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ESTABLISHED IN 1981

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VOL. 39 NO. 228 | PAGES 22



BEAUTY AT ITS BEST

Mesmerizing beauty of Dhalkut during khareef in Dhofar Governorate. PHOTO BY DR SACHING SINGH

MAJORITY OMANI YOUTH
PREFER ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Majority Omani youth now prefer entrepreneurship to jobs more than ever before, according to the results of a national survey.

Four out of five job-seekers among 78 per cent of Omani youth favour doing their own businesses.

“They have expressed interest in having their own business, and setting up their own projects when the necessary consultations and appropriate financing programmes are available”, says the survey report.

The survey on ‘Youth Attitudes Towards Entrepreneurship’ was conducted by the



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SURVEY REPORT

National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in cooperation with the Ministry of Social

Development.

As for the most important challenges that affect the youth turnout for entrepreneurship, the survey found fear of financial obligations in establishing private enterprises recorded 4.1 out of 10 points, and the challenge from loans provided by relevant financing entities would not be sufficient recorded 3.6 points.

Lack of clarity in the concept and projects of entrepreneurship due to poor definition and promotion recorded 3.3 points.

“The wholesale and retail sector was at the forefront of the most preferred sectors for Omani job-seekers”, reveal the report.

TURN TO P2

Unesco hails
Oman for
enrolment
of students
in schools

PARIS: The 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report, released by the Unesco, praised the Sultanate’s experience in expanding in pre-basic and basic education stages. It affirmed that the high enrollment rate of students in these stages in the Sultanate confirms the success of its efforts to provide education for everyone.

The GEM report also praised the high percentage of students with minimum levels of proficiency in mathematics at secondary schools in the Sultanate, noting that this percentage has increased among girls.

The report said that over the past few months, the impact of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) prevented millions of children and adolescents all over the world from attending schools, which has exacerbated the issue of inequality.

The report further said that with more than 90 per cent of students in the world affected by the closure of schools due to COVID-19, the world is witnessing an unprecedented turmoil in the history of education. In the Arab world, this has deprived 17 million children of education because of poverty, which exposed and deepened inequalities. — **ONA**

Majority Omani youth prefer entrepreneurship

FROM PAGE 1

The survey pointed out that 21 per cent job-seekers believe that the procedures for establishing new projects are easy for some extension, compared to 62 per cent finding the procedures difficult, and 17 per cent were neutral. The highest percentage of people who believed in the ease of procedures has been recorded in the

Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah with 32 per cent. “Approximately one out of four young job-seekers believes that academic studies did not provide them the skills needed for entrepreneurship”, the report points out. About 15 per cent youngsters believe that their studies have provided them with the skills needed significantly, while the largest 62 per

cent stated that they received only “medium level skills”. While 30 per cent preferred to work in the wholesale and retail trade sector if they are able to have their own private business, 8 per cent preferred to work-from-home projects and traditional crafts, in addition to other sectors. The survey showed that the 80 per cent of the males surveyed are

interested in entrepreneurship compared to 76 per cent females. The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah recorded the highest percentage of 84 per cent preference followed by Al Batinah South 82 per cent, while the lowest percentage recorded in the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar with 71 per cent and 74 per cent, respectively.

Health insurance must for tourists

PROMOTE ONLINE REGISTRATION AND CASHLESS TRANSACTION, ADHERE TO SOCIAL DISTANCING

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Tourism has asked travel operators to prepare for the reopening of the tourism sector in the country. Apart from following preventive measures suggested by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19, the ministry said the operators must ensure that travellers have a medical certificate or required permits issued by the competent authorities while coming outside the Sultanate. All reservations shall preferably be made online and the use of paper documents or cash payments should be avoided. The operators should organise excursions in small groups not exceeding 16 persons keeping the mind the need for physical distancing among the tourists. Health insurance will be



mandatory for all tourists before completing the reservation procedures. Following are the other procedures to follow when a tourist arrives in the country: S/he must observe the rules of social distancing and minimise gatherings. At hotel check-in, separate pens should be used for each guest and online registration should be encouraged. It is necessary to register arrival times of the travel groups and offer them clean waiting rooms and water bottles. Care should be taken to reduce the number of people entering the reception area at the same time. Digital thermometers should be provided to drivers for temperature checks of the guests. Guests should keep a safe distance of at least one meter while eating and the buffet system should be replaced with A la carte menu.

SULTANATE’S COVID-19 FIGHT HIGHLIGHTED AT ARAB MEET

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Shaikh Mohammed bin Said al Kalbani, Minister of Social Development, praised the directives of His Majesty the Sultan to offer COVID-19 treatment to all citizens and residents without discrimination. Many medical centres were also opened in various governorates to identify coronavirus patients. The Social Development Minister made this statement during the video conference session of the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers on Sunday. “The Sultanate has handled pandemic with caution. A Supreme Committee was formed to study the spread of this virus, in light of the emerging health data and indicators issued by the WHO. Many decisions were taken to curb the spread of COVID-19 and 69 centres for institutional isolation were set up across the Sultanate, besides 32 similar centers on standby,” the minister said in his speech. “To contain the outbreak of the epidemic, all social and religious activities, and gatherings were suspended. Places of worship, as well as higher education institutions, schools,

rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities, and nurseries closed. At the government level, work has been carried out remotely. The number of employees in offices was reduced to 50 per cent. The same is the case with the private sector. Working hours in the private have been reduced from the beginning of June. Maternal and child health services and vaccinations, however, continued without interruption.” Al Kalbani talked about the efforts to create awareness on social distancing through websites and social media. He mentioned the role of phone counseling for COVID-19 infected patients and their families. Besides, voluntary initiatives and contributions of the private and civil sectors were encouraged. In his speech, the minister praised the role of Omani women during the pandemic in health care and relief operations. “Many initiatives from civil societies, charitable institutions, and community members were organised to help people during lockdown. Aid was given to private sector workers. The number of volunteers (males and females) for delivery of relief reached more than 5,000 volunteers.

