International Airport also fell by 46.3 per cent to 25,279 flights at

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

Also included are islands, archaeological and old lanes specified by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, agricultural lands in all parts of the Sultanate, sites near palaces, security and military authorities, which are determined by the competent authorities.

However, the decision does not include lands and real estate located in integrated tourism complexes.

The ministry said, “The Secretariat of the Land Registry in the Ministry has prepared a register with the names of the present owners, their other personal data, especially their nationalities and data of the plot of land or real estate built, in particular the plot number, area, square, state, and type of use”.

Also included is the nature of the property in terms of being agricultural land, vacant land, or constructed real estate.

the end of May 2020, from 47,104 flights for the same period of 2019. The number of international flights at Muscat International Airport was 23,043 flights at the end of May 2020, falling 46.6 per cent over the same period of 2019. The total number of international passengers at the Muscat International Airport also fell by 51.4 per cent at the end of May 2020, reaching 2.98 million passengers. This included 1.48 million passenger arrivals, 1.48 million passenger departures, and 5,121 passenger transits.

The domestic flights at Muscat International Airport fell by 43.6 per cent to 2,236 flights at the end of May 2020, against 3,963 flights for the same period of 2019. — ONA

LOST PASSPORT

ABDUS SAMAD MANIK UDDIN

has lost BANGLADESHI

PASSPORT No. BX0808179.

Finder please handover to ROP.

الرامتان الدولية ش م م

اعلان انعقاد الجمعية العامة العادية

يتشرف رئيس مجلس ادارة الرامتان الدولية ش م م - بناءا على الطلب المقدم من مساهمين يمثلون ١٠٪ من راس المال بدعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية المقررة يوم الاحد الموافق ٢٠٢٠/٨/٣٠ م في تمام الساعة ٤.٠٠ مساء - وذلك في مقر الرامتان الدولية ش م م ولاية بوشر المربع ٣٥ شارع المها مبنى رقم ٨٥ رقم المجمع ٢٥٧ الطابق الاول شقة ١٣ ، وفي حال عدم اكتمال النصاب القانوني يتم عقد الجمعية العامة العادية الثاني تاريخ يوم الاثنين الموافق ٢٠٢٠/٨/٣١ في تمام الساعة ٤.٠٠ مساء ، وذلك في نفس مقر الشركة اعلاه . وذلك لمناقشه جدول الاعمال التالي :-

١. مناقشة المقترح المقدم من مساهمين يمثلون ١٠٪ من راس المال لعزل عضوين من اعضاء مجلس الادارة والموضح اسمائهم بالمرفق ، والموافقة عليه .

٢. انتخاب اعضاء مجلس الادارة لملاء المقاعد الشاغرة بالعزل ، وذلك من المساهمين و غير المساهمين طبقا للنظام الاساسي للشركة وعلى من يرغب في الترشح تهيئة استمارة الترشيح المعدة من قبل وزارة التجارة والصناعة وتسليمها الى مقر الشركة قبل انعقاد الجمعية بيومي عمل وذلك في موعد اقضاء نهاية عمل يوم الخميس الموافق ٢٧/٨/٢٠٢٠ ، ولن تقبل استمارة بعد ذلك . ، وذلك في حال الموافقة على البند (١)

ووفقا للنظام الاساسي للشركة يحق لاي مساهم ان يفوض خطيا اي شخص اخر لحضور كافة الاجتماعات والتصويت على القرارات المتخذة نيابة عنه ويجب بالنسبة للشخص الطبيعي ان يرفق في بطاقة التفويض نسخة من البطاقة الشخصية وبالنسبة للشخص الاعتباري ان تكون بطاقة التفويض موقعا عليها من احد الاشخاص المفوضين بالتوقيع.

رئيس مجلس الادارة

Ministry of Higher Education

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education announces the tender shown in the following table :

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of tenders
11/2020 Recall (2)	OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF ELECTRICAL, ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL SERVICES OF SUR COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES BUILDINGS	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board With Grade, First	RO 25/=	20/08/2020	30/08/2020

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on Tuesday11/08/2020 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of Tender Committee
Ministry of Higher Education

www.mohe.gov.om



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company (GPDC) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below;

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)-EXCLUDED TRANSFER CHARGES
GPDC/04/2020	Demolition of Concrete foundations, slabs, walls, trenches, asphalt roads and utilities, buildings (above and underground) and disposal of concrete debris and backfilling the demolish area by appropriate soil up to road level in GPDC	10-SEP-2020	27-SEP-2020	100/-

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee”, and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer company name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 12.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on 27-SEP-2020.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of GPDC”. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- GPDC is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company, Bank Muscat, 0423011069510017 (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- Bidders to send the deposit slip to: Yasmeen.allawati@holding.nama.om.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.

Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 277
E-Mail: Yasmeen.allawati@Holding.nama.om



MANGROVES

KEY TO MARINE ENVIRONMENT

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Mangroves support rich biodiversity and provide food for fish, shrimp and other marine creatures. They also reduce carbon dioxide emission more than any other trees and act as a strong shield against coastal erosion, wave surges and tsunamis. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs is implementing several programmes to preserve them.

Suleiman Nasser al Akhzami, Director-General at MECA, said that *Avicennia marina*, commonly known as grey mangrove or white mangrove, is common in Oman as it is able to thrive

in hot weather and less water. This type of mangroves stretches over 1,030 hectares from Al Batinah North, passing through Muscat governorate, Al Sharqiyah governorate, Mahout, and Dhofar Governorate in the south.

Al Akhzami mentioned that the project of cultivating one million mangrove seedlings began in April 2000, and after preparing the work plan, the first nursery was established in July of the same year.

A total of 17,250 seedlings were planted in Khor Al Sawadi as a first step for the project in March 2001.

In November 2001, the ministry set up a new permanent nursery for mangrove trees in Al Qurm

Park, but the actual work commenced in July 2003 with a capacity of 22,500 seedlings a year.

Following the success of the cultivation process in Al Sawadi, the second stage of cultivation was implemented in the Wilayat of Sur with a productivity of 16,500 seedlings. Al Akhzami pointed out that in May 2002, a new nursery was established in Sur, while the last nursery was established in Dhofar Governorate in July 2002.

Al Akhzami said the ministry is implementing a long-term plan to rehabilitate and preserve mangroves in the various regions of the Sultanate. The number of cultivated seedlings reached about 700,000 by the end of 2019 in 32 sites along the coast

of the Sultanate.

He said the specialists at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs monitor the lagoons to ensure the growth of mangroves.

The Ministry's specialists also organise awareness campaigns for school students, fishermen and Omani women's associations in all governorates to familiarise them closely with mangroves and the importance of preserving them.

Mangroves in the Sultanate face various threats. Some use it as livestock fodder as they are rich in nutrients. Dumping waste in mangroves not only affects these trees but also is harmful to marine creatures



Lebanese security forces fire tear gas to disperse protesters in the vicinity of parliament in central Beirut on Monday. — AFP

Lebanon’s whole government resigns over Beirut blast

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s Cabinet has resigned over last week’s devastating blast at the Beirut port that killed some 160 people and wounded more than 6,000, the health minister said.

The minister, Hamad Hassan, spoke with reporters at the end of a Cabinet meeting on Monday, which came after two days of demonstrations over the weekend that saw clashes with security forces firing tear gas at protesters.

“The whole government resigned,” Hamad said. He added that Prime Minister Hassan Diab will head to the presidential palace to “hand over the resignation in the name of all the ministers”.

The resignation is “not an escape from responsibility,” the minister was earlier quoted by the broadcaster MTV as saying.

Following the news of Diab’s resignation, protesters started to gather in central Beirut. Some

were trying to remove large cement blocks outside the parliament building, while police used tear gas to disperse them.