WEAR MASK, GLOVES DURING ROP SERVICE VISIT



KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has issued safety guidelines for the people when services resume on Wednesday. The ROP announced last week that services like passport, visa, civil status, and traffic, which were stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic, would now be available from July 1. While all the precautionary measures issued by the Supreme Committee for COVID-19 need to be adhered

USE ELECTRONIC MEANS WHEREVER POSSIBLE: POLICE

to, three measures need priority, according to a statement issued by the ROP. One should wear masks and hand gloves from the moment a person enters the ROP Centre till the time he finishes his work and leaves the premises. Standard two-metre distance between individuals

should be maintained while waiting or being served. Those who are found to be violating the rules will be booked for non-compliance and will be denied access unless they abide by the requirements. However, the ROP also urged people to use electronic services wherever possible and not to visit offices unless necessary. "Using electronic services reduces the rate of infection with COVID-19 and you can also avoid waiting," the statement said.

Omanisation targets set for mining, fisheries

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Minister of Manpower issued two decisions 168/2020 and 169/2020 on Sunday determining the proportion of the national workforce in private sector establishments operating in the fisheries and mining sectors. The ministerial decision 168/2020 determines the percentage of Omanisation in private sector enterprises operating in the fisheries sector. For senior positions it will be 15 per cent in 2020, 20 per cent in 2021, 25 per cent in 2022, 25 per cent in 2023, and 35 per cent in 2024. The ministerial decision 169/2020 determines the percentage of Omanisation in the mining sector – 25 per cent in 2020, 28 per cent in 2021, 31 per cent in 2023, and 35 per cent in 2024. The mining sector jobs include specialists, technicians, skilled workers, semi-skilled workers, and senior positions.

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OMAN

National expert team to work on rain woes in Dhofar

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The Municipal Council of Dhofar Municipality discussed a range of issues including COVID-19, housing design proposals, and most importantly the damages are done to infrastructure following the recent inclement weather that caused extensive damage to roads and wadis (natural canals) in Dhofar Governorate.

The video conference was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

In an interview with the Observer, Dr Ahmed al Ghassani spoke largely on the damages caused by the recent rains and steps being taken to meet any such situation in the future.

“We are working on solutions, both short term, and long term. We are building a national expert team comprising technical and academic experts, and we have decided to invite suggestions from the community through some relevant platforms,” he said. To make the ‘national team’ a broad-based team of experts, the civic body has decided to engage with experts from Sultan Qaboos University and Dhofar University.



PHOTO by Abdulrahim Subait

“We have sent requests to the universities to nominate experts and as soon as we get the right people, we will start working on our future course of action. Our community engagement is vital because we get valuable inputs from them. Based on their suggestions and merit, some members would be selected from the community to be part of the National Experts Team,” Dr Ahmed al Ghassani said.

Commenting on the current status of work, Dr Al Ghassani said, the civic body is currently working on short term solutions under which all the damaged sites

TO WORK HAND IN HAND WITH THE MINISTRY OF REGIONAL MUNICIPALITIES AND WATER RESOURCES (MRMWR) FOR BETTER WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE CATCHMENT AREAS OF DHOFAR

have been identified. “Reasons are being evaluated and our people are working on how to do quick service for the same.”

All these exercises are being weighed for a long term solution to ensure smooth drainage of water in

the future. “For this, the profile of the roads and wadis are being evaluated. If needed we will deepen or widen the wadis to ensure some concrete solution.”

Under its long term plan, the national team of experts would work hand in hand with the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources (MRMWR) for better water management in the catchment areas of Dhofar. “We are committed to protecting Salalah city and the whole of the Dhofar Governorate by evolving a better drainage and water management system,” said Dr Al Ghassani.

NDC conducts Decision-Making 7 exercise

MUSCAT: The annual strategic exercise Decision-Making 7, conducted by the National Defence College (NDC), began on Sunday under the auspices of Maj Gen Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Commandant of NDC.

The seventh edition of the annual exercise comprises participants from various military and security entities as well as civic bodies who have been divided into several groups located in different installations of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in Muscat.

This year the exercise utilised video conferencing to ensure communication between the exercise's control-



lers and the participants and among the participants themselves in line with the precautionary measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Running until July 2, the Decision-



Making strategic exercise serves as a practise to academic studies and the theoretical knowledge the participants have acquired during the course.



Seeb fish market reopens

SEEB: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries on Sunday reopened the fish market in the Wilayat of Seeb after being closed for over three months due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Qartoobi, Director of Fisheries Department in the Wilayat of Seeb, stated that the Seeb fish market has undergone the maintenance required for implementing precautionary measures and safety guidelines set by the authorities to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

These measures include wearing face mask as a mandatory condition for entering the market and disallowing persons with body temperature exceeding 37.5°C. Besides, children under 16 years old and elderly people above 60 years are not allowed into the market while shoppers and vendors are required to observe the 2-metre physical distancing rule.

During the initial phase of reopening, the market will be operating at 30 per cent of its total capacity. Hence, only fishermen, fish vendors and cutters who are residing in Seeb will be allowed into the market. The auction halls will be open from 5 am to 9 am every day except Friday.

— ONA

SalamAir’s special flights to Pakistan

MUSCAT: SalamAir, will be operating special flights to Pakistan starting from Sunday to Karachi (June 28), Sialkot (June 29), Lahore (June 30) and Multan (July 1). “Customers who wish to travel on these flights have to call at 24272222,” the airline said. SalamAir will also operate special flights to Alexandria in Egypt from Salalah on July 30.

Indian expats can now choose their repatriation flights

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Indian expats now can choose their repatriation flights as part of Phase 4 of Vande Bharat Mission. The Indian Embassy in Oman has urged all those who have registered with it to be to resend their information. For details visit <https://forms.gle/K8vdgonkFsTMhVJf7>.

Priority will be given to medical emergency cases, pregnant women, workers in distress, and senior citizens.

Once s/he confirm, the embassy will try and accommodate the passenger in the flight chosen or onboard subsequent flights, provided the passenger meets conditions by the Government of India. Only one individual can use one form and separate



forms need to be filled if family accompanies him or her.

The passengers will have to pay for air tickets and institutional quarantine. Cost of institutional quarantine will be provided by respective state governments after landing.

A total number of 82 flights including 40 chartered services by NGOs and companies have departed from Muscat and Salalah international airports to different cities in India carrying 14,855 passengers.

THERE ARE 16 FLIGHTS SCHEDULED UNDER VBM-PHASE 4:	
Muscat-Kannur,	July 1
Muscat-Trivandrum,	July 1
Muscat-Chennai,	July 2
Muscat Kochi,	July 3
Muscat-Kozhikode,	July 5
Muscat-Trivandrum,	July 5
Muscat-Kochi,	July 6
Muscat-Kochi,	July 8
Muscat-Delhi,	July 9
Muscat-Kannur,	July 10
Muscat-Hyderabad,	July 10
Muscat-Mumbai,	July 11
Muscat-Kochi,	July 12
Muscat-Mangaluru,	July 12
Muscat-Kannur,	July 13
Muscat-Trivandrum,	July 13

In the loving memory of



P.V. Gopalan
12th Anniversary

A

B

C

Advanced
Business
Consultants

Tenders



The Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC ('TANWEER') invites for the following tenders:

Tender No	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer-13/2020	Operation Services for Masirah Power Station SCADA Control Center at Wilayat Masirah in Al Sharqiya South Governorate	60/=	Specialist Companies	9/07/2020	26/07/2020
Tanweer-14/2020	Reinforcement Works for the Existing Network at Wilayat Rakhut and Wilayat Dhalkut in Dhofar Governorate	28/=	"C" and Above	9/06/2020	26/07/2020

The Conditions:

1- Collection of Tender:

Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board, Tanweer and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. haitham.alhumaidi@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number : 24250930.

2- Bank Guarantee:

The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).

3- Offers Submission:

A- Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.

B- Bids shall be provided separately on a CD, along with original cover letters. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD. Bids which do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.

C- Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:

- Tender name and number.
- Tender No. Tanweer -13/2020 to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Tanweer.
- Tender No. Tanweer -14/2020 to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Purchase Committee**, Tanweer.

4- Submission Location:

The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.

5- Tanweer without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

For more information please call: 80077787

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Ministry of
Higher Education

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education announced the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of tenders
15/2020	Upgrading MOHE Cisco IP Telephony	Specialized in providing same service and registered with the Tender Board With Grade, Excellent, First, Second, Third & Fourth.	25 /=RO	6/7/2020	13/7/2020

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on **Monday 29/6/2020** 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


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OMAN

OMAN POST LAUNCHES COMPETITION FOR 50TH NATIONAL DAY STAMPS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: To celebrate the legacy of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman Post has announced a competition to design a collection of commemorative stamps for the 50th National Day, which falls on November 18.

The deadline to submit entries is July 24. The winner will get RO300 per artwork. Artists can submit up to 10 works, using any technique including hand drawing, digital, photo, or mixed media. The artwork should be on eight themes, namely; sustainable development in Oman; solidarity, tolerance and togetherness in Oman; health sector development; women and development in Oman; education development; security and safety; Oman: the oasis of peace; and youth in Oman.

The benevolent rule of the late His Majesty has paved the way for the prosperity of the Sultanate and its people. Oman Post



is celebrating the legacy of this visionary leader who paved the way for the development and progression of the nation, working tirelessly to build a proud country for future generations; one that

enjoys a thriving business environment, robust policies, and incentives all supported by solid and sustainable infrastructure.

Abdulmalik al Balushi, CEO of Oman Post, said, "Guided by the late His

Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman planted the seeds of growth 50 years ago with a dream to create a sophisticated globalised economy and today, it is harvesting a healthy crop that promises continued progress led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

"The 50th National Day marks a very special anniversary as we celebrate the outstanding achievements of our beloved leader, the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. The competition aims to bring to the forefront a long list of milestones throughout Oman's renaissance by presenting them through the eyes of the people and turning them into commemorative stamps that can be enjoyed by all. We have chosen a set of themes that reflect various aspects of the Sultanate's development, including life, society, and the economy, and they will serve to remind us of our remarkable progress and of our prosperous future."

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The partners of the Upgrade programme, which transforms the best graduation projects in the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies into successful start-ups to bring socio-economic benefit to Oman, have organised a virtual event called 'Upgrade Café' last month.

According to Asila bint Saif al Zeidiyah from The Research Council (TRC), the programme consists of three stages. The first stage has been completed and 64 projects have been qualified for the second stage that will soon take place through the Microsoft Teams application.

Upgrade qualifiers get ready for the second stage

During the event, the participants who qualified in the first stage of this year's programme were introduced to presentations on how to present their graduation projects before the jury and become a successful entrepreneur.

Dr Ali al Hashmi, Senior Manager Network Design at Omantel, gave a presentation on the economic effects of the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution, in which he focused on Omantel's efforts in this aspect and the use of the 5G technol-

Winners will get assistance to transform their graduation projects into startups in the Information and Communication Technology sector on topics such as smart cities, Internet of Things, information security, artificial intelligence, big data and block chain.

ogy in different areas of life. He also encouraged the participants to continue with their innovative endeavours as it will help raise the status of the Sultanate.