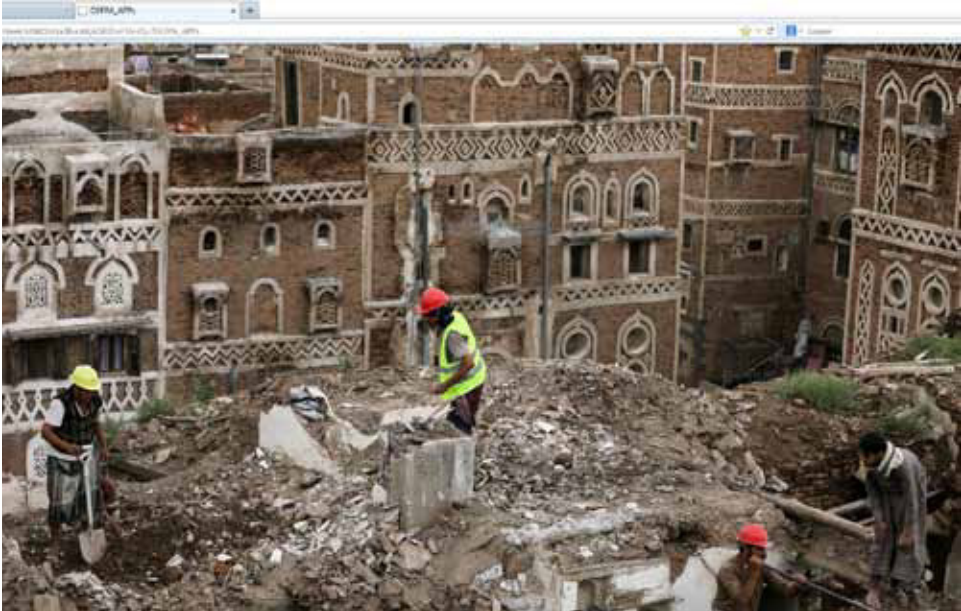
Earlier in the day, Lebanon’s justice minister stepped down, becoming the third minister to quit since last week’s devastating Beirut port explosion.

“I submitted my resignation due to the Beirut blast and the protests,” Marie-Claude Najm was quoted by MTV as saying. — dpa

Heavy rains take their toll on old Sanaa houses

SANAA: Houses in Yemen’s UNESCO-listed Old City of Sanaa are collapsing under heavy rains, as months of floods and storms assail a country already reeling from war, food shortages and disease.

The distinctive brown and white mud brick houses of Sanaa’s historic neighbourhoods, which date from before the 11th century, have long been under threat from conflict and neglect.



Mud brick houses of Sanaa’s historic neighbourhoods date from before the 11th century. — Reuters

IN BRIEF

Iran: Insurers should pay compensation for Ukraine jet crash

DUBAI: Iran will not compensate Ukraine International Airlines for its plane Tehran accidentally downed in January because the passenger jet was insured by European firms, the head of Iran’s Central Insurance Organisation said on Monday.

“The Ukrainian plane is insured by European companies in Ukraine and not by Iranian (insurance) companies,” said Gholamreza Soleimani, according to the Young Journalists Club news website affiliated with state TV. “Therefore, compensation should be paid by those European companies.”

Soleimani’s comments concerned the aircraft and did not address potential compensation for victims’ families. There was no immediate comment from European aviation insurers. — Reuters

Israel strikes Hamas post over ‘balloons’

GAZA CITY: An Israeli aircraft struck an observation post in the northern Gaza Strip late on Sunday, the Israeli military said, an apparent reaction to people sending incendiary balloons across the border towards Israel. The post belonged to the Hamas movement, the Israeli military said. Hamas security sources reported no injuries.

The attack came shortly after masked youths launched incendiary balloons across the Strip into Israel, setting alight agricultural fields. A previously unknown group calling itself Wa’ed al Tahrir, or the Promise of Liberation, claimed responsibility for the launch. Their balloons had explosives attached to them.

The group said in a leaflet that the balloons were partially intended as revenge for alleged Israeli measures against “innocent women” in the West Bank, against Palestinian prisoners and against the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. — dpa

WORLD

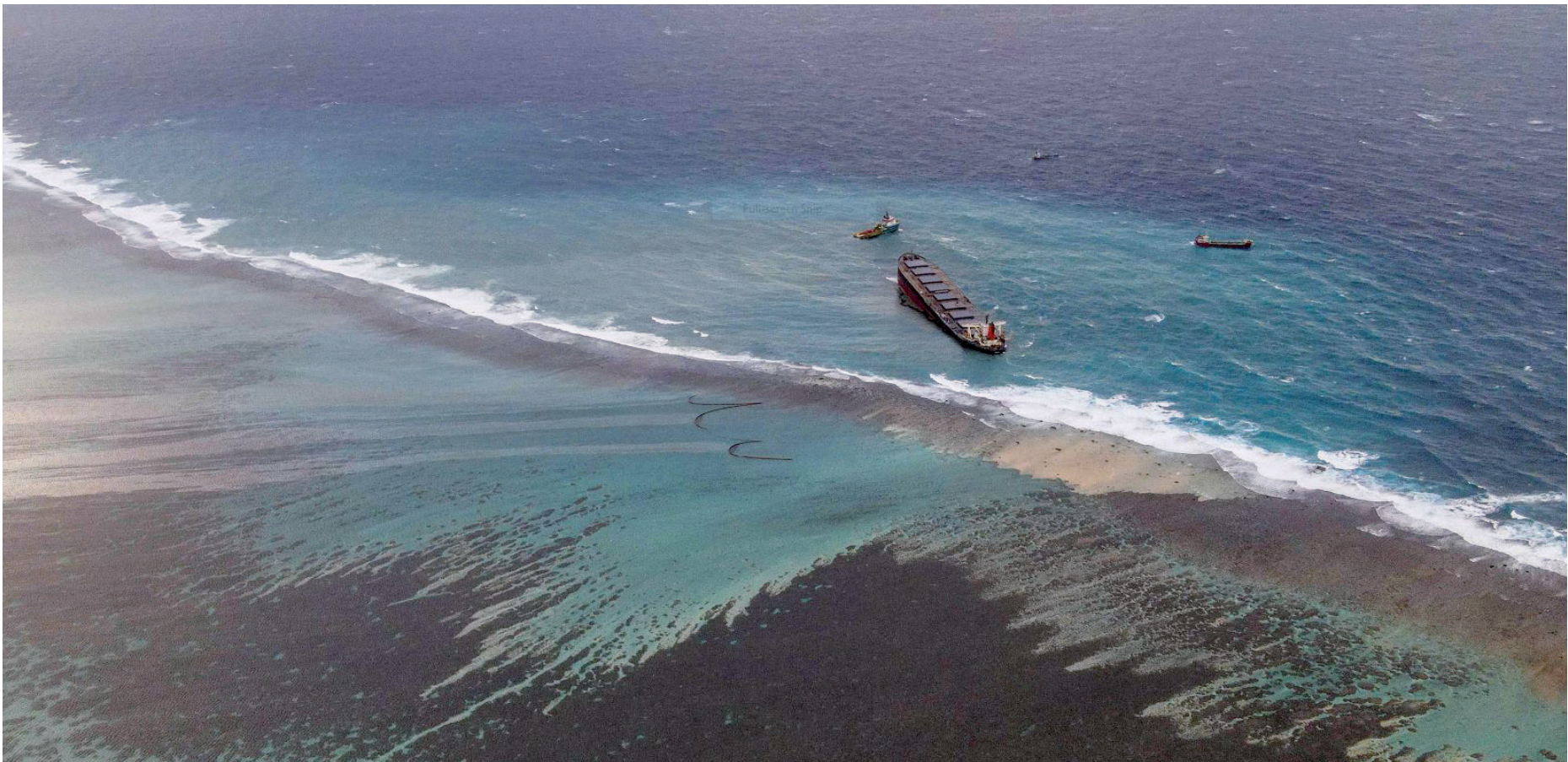
RACE TO CONTAIN OIL SPILL
AS TANKER BREAKS UP

PORT LOUIS: Salvage crews raced against time on Monday to prevent a second disastrous oil spill off the picture-perfect coastline of Mauritius, with a damaged tanker carrying thousands of tonnes of fuel at risk of splitting apart.

The bulk carrier MV Wakashio ran aground on July 25 with 4,000 tonnes of fuel aboard and began seeping oil last week, staining coral reefs, mangrove forests and tranquil lagoons in an unprecedented environmental catastrophe for the archipelago nation.