Upgrade is a competition where winners will be assisted to transform their graduation projects into startups in the Information and Communication Technology sector on topics such as smart cities, Internet of Things, information security, artificial intelligence, big data and block chain.

Trump denies was briefed on Russia-Taliban bounty intelligence

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump denied on Sunday he had been briefed on intelligence that reportedly showed Russia had offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants for killing US soldiers in Afghanistan.

In a pair of early morning tweets, Trump angrily slammed the report by The New York Times as “Probably just another phony Times hit job, just like their failed Russia Hoax.”

“Nobody briefed or told me, @VP Pence, or Chief of Staff @MarkMeadows about the so-called attacks on our troops in Afghanistan by Russians, as reported through an ‘anonymous source’ by the Fake News @nytimes,” he wrote.

“Everybody is denying it and there have not been many attacks on us....”

“Nobody’s been tougher on Russia than the Trump Administration.”

On Friday, the Times reported that US intelligence had concluded that a Russian military intelligence unit offered rewards to Taliban-linked militants to kill troops of the US-led



US troops patrol at an Afghan National Army base in Logar province, Afghanistan. — Reuters file photo

coalition in Afghanistan.

The rewards were purportedly incentives to target US forces as Trump tries to withdraw troops from the conflict-torn country — one of the militants’ key demands — and end America’s longest war.

Citing anonymous officials, The Times said Trump was briefed on the findings in March, but has not decided how to respond.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany on Saturday issued a denial similar to Trump’s but left open the possibility that such intelligence existed.

“This does not speak to the merit of the alleged intelligence but to the inaccuracy of The New York Times story erroneously suggesting that President Trump was briefed on this matter,” McEnany said.

Others were sceptical that Trump would not have been informed of such an explosive conclusion.

“The idea that Trump wouldn’t be briefed on Russia putting a bounty on US troops is even crazier than him being briefed and doing nothing,” Ben Rhodes, a former national security aide to Trump’s predecessor Barack Obama, wrote on Twitter.

— AFP

HK tops the agenda as China’s top lawmakers meet

BEIJING: China's top legislative body met in Beijing on Sunday for the first day of a three-day conference that is expected to expedite the passage of a new national security law for Hong Kong. The National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) added the law to its agenda on Sunday as the meeting convened, Hong Kong's i-Cable News reported, citing Hong Kong delegate to the NPC, IpKwok-him. At the last NPCSC session that concluded on June 20, the national security law also did not appear on the original agenda but was added just as it convened.

Poles choose president in election delayed by virus

WARSAW: Concerns over democratic standards and bread and butter issues top the agenda as Poles vote on Sunday in round one of a tight presidential race that had to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Incumbent Andrzej Duda, 48, is campaigning for re-election in a vote that could determine the future of the right-wing government that supports him. Ten candidates are vying to replace him, but opinion polls show that Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, a liberal from the main Civic Platform (PO) opposition party, will enter a neck-and-neck run-off on July 12.

France pulls plug on country’s oldest nuclear plant

FESSENHEIM, France: France's oldest nuclear power plant will shut down on Tuesday after four decades in operation, to the delight of environmental activists who have long warned of contamination risks, but stoking worry for the local economy.

The Fessenheim plant, opened in 1977 and already three years over its projected 40-year life span, became a target for anti-nuclear campaigners after the catastrophic meltdown at Fukushima in Japan in 2011.

— Agencies

WORLD

America tops 2.5 million virus cases as infections surge



A medical personnel member takes samples on a man at a “walk-in” and “drive-through” coronavirus testing site in Miami Beach, Florida. — AFP

MIAMI: The United States has surpassed 2.5 million coronavirus cases, as efforts to reopen the world’s economic powerhouse were dramatically set back by a surge of new infections in states such as Florida.

Infections are also up in some other parts of the world that have reopened.

The US leads the world in COVID-19 cases by far, accounting for well over a third of the global total of nearly 9.9 million since the virus emerged late last year in China.

On Saturday alone the US recorded more than 43,000 new cases, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. US deaths now exceed 125,000, approximately one-fourth the world total of over 495,000.

The tension between reopening battered economies — efforts pushed in the US by President Donald Trump — and public health is a source of debate in nearly every country. In Iran, which has struggled to curb its outbreak even as it gradually lifted restrictions from April, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said “something must be done” to prevent coronavirus causing economic issues. “But in the

case of negligence and significant spread of the disease, economic problems will increase, too,” he said.

The EU on Saturday pushed back a decision on a list of “safe countries” from which travellers can visit Europe — a list which could exclude the US.

Meanwhile stars including Coldplay, Miley Cyrus and Jennifer Hudson lent support to a European Commission-led drive that raised 6.15 billion euros (\$6.9 billion) to support vaccine research and help make it available to poorer countries.

Some of those countries are still far from reaching their peak in infections, authorities say.

In the Middle East, the governor of Bethlehem announced that the Palestinian city would temporarily close due to rising infections.

While in India, densely populated cities have been particularly hard hit. The country set a daily record on Saturday with 18,500 new cases and 385 deaths. Total infections are at 509,000, with more than 15,600 deaths. The disease also continues to rampage through Latin America, with Peru surpassing 9,000 deaths in total on Saturday. — AFP

IN BRIEF

Cases rise sharply and surpass 200,000 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The number of coronavirus infections in Pakistan surpassed the 200,000 mark on Sunday as authorities imposed restrictions in major cities across the country in a struggle to control the spread of the virus.

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases rose to 202,944 and related deaths reached 4,118. At least 4,072 new cases and 83 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, health ministry data showed on Sunday. More than 92,000 or 45 per cent of people infected have recovered whereas 2,805 are in critical condition at hospitals. Pakistan reported its first coronavirus case on February 26 and is now among the top 15 countries most affected.

Iran to make masks compulsory from next week

TEHRAN: Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that mask-wearing will be mandatory in certain areas as of next week and gave virus-hit provinces the green light to reimpose restrictive measures. The Islamic republic has refrained from enforcing full lockdowns to stop the spread of the COVID-19 disease, and the use of masks and protective equipment has been optional in most areas. Mask-wearing would be “obligatory in covered spaces where there are gatherings”, Rouhani said during a televised meeting of the country’s anti-virus taskforce.

Chinese firm says vaccine candidate shows promise

BEIJING: China National Biotec Group (CNBG) said on Sunday that early human test results for a coronavirus vaccine candidate suggested it could be safe and effective, the second vaccine candidate from the firm to show encouraging results in a clinical trial. The experimental shot, developed by a Beijing-based unit of CNBG, has induced high-level antibodies in all the inoculated participants in a Phase 1/2 clinical trial involving 1,120 healthy people, according to preliminary data of the trial, CNBG said in a posting on the social media platform WeChat, without disclosing specific readings.

— Agencies



A statue of Robert Milligan is being removed by workers outside the Museum of London Docklands near Canary Wharf, London, Britain. — Reuters

CALIFORNIA CONFRONTS ITS RACIST PAST AS STATUES FALL

HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS

Across California, the massive anti-racism protests that have followed the police killing of George Floyd have led to an unprecedented reckoning with public symbols of slavery and oppression. This month, statues have been toppled. Mascots have been changed. A coastal town's Confederate-linked name has been reconsidered. At this moment of global outcry against racism, Californians are saying en masse that, for too long, the state's history has been whitewashed, the ugly parts ignored. Marcus Hunter, chair of African American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, said he thinks the statues are falling at such great

numbers and with less push-back than in years past because white people and others who are not Black are joining the protests and helping pull them down. He also believes that people being forced to stay home during the pandemic could not ignore Floyd's killing and the movement it sparked. "I've been calling this the great pause," Hunter said. "It wasn't just a slowdown. It was 90 days of shelter in place. Either people are going to change America, or it's going to remain the same." In the Antelope Valley, a high school dropped its Rebels mascot, once depicted as a soldier with a Confederate flag. In Kings Canyon National Park, the name of the 255-foot Robert E Lee Tree, a giant sequoia that is one of the world's tallest trees, was removed. — dpa

Cleanliness is part of faith



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Basic cleanliness and hygiene practices are undoubtedly of high significance for the existence of mankind and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. It is attributed that hygiene is two thirds of health and nine-tenth of sickness can be prevented by the right hygiene. Historically, poor hygiene played a vital role in causing several chronic diseases worldwide such as swine flu and dengue fever, a mosquito-borne tropical disease caused by the dengue virus. In hospitals and medical centres, for instance, proper hygiene is so critical to prevent infection and the spread of germs. Likewise, it is equally important in food factories, dairies, restaurants and other places where food is handled on a daily basis to prevent the spread of food-borne illnesses. In this regard, adhering to personal hygiene is a must-to-do practice for all medical staff and those working in food-handling places. However, keeping hygienic shall be a habit of all human beings so they become healthy.

Referring to the current battle with coronavirus over months ago, it has become mandatory to fight the war of hygiene in order to provide a healthy world to current and future generations. Therefore, it has been globally highlighted that personal hygiene is a key weapon to fight the COVID-19 virus. In a bid to avoid catching this virus, people have been advised to maintain cleaning their hands frequently. Negligence of hand washing can easily help transferring germs and bacteria via the mouth or eyes. From a religious perspective, personal hygiene is an essential part of Islam and it is held at high level. Faithfully, Muslims are required to be alert to the environment and wash their hands before meals, prayers and anytime they touch anything contaminated as well as cleaning their body on regular basis. Eventually, washing hands became a common hygiene practice among human beings. Moreover, Ablution, for instance, is an Islamic ritual for cleaning and purification that involves washing hands, feet, face and head before each of the five daily prayers being performed by Muslims. The word ablution comes from the Latin Abluere, which means "to wash away." Back in the Middle Ages, this term referred to the use of liquids for purification in chemistry; it later took on a religious meaning. All the major religions have some rituals of purification including the washing of hands or feet and cleansing of sacred containers or other objects. Hence, cleanliness of all forms is part of faith.

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WATER SECTOR SUBSIDY DIPS TO RO 154M IN 2019



REDUCED ASSISTANCE:
State subsidy to the water sector has been on the downtrend since 2016 when it reached a high of RO 185.7 million.

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Government subsidy paid out to the Sultanate's rapidly expanding water sector declined marginally last year to RO 154.2 million, down from RO 155.9 million a year earlier, according to the Public Authority for Water (Diam).
State subsidy to the water sector has been on the downtrend in recent years in line with Diam's mandate to, among other objectives, dramatically reduce government assistance to the industry. From a high of RO 185.7 million in 2016, it dipped to RO 172.3 million a year later, before sliding to a new low of RO 155.9 million last year.
Commenting on the sector's reduced dependence on government subsidy, Dr Abdul Malik bin Abdullah al Hinai, Chairman of the Board of

Directors, said: "Diam requires subsidy from the government as revenues collected from customers do not match the costs of providing the services. The total amount of subsidy required by Diam has fallen again for 2019 to RO 154 million by 1 per cent. This is now the third successive year that a fall in total subsidy has been achieved."
Dr Al Hinai attributed the subsidy reduction to, among other factors, enhanced operational efficiency of Diam's assets, cost-competitive procurement of water from producers, and reductions in 'unaccounted for water'.
"These savings have been achieved while supplying more water to more customers; the subsidy required per cubic meter delivered was RO 0.93 per cubic meter in 2016 compared to RO 0.51 per cubic meter in 2019.