More than 1,000 tonnes has already oozed from the ship, its Japanese operator says, causing untold ecological damage to protected marine parks and fishing grounds that form the backbone of Mauritius' economy.

Fuel was being airlifted on Monday by helicopter to the shore, but efforts to pump more from the hold were being thwarted by rough



An oil tanker that ran aground off the coast of Mauritius could break up, the country's Prime Minister has said — deepening the island's environmental catastrophe. — AFP

seas and strong winds.

The weather, which is also fanning the oil slick further up the coast, is not forecast to improve until evening.

Some fuel has been removed but 2,500 tonnes still remains aboard, said Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, who warned cracks in the hull were

worsening, and there was a very real chance the boat could split.

"We are in an advanced fracturing process. The bulk carrier does not have much time ahead of it," said one scientist working on the emergency effort, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Divers have reported fresh cracks in the hull, while creaking sounds from the vessel could be heard from the southeast shore, where a major clean-up operation is under way to remove treacly sludge coating miles of Mauritius' unspoiled coastline.

— AFP

Tirumala reports huge coronavirus outbreak

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI: A well-known Hindu temple in India has seen more than 700 cases of the novel coronavirus among its staff in the past two months, a temple official said on Monday, as cases in the country surged past 2.2 million.

India reported a near-record 62,064 new cases of the virus in the past 24 hours, according to federal health data released on Monday, taking its total number of cases to more than 2.2 million.

India has fewer cases than only the United States and Brazil, though it has reported a relatively low number of deaths, at fewer than 45,000,



Over 700 Lord Venkateswara temple employees had been infected by the virus. — Reuters

although epidemiologists say the peak of its outbreak could be months away. Cases in India have been spreading from urban areas to smaller towns and the countryside, where health infrastructure is already overburdened.

— Reuters

'WE GOT EXAM GRADES WRONG FOR PUPILS'

LONDON: Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Monday sought to address anger over pupil examination results by admitting that the devolved government had not got it right during the pandemic.

With almost no examinations taking place, teachers graded pupils in key exams and the grades were then moderated by examination boards. To the dismay of pupils, many grades in Scotland were revised down.

"In a very difficult and unprecedented situation, we took decisions that we thought on balance were the right ones," Sturgeon



Nicola Sturgeon: 'We did not get this right and I'm sorry'. — Reuters

said, adding that there had been too much focus on the system and too little on the pupils involved.

"Too many students feel they have lost out," she said. "I do acknowledge that we did not get this right and I am sorry for that." — Reuters

ANALYSIS

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE



Lakshmi Kothaneth

lakshmiobserver@gmail.com



As trump falters, Democrats and Biden eye an elusive prize

JOSEPH AX

As polls show Texans increasingly frustrated with President Donald trump's response amid a massive resurgence in coronavirus cases, Democrats say they have a real chance to turn a long-held dream into reality: winning the state's presidential contest for the first time in more than four decades.

In recent weeks, Joe Biden's campaign has aired television ads specifically aimed at Texans - the first time a Democratic presidential candidate has done so in a quarter-century, according to the state party - and made its first hires there.

Texas is among the states targeted by a \$280 million fall advertising blitz the campaign unveiled last week, part of a broader strategy aimed at putting Republican-leaning states, including Georgia, Iowa and Ohio, in play ahead of the November 3 election against the Republican trump.

With polls showing Biden holding a national lead over trump and effec-

tively tied in Texas, Democrats say a concerted effort in the state could expand his viable paths to the White House.

"Because of the pandemic, the battleground has grown," said Democratic US Representative Filemon Vela, who represents a south Texas seat.

But skepticism remains about conservative Texas becoming a true swing state. trump carried it by nine percentage points four years ago, and some strategists expect his standing to rebound as the election draws closer.

Trump campaign spokeswoman Samantha Cotten said Democrats were "delusional" for thinking they can win Texas.

"We welcome the Biden campaign to light their money on fire by investing in the Lone Star State," she said in a statement.

Texas is an expensive place to advertise on television given its size and multiple media markets, and Biden aides acknowledge the campaign is unlikely to spend the kind of vast sum a full-court press would require. — Reuters

A lockdown and a week-long holiday have given us the break we required and a quick dose of discipline.

They say it takes 21 days to form a habit. After 14 days of dusk-to-dawn lockdown we have the urge to rush home at 7 pm despite the change of timing from 9 pm to 5 am. It just shows how easily we can condition ourselves and bring in discipline into our lives no matter what our age is – it is never too late. Now we only wish there is someone to inspire us for all the changes we need to incorporate into our lives.

They say old habits never die, but there is a possibility that we can acknowledge it but replace it. As children when we used to throw tantrums or cry the best tool parents or family members used was distraction. It might still be the best tool to use at present as well. It is not about being nonchalant about what is going on around us, knowingly choosing to stay positive with filling in the day with the work, new hobbies and learning new things.

The new norms could be a turning point in our lives. The lockdown brought into focus the value of time. The pandemic taught us that we can manage work and life in a different way as well. When the experts tell us that lifestyles may never be the same again the first thing that comes to the mind are visiting public places and traveling. Accordingly we have been thinking of immunity and that has brought attention to our body and mind.

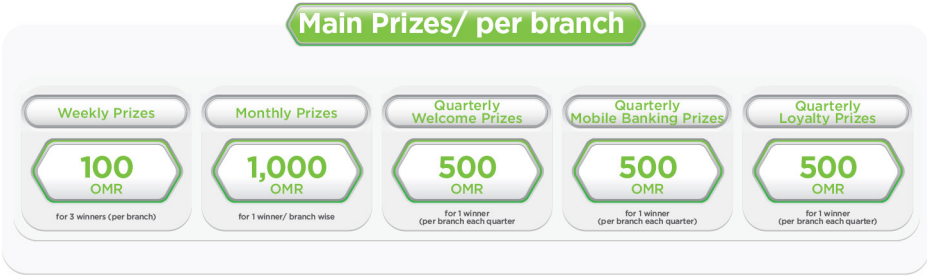
Does that mean socialising has been actually a distraction all these years? We need the support system of our family, friends and the society no doubt, but maybe there could have been times where we had gone overboard.

Now, however, it is you, the immediate family and thoughts.

For those of whom who are on their own as residents in the country without their families work has been a therapy. Hopefully they are able to overcome anxiety and fear to keep their thoughts positive.

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

BUSINESS



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Duqm SEZ to register new companies in 15 minutes



INVESTMENT DESTINATION:
SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE PROCESSING TIMES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PERMITS, ACCORDING TO THE CEO.

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT: Local and international investors looking to set up operations at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm can now register their new businesses in under 15 minutes – as opposed to around five days until recently – under revamped and modernised procedures that have been introduced by the SEZ Authority (SEZAD).

The streamlined procedures, unveiled by the Authority recently, are aimed at positioning the SEZ as an investment destination and integrated hub anchored by a modern city that offers the highest living standards, according to Dr Ismail Ahmed al Balushi, CEO – SEZAD.

In an interview featured in *Duqm Economist*, he stated that the digitisation of registration procedures has contributed to a dramatic reduction in the time required to process and approve all manner of appli-

cations.

“The digital transformation plan being currently implemented by SEZAD has contributed to reducing the time required for completing investor applications,” said Dr Al Balushi.

“In addition, investors can get their business licenses from SEZAD in just one day without the need to approach other entities once all required documents are submitted.

This will ensure that projects can start their economic activities in a speedy and flexible manner.”

Under the revamped procedures, applications for land usufruct will be processed within five days (compared with 30 days previously), while a business license will be issued in 24 hours (versus five days previously).

Likewise, construction permits will be issued within five days presently, as opposed to 15 days in the past.

Significant reductions have been made in the

processing times for environmental permits, according to the CEO. It will be issued within 25 days for Grade 1 (heavy industries), five days for Grade 2 (medium industries) and two days for Grade 3 (light industries).

This compares with an average of a 40-days wait for environmental permits pertaining to all three grades

in the past.

“SEZAD welcomes all kinds of companies from different parts of the world to invest in Duqm,” said the CEO.

“Investors can register their projects in the commercial register of SEZAD in any legal form available in the Sultanate per the new Commercial Companies Law issued in 2019.”