Diam is confident that this will continue to decrease as a result of further efficiencies being delivered," he stated in the Chairman's foreword to the recently published 2019 Annual Report.
According to Diam, water tariffs set by the government make it near impossible for the state-owned utility to recoup the cost of supplying potable water to its vast customer base. The difference is borne by the government in the form of subsidy.
An estimated 386 million m3 of potable water was distributed through Diam's networks nationwide in 2019, up 6 per cent from the previous year's total volume.
Around 80 per cent of this volume comes from state-owned Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole offtaker of water produced by desalination plants around the coun-

try.
Well-fields account for a further 15 per cent share, while the remaining five per cent comes from small desalination plants catering to remote areas lying outside the coverage areas of the country's main distribution grids.
Diam has also been investing in the development of water distribution networks and expansion of existing ones to cater to the country's growing demand for piped water access.
Capital expenditure soared 30 per cent to RO 81.5 million last year, up from RO 62.8 million in 2018.
The utility also reported a 16 per cent surge in its customer base last year, climbing to 611K accounts, up from 524K in 2018 – the tally bolstered by the transfer of Suhar Municipality's water distribution assets to Diam's jurisdiction.

NEW REGULATIONS TO SUSTAIN GROWTH OF OMAN'S AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY

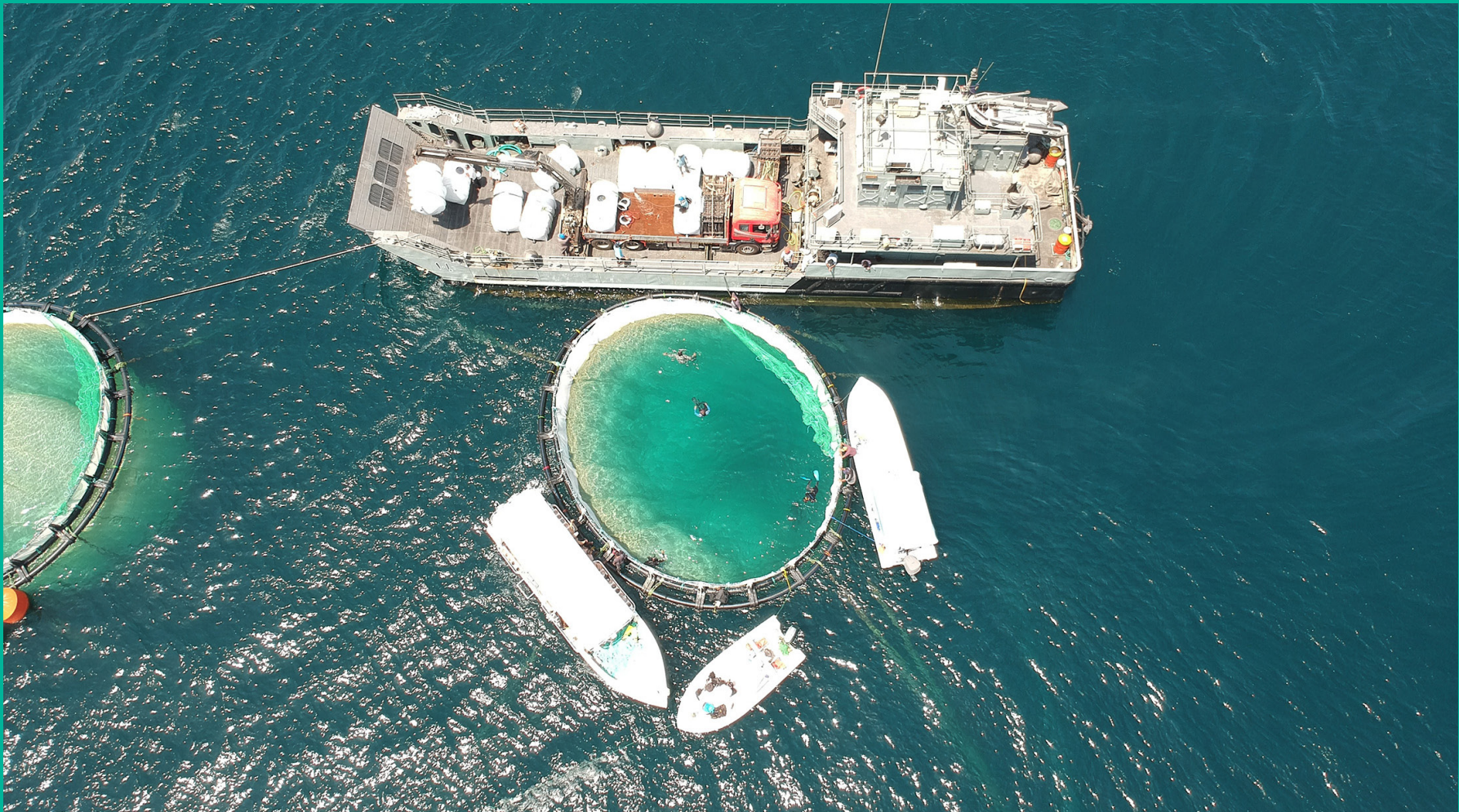
CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: With fish farming projects worth several hundred million dollars in the pipeline, Oman's authorities are developing new regulations to secure the health of this newly emerging industry, output from which is projected to surpass conventional fishing in volume and value terms within the next two decades.

Currently under formulation is a new National Aquaculture Health Management framework – an initiative being developed with the support of the UK-based Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences (CEFAS). The underlying goal is to ensure the long-term sustainable development of the aquaculture sector, says the Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit (ISFU), a special task force set up within the Diwan of Royal Court to speed up the delivery of projects and initiatives deemed to accelerate Oman's economic diversification.

"With several large-scale aquaculture projects either under construction or in the development stages in Oman, the country is getting set to establish itself as an important player in the rapidly-evolving global aquaculture market.