البنك الوطني العماني
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report

For the 6 Month Period ending 30th of June 2020

The second quarter of 2020 marked a recovery after a very sudden and vicious sell-off that occurred towards the end of the first quarter. COVID-19 remains a health and economic threat as the pandemic is yet to be reigned in and a vaccine yet to be discovered, approved and mass produced. Many equity gauges globally are trading at near all-time highs while many developed world government bond yields are at all time lows, in part due to forceful intervention by many central banks across the world. The 10-years US treasury yield continued to drop, closing the quarter at 0.66%, while the 10-years Japanese, German and Swiss yields closed the month at 0.02%, -0.46% and -0.45% respectively.

On the commodity front, crude enjoyed a healthy bounce largely due to a demand recovery and a cohesive OPEC+ production curtailment plan. Brent closed the quarter at USD 41 a barrel after dipping below USD 20 a barrel earlier during the quarter. The West Texas Intermediate, its North American cousin, briefly traded below zero as a lack of storage capacity caused havoc in commodity markets.

Regional equity markets (as measured by the S&P GCC Large and Mid-Cap Index) were tributaries of the global appetite for risk as they recovered 11.08% during the second quarter after correcting 24.81% during the first one. On a year-to-date basis, Saudi Arabia shed 12.83%, Kuwait shed 19.01%, Qatar shed 14.29%, UAE shed 22.08%, Bahrain 28.38% and Oman 12.56%.

During the second quarter, the Fund gained 10.34%, compared to the benchmark's 11.08% return. On an absolute basis, all sectors posted positive returns, with Materials and Telecoms being the best performers. On a relative basis, the Fund did benefit from its overweight in telecoms and logistic services while under allocations to Financials and Materials negatively impacted its relative return.

As of quarter end, the Fund has redeployed some of its cash while maintaining a sizeable allocation to short duration investment grade sovereign bonds. Intervention by developed world central banks remains chief among the factors impacting investment returns. Given its limitless attribute, we were forced to acknowledge its impact on equity markets. We remain however of the opinion that underwhelming earnings among regional corporates will bring more attractive entry points in the coming quarters. We will be looking for deeper discounts and more opportunities to re-deploy capital down the road.

UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2020			
	30 June 2020	30 June 2019	31 December 2019
	RO	RO	RO
Assets			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	6,634,899	9,832,338	9,271,089
Cash and cash equivalents	1,713,175	784,763	808,280
Dividend receivable	-	3,397	-
Interest receivable	8,315	1,123	-
Total assets	8,356,389	10,621,621	10,079,369
Liabilities			
Amount due to brokers	-	27,480	-
Amount due to related parties	23,165	31,599	28,439
Accruals and other payables	10,703	8,135	8,565
Total liabilities	33,868	67,214	37,004
Total net assets attributable to Unitholders	8,322,521	10,554,407	10,042,365
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	8,356,389	10,621,621	10,079,369
Net asset per unit attributable to the unitholders	0.640	0.801	0.782
UNAUDITED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2020			
	30 June 2020	30 June 2019	31 December 2019
	RO	RO	RO
	(6 months)	(6 months)	(12 months)
INCOME			
Dividend income	124,539	336,357	404,346
Interest income	11,903	5,341	8,384
Total income	136,442	341,698	412,730
Net realised (loss)/gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(1,598,320)	285,087	139,571
Net unrealised (loss)/gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	151,436	453,890	393,977
Net investment (loss)/income	(1,310,442)	1,080,675	946,278
EXPENSES			
Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)	34,774	33,116	51,905
Management fees	47,745	55,997	111,459
Administration fee	7,499	7,667	15,321
Custodian fees	4,787	4,760	9,600
Fund Management Body's fee	21,000	21,000	35,000
General and administration	6,807	10,687	17,624
Foreign exchange loss	8,787	11,333	6,008
Total expenses	131,399	144,560	246,917
(Loss)/profit and total comprehensive (loss)/income and (decrease)/increase in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the period/ year	(1,441,841)	936,115	699,361
(Loss) / profit per unit	(0.112)	0.071	0.054

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 2477 8756, Fax: 2477 8993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

Investment Manager & Administrator
البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

Mineral-based projects worth RO 122 million set to come up in Duqm SEZ

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Oman's Majority state-owned Duqm Quarries, which was established three years ago to jumpstart the growth of mining activities in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm, has unveiled a portfolio of five projects for investment — ventures that will serve to showcase the zone's promising mining and mineral based investment potential.

Total investment in the five projects, all of which seek to add value to locally exploited mineral resources, is around RO 122 million, according to the company's CEO, Eng Ali bin Abdullah al Zadjali.

In an interview to *Duqm Economist*, the quarterly newsletter of the SEZ Authority of Duqm (SEZAD), Al Zadjali said all five projects — focusing on the manufacture and production of soda ash, cement clinker, quick lime, float glass, and ground calcium carbonate — have been found to be commercially feasible, thus paving the way for their implementation.

Further, with a view to attracting local and international investment in these projects, Duqm Quarries will shortly present details of its feasibility and technical studies covering all five ventures via the portals of SEZAD and the Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development (Ithraa), he noted.

The biggest of these projects by value is a 900-tonnes/day soda ash production facility with an investment of around RO 56 million. Also



PROMISING SECTOR:

Five projects — focusing on the manufacture and production of soda ash, cement clinker, quick lime, float glass and ground calcium carbonate — have been found to be commercially feasible, thus paving the way for their implementation in the SEZ, according to Duqm Quarries.

known as sodium bicarbonate, soda ash is a key raw material in the manufacture of a wide array of industrial chemicals and goods, including detergents and glass. Also envisioned is a 150-tonnes/day capacity ground calcium carbonate plant with an investment of RO 2.8 million.

Equally notable is a float glass manufacturing project with an investment of around RO 50 million. Plant capacity is projected at 600 tonnes per day, effectively making it the largest facility of its kind in the Sultanate

when it comes into operation.

Making up the rest of Duqm Quarries' portfolio are a 1,500 tonnes/day capacity clinker facility (costing RO 8 million) and 600 tonnes/day capacity quick lime production plant with an investment of around RO 5.5 million.

All five projects are planned for implementation within an integrated complex, allowing for synergies to be created and exploited in the production of a range of cost-competitive commodities for the construction, manufacturing, industri-

al, oilfield and petrochemical sectors.

Set up in 2017 with a mandate to drive investment in the mining and mineral development sector, Duqm Quarries is 70 per cent owned by Tatweer (Oman Company for Development of the SEZ in Duqm), the wholly owned investment and development arm of SEZAD.

Licensed by SEZAD to undertake quarrying and mining activities in the SEZ, the company has been a key provider of aggregate and other construction materials for all kinds of industrial, infrastructure and building projects coming up in the zone.

It has also produced a mining map that pinpoints the availability of commercially valuable industrial minerals and other resources in the SEZ.

BUSINESS

Gulf Downstream Association discusses COVID-19 impacts

MUSCAT: The Gulf Downstream Association (GDA) announced on Monday the successful conclusion of its first Board of Directors meeting of 2020, which was held virtually followed by the Annual General Assembly Meeting. Presided over by Suleman Al Bargan, Chairman of the Association, (Vice-President Domestic Refining & NGL Fractionation – Saudi Aramco), the Assembly was attended by senior representatives of GDA member companies, who gathered to review activities of the past year and the Association’s strategy for the year ahead.

Eng Audah al Ahmadi, Secretary-General of GDA, discussed the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on GDA’s operations and actions taken to cope with it. He presented the 2019 Achievements and Way Forward Plan.

“Despite the current challenges, GDA continues to work towards meeting our mission of driving further development of the region’s downstream industries through greater collaboration between our members and other key players in the industry both in the Middle East and around the world.

In 2019, we successfully increased our membership by 87 per cent and had a 100 per cent membership retention rate. Currently, we are in the process of developing various



new services for our members on virtual platforms.

We look forward to leveraging the many resources we have developed, both real and virtual, to support our members and to keep building on the momentum we have achieved since our establishment in 2016,” said Al Ahmadi.

The Gulf Downstream Association (GDA) is billed as a non-profit association and “point of reference” for all downstream players including industry professionals, corporate executives and legislators seeking to foster excellence and drive advancement through mutually beneficial engagement and industry collaboration.