At the same time, the Sultanate realises that aquafarming operations need to be carefully managed and under a rigorous set of regulations to avoid potential drawbacks, such as loss in stock due to disease outbreaks. Therefore, to ensure the long-term sustainable development



ROBUST AMBITIONS:

A 30-year master-plan for aquaculture development targets an output of around 200,000 metric tonnes per annum of farmed fish by the year 2040, alongside the creation of some 11,000 jobs for Omanis.

of the sector, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries collaborated with CEFAS in 2019 to build a new regulation plan for the aquaculture industry in Oman," ISFU explained in its 2019 Annual Report published here recently.

CEFAS is an executive agency of the British government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It specialises in carrying out a wide range of research, advisory, consultancy, monitoring and training activities for a large number of customers around the world.

Significantly, the Ministry's current 30-year master-plan for aquaculture development targets an output of around 200,000 metric tonnes per annum of farmed fish by the year 2040, alongside the creation of some 11,000 jobs for Omanis.

However, going by the robust investment interest garnered thus far in the sector, Oman is likely to achieve a production of 290,000 metric tonnes of farmed fish by 2030, surpassing targets envisioned in the master-plan. Types of fish identified for intensive farming in the Sultanate include shrimp, sea bream, sea bass, grouper, abalone and seaweed, among other species, say experts.

Just last week, the biggest of Oman's investors in the aquaculture industry – Oman Investment Authority (OIA), representing an amalgam of wealth funds and state-owned enterprises – announced the creation of an integrated entity to oversee its burgeoning portfolio of aquaculture projects.

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), resulting from the consolidation of

OIA-owned Blue Water, Al Wusta Fishery Industries, and Oceanic Shrimp Aquaculture, is overseeing the development of a mega projects the flagship of which is the Barr Al Hikman Shrimp Aquaculture Farm.

Covering an area of 40,000 hectares, it is expected to be one of the largest in the world with an estimated production capacity of 200,000 tonnes of shrimp annually. Other equally promising investments are ongoing in abalone and other fin-fish based farm projects.

Ahead of the roll-out of the new National Aquaculture Health Management regulations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has commenced the process of building adequate capacity within the industry to support the implementation of the measures when they eventually come into force. Existing labs of the Ministry are proposed to be upgraded as well to bring them into line with the new regulations, the ISFU report added.

BUSINESS

19.5pc fall in real estate deals in May

MUSCAT: The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate till the end of May 2020 fell 19.5 per cent to reach RO878.9 million, down from RO 1.091 billion for the same period of 2019, according to National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

The number of plots issued until the end of May 2020 was 58,362, representing a drop of 38 per cent last year's tally of 94,171 plots. Of the total value of transactions, the share of sales con-



tracts was RO 283.7 million, while RO586 million came from mortgage deals.

As many as 15,949 sales contracts were executed during the first five months of this year, against 25,322 contracts during the same period of 2019. However, the total number of mortgage contracts fell by 39.7 per cent to 4,146 deals against 6,875 contracts in 2019.

The Sultanate's government collected RO22.5 million in real estate transac-

tion fees during Jan – May 2020, representing a drop of 40.8 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

NCSI data reveals a 8.4 per cent fall in traded value of exchange (barter) contracts this year amounting to RO9.2 million, as against RO 10 million posted in the comparable period of 2019.

The number of plots allocated to GCC citizens fell by 61.4 per cent to reach 167 plots compared to 433 plots during the same period of 2019.

Ahli Bank enters partnership with Dhofar Insurance

MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to provide a diverse bundle of banking and financial products and services to existing, as well as new customers across the Sultanate, Ahli Bank, the Sultanate's leading banking and financial institute, has entered into a strategic alliance with Dhofar Insurance Company, a market leader with strong expertise and proven track record. Under the partnership, Ahli Bank will offer its customers retail products of Dhofar Insurance Company including: Motor, Travel, PA and others under its 'Bancassurance' portfolio.

Commenting on the strategic tie-up, Hana Fahad al Hinaï – DGM Retail Banking from Ahli Bank mentioned, "We are pleased to collaborate with the Dhofar Insurance Company. We believe that our customers' needs are continuously evolving and becoming increasingly more sophisticated. As service providers, it is hence imperative for us to look for the best ways to provide comprehensive and flexible solutions to meet these constantly changing needs and requirements."

Omar Ahmed al Shaikh - Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Dhofar Insurance Company said, "At Dhofar Insurance, we have always believed in expanding our horizons by forging strategic partnerships. We are hence delighted to associate with one of the sultanate's leading, fastest growing banks to sell our motor, travel and personal accident insurance products. Ahli Bank enjoys a large and growing customer base, which is the perfect target segment for our insurance products. We hope to tap into this segment with the help and support offered by the Bank."



Sharakah, Green Line join hands to support training

MUSCAT: Green Line Training Institute in Bausher has provided vocational training for 170 Omanis in mechanical maintenance, pumps and compressors maintenance, lathing and metal forming and machine operations during the 2019 – 2020 timeframe.

It follows financial and consultancy assistance provided by the Fund for Development of Youth Projects (Sharakah) in line with its continuing support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), besides empowering entrepreneurial skills in the Sultanate, thereby creating job opportunities for Omani youth.

Muaath Ali al Shihi, Investment Analyst in Sharakah said: "Green Line Training Institute supports Oman's vision to empower to youth by boosting their employability in the private sector and thereby easing its dependence on expat labour."



'New Volkswagen' unveiled

MUSCAT: Volkswagen Middle East reveals its new brand design and logo to the region, through the creation of a piece of artwork which encapsulates the new attitude of the brand. This comes as part of Volkswagen's brand realignment globally, one of the world's largest rebranding campaigns in the industry.