The Association was established to aggregate the scattered wealth of knowledge that lies across the global downstream industry in order to accelerate development and serve as a catalyst for strong and sustainable industry growth in the Gulf region and worldwide.



BankDhofar ensures safe banking experience

MUSCAT: BankDhofar puts technology and innovation at the core of its strategy to improve the experience of its customers. The Bank is constantly keeping pace with the technological developments while designing new products and services to ensure convenient banking experience for customers. This was reflected during COVID-19 pandemic, as BankDhofar continued providing its services to the customers around the clock through digital banking channels. For the safety of the customers, the bank urged them to conduct their transactions safely through mobile banking, internet banking, phone banking and call centre.

BankDhofar’s Mobile Banking App offers a wide range of exclusive services which are available only with through its award winning App. The services include; instant transfer to any Bank in the Sultanate, cardless cash, mobile top-up for all telecom providers in the Sultanate, increasing withdrawal limit to RO 5,000, Instant International money transfer service with Western Union, among other services.

Through Internet Banking, BankDhofar provides a number of features for retail and corporate customers. Along with managing accounts, customers may view details of their account, as well as payment transactions. Customers may also Inquiries about seized amounts, cheque book requests and information related to transactions. They can pay dues for credit cards issued by BankDhofar as well as American Express credit cards. In addition, customers may transfer funds to their personal accounts, other accounts at BankDhofar, and accounts of customers in local and international banks at their convenient.

Gold steadies as dollar extends rally

WASHINGTON: Gold prices were little changed on Monday, having retreated sharply from a record peak in the last session, as the dollar made further gains with investors keeping a cautious eye on the US-China spat ahead of key trade talks on August 15.

Spot gold was steady at \$2,033.61 per ounce by 09:25 GMT. US gold futures rose 0.76 per cent to \$2,043.50.

Gold hit a record high of \$2,072.50 on Friday but pulled back as much as 2 per cent, hurt by a bounce in the dollar after data showed the US economy added 1.763 million jobs in July.

“We’re seeing a little bit of a top (in gold) in the short to medium term and because of the rebound of the dollar, we could see a little bit of a drift lower over the course of the next few days” said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.



A salesman displays gold bars inside a jewellery in Hyderabad, India. — Reuters

While gold could decline further towards \$2,000 or lower as investors book profits, bullion hasn’t lost its lustre, he added.

The dollar has, on occasion, been the favoured refuge amid escalations between Washington and Beijing, and was up in early London trading, with investors also focusing on fiscal stimulus in the US ahead of key trade talks on August 15. — Reuters

BUSINESS

OIL PRICES CLIMB ON POSITIVE CHINA DATA, RISING DEMAND

LONDON: Oil rose on Monday, supported by an improvement in Chinese factory data and rising energy demand as countries eased coronavirus-related lockdowns, but traders remained cautious due to US-China tensions and uncertainty over a US stimulus package.

Brent crude rose 54 cents, or 1.2 per cent, to \$44.94 a barrel by 08:52 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 69 cents, or 1.7 per cent, to \$41.91 a barrel.

Saudi Arabian Aramco Chief Executive Amin Nasser said on Sunday that he sees oil demand rebounding in Asia as economies gradually open up.

China's factory deflation eased in July, driven by a rise in global oil prices and as industrial activity climbed back towards pre-coronavirus levels, adding to signs of recovery in the world's second-largest economy.

"With oil demand still slowly grinding higher, and oil supply in check due to the OPEC+ production cut deal and prices too low to incentivize strong production growth in the United States,



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes in this illustration picture. — Reuters

the oil market remains undersupplied," UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo said.

Iraq said on Friday it would cut its oil output by a further 400,000 barrels per day in August and September to compensate for its overproduction in the past three months. The move would help it comply with its share of cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as OPEC+.

"This would send out a strong signal to the oil market on various levels. That said, this would also require

the international companies operating in Iraq to join in with the cuts," Commerzbank analyst Eugen Weinberg said.

However, uncertainty over US fiscal stimulus put some pressure on prices. President Trump signed a series of executive orders to extend unemployment benefits after talks with Congress broke down.

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Sunday they were open to restarting the talks.

"The longer this drags on

CHINA'S FACTORY DEFLATION EASED IN JULY, DRIVEN BY A RISE IN GLOBAL OIL PRICES AND AS INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY CLIMBED BACK TOWARDS PRE-CORONAVIRUS LEVELS, ADDING TO SIGNS OF RECOVERY IN THE WORLD'S SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY.

the worse it is for the demand scenario," said Michael McCarthy, market strategist at CMC Markets and Stockbroking.

Adding to the uncertainty were ongoing tensions between Washington and Beijing. Trump signed two executive orders banning WeChat and TikTok in 45 days' time while announcing sanctions on 11 Chinese and Hong Kong officials.

Markets will now keep an on a China-US meeting on trade talks scheduled for this weekend.

— Reuters

Senators urge US to remove tariffs on EU foods, beverages



A worker adjusts European Union and US flags at the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan group of 13 US senators have asked the US Trade Representative's Office (USTR) to remove 25 per cent tariffs imposed in October 2019 on European Union food, wine and spirits, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

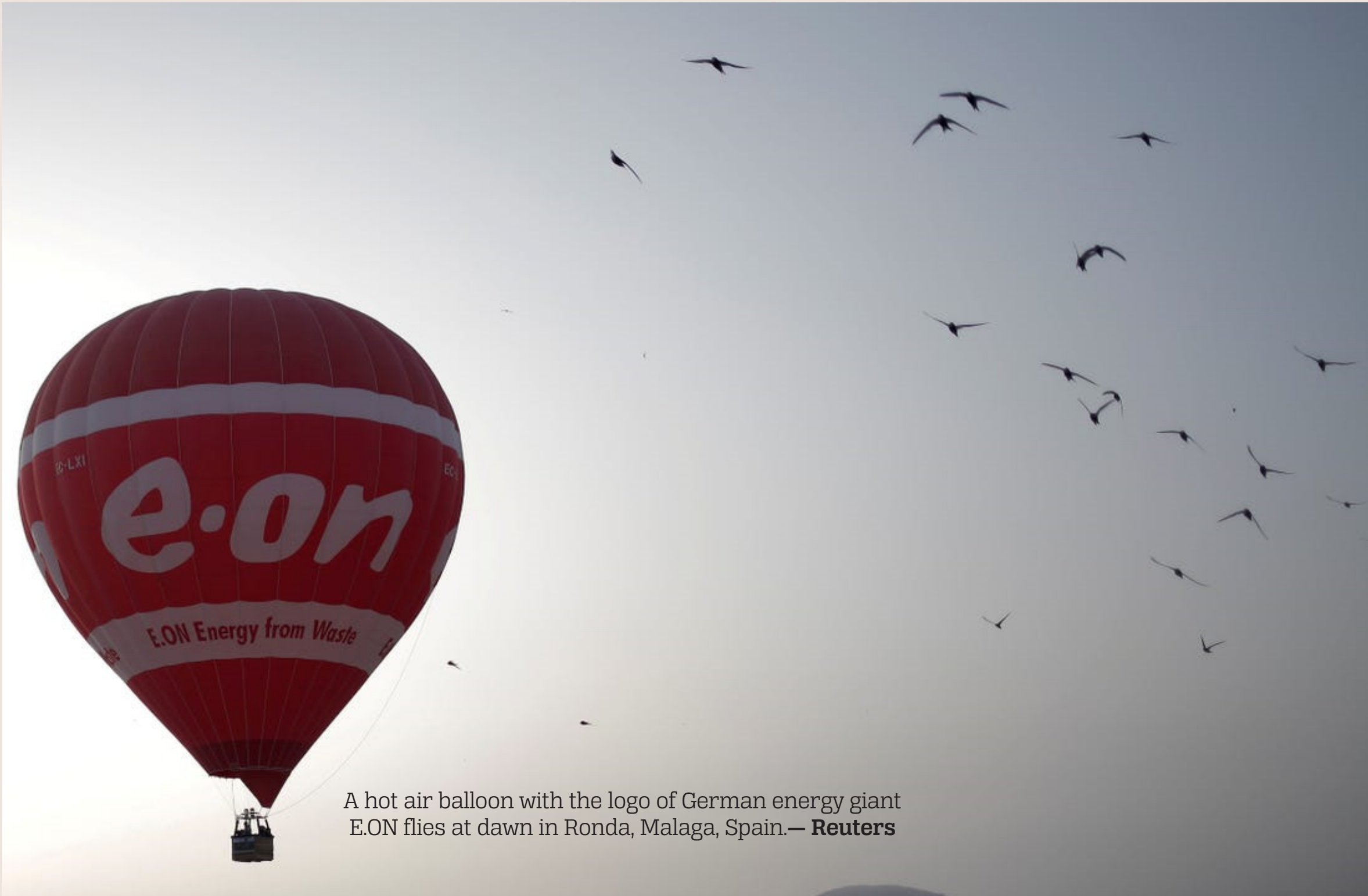
The tariffs, in retaliation for EU subsidies on large aircraft, hit French wine, Italian cheese and single-malt Scotch whisky, as well as cookies, salami, yogurt, olives from France, EU-produced pork sausage and German coffee.

Seven Republican and six Democratic senators, including Robert

Menendez, John Barrasso, Cory Gardner, Susan Collins, Dianne Feinstein, Pat Toomey, Kyrsten Sinema and Cory Booker said in a letter to USTR Friday that American "restaurants, retailers, grocers, importers and distributors" are experiencing "severe economic hardship due to the increased cost of goods."

The senators noted "demand for these goods has declined, leaving importers and distributors with months' worth of product, much of it perishable, in storage and in transit with no clear end date for the COVID-19 pandemic." — Reuters

BUSINESS



A hot air balloon with the logo of German energy giant E.ON flies at dawn in Ronda, Malaga, Spain.— Reuters

Coronavirus accelerates European utilities’ digital drive

MILAN: When COVID-19 plunged Italy into lock-down, it was decision time at the Verampio power station. The control room, which runs a fleet of hydroelectric plants across the Piedmont region, hard hit by the pandemic, had to be secured to keep the lights on.

Operator Enel, Europe’s largest utility, moved quickly to create a parallel backup control room at a smaller site 30 kms (18.6 miles) away while also plugging some key workers into the plant’s data base so they could work from home to help keep control.

“We’d never done this sort of thing over a long period of time but it worked instantly,” said Giuseppe Serrecchia, Enel’s head of Global Power Generation Digital Hub.

“To properly respond to the challenges of COVID,

Like companies in other sectors, European utilities are having to speed up the adoption of new technologies as the coronavirus crisis forces them to use software, not people, to steer critical infrastructure including plants and grids.

we’ve boosted our overall digitalization drive.” Like companies in other sectors, European utilities are having to speed up the adoption of new technologies as the coronavirus crisis forces them to use software, not people, to steer critical infrastructure including plants and grids. Consultants say the move was overdue. Spain’s Iberdrola, the world’s second-largest renewables group by

capacity, has set up similar processes to Enel. The pandemic that brought the global economy to its knees has created advantages for businesses immune to shut-downs and restrictions, allowing staff to work remotely and providing technology to keep service flowing. “Utilities that started digital programs before the crisis have been more resilient. In the post-COVID 19 world, many will need to reconsider their technology priorities,” McKinsey said. “Using remote supervision could help grid operators minimise the risk for their workforces while simplifying operations,” the consultancy said. At Germany’s E.ON, Europe’s largest operator of energy networks with 1.56 million kms of power and gas grids, that message has also sunk in.

It has freed up a further 500 million euros (\$591 million), on top of a total 13 billion euros it plans to invest over the next three years, mostly in upgrading its energy infrastructure. The company has increased the use of drones by 50 per cent and relies more on automated image recognition software for the inspection of high-voltage power lines as a direct consequence of the pandemic, officials said. E.ON, which recently completed the takeover of Innogy’s networks and retail activities, is also banking on virtual reality. At subsidiary Bayernwerk, which operates distribution grids in the German state of Bavaria, E.ON has virtually recreated substations to train staff remotely and provide access to partner firms without sending anyone. — Reuters

SPORTS



HAMILTON WELCOMES VERSTAPPEN TITLE FIGHT



RED BULL RISE TO CHALLENGE AFTER DUTCHMAN'S DRAMATIC VICTORY

SILVERSTONE: Lewis Hamilton welcomes the prospect of a Formula One title battle with Max Verstappen following the Dutchman's dramatic victory in Sunday's torrid 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone.

Defending champion and current leader Hamilton, who has a 30-point advantage at the top of the drivers' standings, praised Verstappen and his Red Bull team for inflicting a first defeat on Mercedes in five races this year.

"It's great that Max won," said Hamilton, Speaking in the aftermath of his record-equalling 155th podium finish, in second place.

"As I've said before I want to have races and a challenge. Obviously, the Red

Bull seems to be quite close to us in race conditions, but that's a good thing and it will be interesting to see their progression through the rest of the year.

"I definitely will not overlook them. We will keep a close eye on them. It's not going to be easy by any means."

Hamilton, who shares the podiums record with seven-time world cham-

pion Michael Schumacher, is in pursuit of his own seventh drivers' title this year and also has the German's unrivalled haul of 91 GP wins in his sights.

'DIFFICULT DAY' FOR MERCEDES

However in sweltering conditions on Sunday, Red Bull had not only a superior strategy — by choosing to start Verstappen on hard-compound tyres —

but also a superior level of management of tyre wear, which appears to have become a weakness of Mercedes' otherwise flawless car this year.

Hamilton had only won the British GP at the same track a week earlier after surviving a last-lap puncture as Verstappen closed in.

Mercedes chief Toto Wolff conceded his team had failed to deliver after starting with Valtteri Bottas on pole and Hamilton second in their 67th front row lockout.

Verstappen started fourth and won by 11 seconds, a luxury that afforded him several light-hearted quips on his way to victory and a poor sign for Mercedes heading into the weekend's Spanish GP in Barcelona. — **AFP**

SPORTS

BARCA BACK THEMSELVES AGAINST BAYERN

CATALANS MEET GERMAN CHAMPIONS IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTERS

BARCELONA: Barcelona insist they have as much chance as Bayern Munich of winning their Champions League quarterfinal despite a far from convincing 3-1 win over Napoli on Saturday. First-half goals from Clement Lenglet, Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez sent Barca on their way into the 'Final Eight' tournament in Lisbon where they will face the German champions, who crushed Chelsea 4-1 for a 7-1 aggregate win in their last-16 second leg.

Barca's 4-1 aggregate win over Napoli may have looked resounding on the scoresheet but was anything but, as Gennaro Gattuso's Italian side dominated the second half after Lorenzo Insigne scored at the end of the first.

Still, Barca coach Quique Setien said his side should not be underestimated against Bayern, who swept to a domestic double this season in contrast to the Catalans losing out on the Spanish title and failing to win any other silverware.

"It will be tough for us because they've had an excellent season and dominated their tie. It will be difficult for us but also for them. They are an excellent team, but so are we," Setien said.

Barca striker Luis Suarez added: "In a one-off game anyone has a chance, so it's perfectly balanced, 50/50. Bayern are a great team, one of the candidates to win the competition, but it's 11 versus 11 over 90 minutes."



Barca beat Bayern in the semifinals in 2015, the last year they won the competition, which avenged a 7-0 thrashing on aggregate at the hands of the Germans in the last four in 2013.

The Catalans have been haunted in the last two years of the Champions League by their inability to see out comfortable first leg results, surrendering a 4-1 lead over AS Roma in 2018 and a 3-0 advantage over Liverpool last year.

Midfielder Sergi Roberto said the fact that ties will be played over one match rather than two, due to the competition being rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, means form will count for less.

"Every game is its own different world and that is true now more than ever. There are no favourites in this Champions League, anyone can win or lose a one-off game," he said.

"Every match will feel like a final so we are going to have to be very concentrated."

Former Bayern great Lothar Matthaeus, however, was less complimentary of Barcelona, saying the German champions were the overwhelming favourites to win next Friday's clash.

"Naturally Barcelona have enough quality to produce the best of themselves in one game, but I think Bayern will have to make many mistakes and do many things wrong to lose against this Barcelona," he told Sky Sport Germany. — Reuters





AHF moves 2020 Asian tournaments to next year

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Asian Handball Federation (AHF) has postponed all the 2020 Asian handball championships to the next year. The decision, which was made by the AHF executive committee, is the second such move in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic making another wave with rising case numbers in many countries. The official announcement by AHF is in regard to its top priority for players' safety.

The new rescheduled dates for the 17th edition of Asian Under-19 Handball Championship which serve as qualification event for the 2021 IHF Men's Youth (U19) World Championship will be held during first half of March 2021 instead of the previous dates from October 7 to 15 in Shiraz city, Iran.

The second edition of the 2020 Asian Youth



Beach Handball Championship will be held in February 2021 in Bangkok city, Thailand.

Kazakhstan will host the ninth edition of the Asian Men's Youth Championship in March 2021 while the fifth edition of the Asian Women's Club League Handball Championship will take place in the first half of April 2021 in Kazakhstan as well. The 23rd edition of Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship

is scheduled for the second half of May 2021.

OMAN KEEN FOR GOOD SHOW

The Oman Handball Association (OHA) had sent the confirmation participation letter to the AHF in mid of June to take part in the Asian Under-19 Handball Championship. The Sultanate handball under-19 team with the new coaching staff is keen to register an impressive display at

the Asian championship event with the new coaching staff.

The OHA appointed-coach Adil al Hasani will lead the technical staff of the team with Bader al Tamimi as assistant coach and Jamal al Dughaishi as team manager. Oman were placed in the eighth position in the previous edition of the Asian Under-19 Handball Championship which was hosted in Salalah in 2018.

SPORTS



TALENTED OMANI TEENAGER IMPRESSES AT EUROFORMULA RACES

MUSCAT: Shihab al Habsi, Oman's highly-talented young race driver with his eyes on Formula One, started his belated 2020 race campaign at the Hungaroring last weekend, when he took part in the first two races of the Euroformula (Formula 3) Championship, finishing 10th in the first race and 11th in race two.

Formula One only recently left the Hungaroring (near Budapest, Hungary), before the Euroformula teams arrived to commence practice at the circuit which has a reputation as being very challenging and 'technical', with a twisty/bumpy nature making overtaking difficult.

Shihab had little time to learn the track before the first race of the weekend; a task made doubly difficult as he was also trying to learn about his new Dallara 320 race car at the same time, due to having to remain in Oman until just a few days ago as a result of the worldwide COVID-19 travel restrictions.

However, despite only having a total of 200 kilometres of practice under his belt, as compared to the other competitors, most of whom had over 3,000 kilometres of testing to date, Shihab worked his way up to third at one stage during first qualifying. But ultimately, his lack of familiarity with the car and track, resulted in him starting from the back of the grid for Race One on Saturday. However, a good start,

followed by a determined drive against a strong field, resulted in Shihab finishing in a very creditable 10th position and being awarded one championship point.

'My first start in Euroformula was good and it didn't take long for me to get into a rhythm and start improving my times. I gradually reeled-in drivers in front and was delighted to overtake two other cars in the first half of the race on a track that is difficult to overtake on. I continued to push as fast as I could, but with races only being 17 laps, the chequered flag came out before I could make up any more places. My best lap time was faster than my team-mate and now my first race is under my belt, things will improve quickly' said Shihab.

These sentiments were echoed by race commentators who described Shihab, the youngest driver in the field, as 'a great talent who works well under pressure... and has a reputation for being very intelligent with regards to setting-up the car'.

Sunday dawned with Shihab suffering from constant neck pain as a result of a lack of seat time allowing for his neck to get used to the g-forces throughout the many corners at a circuit dubbed 'Monaco without the walls'. Despite this, Shihab out-qualified his team-mate for Race Two and made changes to the car in readiness for another 17 laps.

SHIHAB'S F3 SEASON GETS OFF IN HUNGARY



FEATURES

Donating blood, planting positivity: Coming together doing selfless acts in the face of COVID-19

So what's keeping the youth of Oman busy in the time of pandemic? Some are utilising technology to accomplish their chores, some are donating blood and some are sharing positivity within their spheres... **p20**

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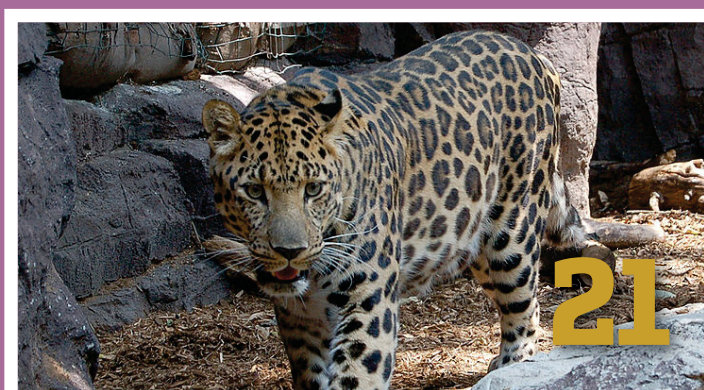
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FEATURES



Donating blood, planting positivity:
Coming together
doing selfless
acts in the face
of COVID-19



KABEER YOUSUF

The Sultanate is on the path to recovery, embracing the new normal and that is visible in the people thinking and planting positive outlook of life and the various blood donation drives conducted in response to a call by the Central Blood Bank, under the Ministry of Health.

The social media campaigns, ‘This too shall pass’ has gained momentum and workplaces, retail outlets, commercial centres and the like are operating as usual within the safety guidelines of the civic authorities.

Phil Taylor, Welsh Government Regional Manager Middle East and North Africa feel what COVID-19 could teach him were how to get even closer to the workplace and accomplish the desired tasks.

“What has been good for me is using the technology, MSTEams, Skype and Zoom for meetings and being able to see more of my colleagues back in Wales than I normally would. It’s brought me closer to the Welsh Government team based in Wales,” Taylor told the Observer.

“One of the important lessons I learned during this Pandemic period is to consciously try to stop stressing over the things which are beyond my control and continue to appreciate the blessings in our lives,” says Salu Jose, Academic Coordinator, Mental Health Nursing Programme, Higher Institute of Health Specialities.

She advocates all of us to practise more of mindfulness, noticing simple things in life, improving our sense of gratitude and thus living our lives to its fullness.

“During these challenging times only I could realise the value of reflecting more on the inner self, need of slowing down a bit in life, human being’s interdependence and finding the true meaning of our lives,” adds Salu Jose.

THE OBSERVER IMPACT:

Inspired by a campaign conducted by the Oman Observer Daily last week, groups of people approached the Central Blood Bank to donate blood to support the hospitals under it to avail sufficient units of blood to meet emergencies.

On Thursday, a group of 30 men under the KMCC Al Khoudh, besides several other associations, visited the Blood Bank to donate.

“We took up the blood scarcity in the country as an issue that needed to be addressed by both locals and expats alike, thanks to the report on Oman Observer Daily, and donated blood”, TP Muneer, an English teacher with a school told the Observer.

His friends Abdul Hameed, Shanahan Thayat, Shahul Hameed Kottayam, Rafi Valiyakath, Mujeeb, Abdul Shukoor Nidal, Hameed, Aboobacker, Hakkim, Faisal, Shabeer, Ashiq, Suhail, and Jabir were also seen in the queue waiting for their turn to be the links in the long chain of people taking part in the national cause.

MINIMALISM, THE NEW MANTRA

Along with various social causes, there is a segment of people who believe that certain values need to be upheld to stay afloat during the Coronavirus period and to survive post-COVID-19.

Smruti Sasidharan, a sales expert, believes that less is more and consumerism is not a necessity post coronavirus. On the other hand, minimalism is the key to sustainability. An intentional effort to spend quality time with your dear ones should be made.

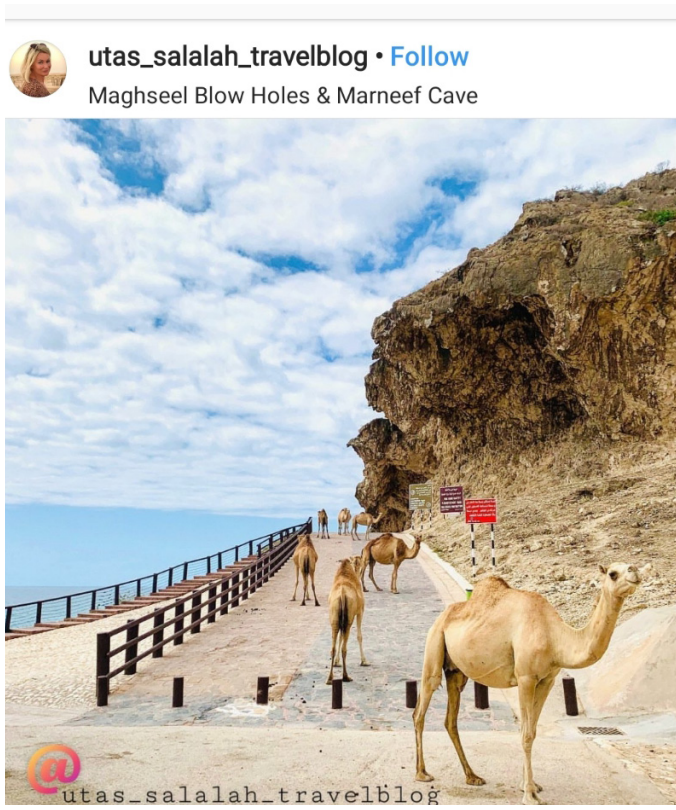
“One should value every second spent with others as it might be the last time you’ll see them and make the best of each day. Stay kind and always learn something new to adapt yourself with an ever-changing world,” said Smruti.

For Noorul Ameen who leads a retired life after his tenure as the General Manager of Korean Fishing Co in Muscat, every adversity is a time to introspection and learn a lesson for a brighter life.

“Although the lockdown would cause a great amount of inconvenience to the general public, we all should be aware of the positive aspects of the decision taken by the authorities. Unfortunately, many citizens in the villages and towns are not fully aware of the positive sides of the temporary lockdown in the long run. Learn to see the silver linings at every challenge,” adds Noor, who has not gone out of the house since March this year.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



IT MAY BE one of the most recognisable symbols of conservation, but efforts to protect the giant panda have failed to safeguard large mammals sharing its habitats, according to research published Monday showing dramatic declines of leopards and other predators.

The giant panda has won the hearts of animal lovers around the world and images of the bamboo-eating creature with its ink-blot eye patches have come to represent global efforts to protect biodiversity.

Since conservation efforts began, China has cracked down on poachers, outlawed the trade in panda hides and mapped out dozens of protected habitats.

The strategy is considered one of the most ambitious and high-profile programmes to save a species from extinction — and it worked.

The panda was removed from the International Union for Conservation of Nature endangered species list in 2016 although it remains “vulnerable”.

But a new study published on Monday in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution has cast doubt over the idea that efforts to protect the panda automatically help all other animals in its territory.

Researchers found that the leopard, snow leopard, wolf and dhole — also known as the Asian wild dog — have almost disappeared from the majority of giant panda protected habitats since the 1960s.

The findings “indicate the insufficiency of giant panda conservation for protecting these large carnivore spe-



Leopards, wolves vanishing from panda conservation areas: study

cies,” said Sheng Li, of the School of Life Sciences at Peking University, who led the research.

The authors compared survey data from the 1950s to 1970s with information from almost 8,000 camera traps taken between 2008 and 2018.

They found that leopards had disappeared from 81 percent of giant panda reserves, snow leopards

from 38 percent, wolves from 77 percent and dholes from 95 percent.

The predators face threats from poachers, logging and disease, the study found.

The authors said a key challenge was that while pandas may have a home range of up to 13 square kilometres (5 square miles), the four large carnivores can roam across an area exceeding 100 square kilo-

metres.

Sheng Li told AFP that individual panda reserves — typically around 300-400 sq km — are too small to support a “viable population of large carnivores like leopards or dholes”.

‘Enormous charisma’

Panda conservation has helped protect other animals, he said, including small carnivores, pheasants and songbirds.

“Failing to safeguard large carnivore species does not erase the power of giant panda as an effective umbrella that has well sheltered many other species,” he added.

But he called for future conservation to see beyond a single species, or animals with “enormous charisma”, to focus on broader restoration of natural habitats.

He said he hoped this can be achieved as part of a proposed new Giant Panda National Park, a long-term programme that would link up existing habitats over thousands of kilometres to allow isolated populations to mingle and potentially breed.

The recovery of large carnivore populations would “increase the resilience and sustainability of the ecosystems not only for giant pandas but also for other wild species”, the researcher added.

The IUCN estimates there are between 500 and 1,000 mature adult pandas in the Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu regions of China.

The conservation group lists the leopard and snow leopard as vulnerable across the areas they are found in, while the dhole is listed as endangered.—AFP

FEATURES



Beethoven's 5th plays at Montreal airport 'drive-in'

MUSIC LOVERS streamed into an airport parking lot, socially distancing in cars to listen to the Montreal Symphony Orchestra play Beethoven, Ravel and Mozart in between flights taking off.

"I normally spend a lot of time either in front of an orchestra or in front of an airport. So we combined the two, it's kinda special," conductor Jacques Lacombe said during an interview Wednesday evening, shortly before the performance.

The Montreal Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is used to playing outdoors — in parks, outside retirement homes, even at the city's Olympic stadium every summer.

But at the end of an airport runway, facing a crowd seated behind car windshields? Not so much.

"This is a first in my career,"

said the conductor, who directs the Mulhouse Symphony Orchestra in eastern France but regularly collaborates with the MSO.

The MSO, one of two major symphonies in Montreal alongside the Orchestre Metropolitain, had not performed in public since March due to the pandemic.

For its eagerly anticipated COVID-era debut, it opted for a drive-in show — a first in Canada according to organizers.

More than 520 carefully spaced cars, their headlights off, packed into a massive parking lot at the Trudeau International Airport west of Montreal in front of a small stage where around fifty musicians performed, each socially distanced from the other.

'BEAUTY IS MISSING'

The performance was broad-

The performance was broadcast on a dedicated FM channel, allowing the music-loving motorists to listen to the concert on their car radio. Two giant screens allowed the back rows to see the stage

cast on a dedicated FM channel, allowing the music-loving motorists to listen to the concert on their car radio. Two giant screens allowed the back rows to see the stage.

In lieu of applause the audience honked car horns and flashed headlights.

Every now and then a jetliner took off behind the stage, drowning out a delicate tune from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, or the opening notes of the adagio from Beethoven's 5th Symphony.

Most of the spectators said they were not bothered by the disruption.

"Airplanes are wow, it's perfect," said Michele Lesieur, a Montreal nurse who came in her small Toyota.

The last concert she went to was all the way at the beginning of the year. "I missed that a lot," she said. "Beauty is miss-

ing right now."

For Lesieur there was only one downside: a very large SUV parked in front of her. "If I had known, I would have paid a little more for better seats," she said.

Ticket prices ranged from Can\$100-\$500 (US\$75-\$375) per car, helping support the symphony after it was forced to cancel dozens of concerts due to restrictions on large public gatherings.

'A MESSAGE OF HOPE'

Yuni Lavoie, a 20-year-old student, and three friends opted for cheap seats, parking their car in the very last row.

"We can't see the stage, there's a car with a roof rack right in front of us," said the young music lover.

But for the price, she didn't mind too much. "We're going to listen on the car radio, it's going to be fun."

A few hundred meters (yards) away, in the first row at the foot of the stage, Rachel and her husband had a breathtaking view of the orchestra. Their ticket was a gift from their children for their 60th wedding anniversary, she explained. "We're happy!"

Spectator Jacques Lacombe found Beethoven's 5th "metaphorical" for the Covid-19 era, particularly in Montreal, the Canadian city hardest hit by infections.

"It is a symphony where man fights against his destiny, it begins in turmoil and oppression and ends with a kind of liberation, jubilation and victory," he explained.

"I hope that this evening's message is a message of hope, that we will return to a certain normality."—AFP