To unveil the 'New Volkswagen' in this region, Volkswagen Middle East partnered with long-term-UAE-based artist Maddy Butcher to create an artistic take on the new Volkswagen era – intro-



ducing it to the region in a powerful, contemporary and creative way. Inspired by the automotive brand's forward-thinking attitude, the artist has produced an energetic mural entitled "Kinetic", which combines the vibrant new brand palette and tone with some of the most recognizable features of its vehicles, such as the honeycomb grill, wheels and the new logo.

IMF WARNS OF \$12 TRILLION HIT TO ECONOMY FROM VIRUS

The coronavirus pandemic will trigger the biggest hit to global growth since the Great Depression and cost the global economy an estimated \$12 trillion, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said. The virus is causing wider and deeper damage to the global economy than first thought, the organisation said as it slashed its global output forecasts further.

The IMF now expects global output to shrink 4.9 per cent in 2020. In April, the organisation had predicted a three per cent contraction. The UK economy is now on course to shrink 10.2 per cent in 2020, the Fund said. In April, it had forecast a contraction of 6.5 per cent for the year.

IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said: "The COVID-19 pandemic pushed economies into a Great Lockdown, which helped contain the virus and save lives, but also



ANDY JALIL

andyjalil@aol.com

triggered the worst recession since the Great Depression."

Gopinath added that while some countries were starting to recover from the economic hit as lockdowns were eased, "in the absence of a medical solution, the strength of the recovery is highly uncertain and the impact on sectors and countries uneven".

She said that the Fund's downgrades on its April forecasts "reflects worse than anticipated outcomes in the first half of this year, an expectation of more persistent social distancing into the second half of this year, and damage to supply potential".

Describing the economic downturn triggered by

COVID-19 as "a crisis like no other", the Fund revised down growth projections for every G7 industrial nation as well all leading developing nations. The IMF said it would take two years for global output to return to the levels seen at the end of 2019.

Recovery in 2021 also will be weaker, the IMF said, updating its global growth forecast at 5.4 per cent for the year compared to 5.8 per cent in its April forecast. It said, however, that a major new outbreak in 2021 could shrink the year's growth to a barely perceptible 0.5 per cent.

The IMF said that more policy actions from governments and central banks would be needed to support

jobs and businesses to limit further damage and set the stage for recovery.

Global stocks had plunged further into the red last week as fears of a second wave of the pandemic mounted and investors worried about a slowdown in the global economic recovery.

The FTSE 100 closed down 3.11 per cent as growing numbers of new infections compounded fears over a second wave of cases, sending jitters through equity markets. The FTSE 100's losses follow some concerning coronavirus case figures from the US.

UK health experts called for an urgent review to prepare the public for a second wave of Covid-19 infections. In an open letter, the experts pressed the government to act in order to prevent more coronavirus deaths and economic damage if a second wave occurs during winter.

Shumookh to invest in fintech, hydroponics

MUSCAT: Shumookh Industrial Development Fund (SIDF) has signed two investment agreements totalling around RO 700,000 as part of its support for Omani SMEs and enhancing their growth competency. The agreements were signed with Trust FinTech (TFT) LLC and AlManjam Agricultural Development LLC.

The first agreement was signed by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chairman of Shumookh Industrial Development Fund (SIDF), and Ahmed al Rahbi, Chief Operating Officer of Trust FinTech. Shumookh Industrial Development Fund is partnering with Trust FinTech (TFT) by investing in the equity of the company and taking 15



per cent of the stake. This will be the first of its kind strategic cooperation for the financial technology supporting company in Oman. TFT as a Fintech company works in developing, managing, and operating financial mobile solutions for its clients.

The second agreement between Shumookh Industrial Development Fund and Al Manjam

Agricultural Development was signed by Hilal al Hasani, Chairman of SIDF, and Khalid al Habsi, Chief Operating Officer of Al Manjam Agricultural Development.

The two parties have partnered to form a new entity which will invest in a project that plans to grow fruits and vegetables using hydroponics method in a completely controlled

environment. Al Hasani stated that the Fund has agreed to form a strategic alliance with the promotor to form an agricultural company in order to work towards achieving self-sufficiency in food sector and in a long run support of food security in the Sultanate.

Shumookh Investment and Services, the investment arm of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn, established Shumookh Industrial Development Fund (SIDF) in cooperation with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) with the aim of investing in companies associated with the industrial cities in the Sultanate.

BUSINESS



A man talks on his mobile phone beside Huawei's billboard featuring 5G technology at the PT Expo in Beijing. — Reuters

Huawei controversy opens field for 5G challengers

TOKYO: With growing pressure to keep China's Huawei out of 5G network development, it could be time for firms like Japan's NEC and South Korea's Samsung to shine.

Washington has pushed allies to bar Huawei, a Chinese telecom giant, from building next-generation 5G mobile networks, claiming its equipment can be used to spy for Beijing.

Huawei denies the charges, but US pressure has prompted an about-turn in Britain.

The government had already pledged to cut the firm out of the most sensitive "core" elements of 5G that access personal data, and is now reportedly pushing for plans to end Huawei's involvement in Britain's 5G infrastructure by 2023.

But excluding Huawei is not without challenges, because there are currently only two alternatives in Europe for 5G equipment such as antennas and relay masts: Finland's Nokia and Sweden's Ericsson.

But excluding Huawei is not without challenges, because there are currently only two alternatives in Europe for 5G equipment such as antennas and relay masts: Finland's Nokia and Sweden's Ericsson.

Britain has encouraged Washington to form a club of 10 democratic nations that could develop its own 5G technology, but there has been little movement so far.

"The vast majority of the commercial networks sold in the world come from the big three," said Sylvain Chevallier, in charge of telecoms at BearingPoint consultancy, referring to Huawei,

Nokia and Ericsson.

"But a world of three is not good for operators, and if it goes down to two it will be worse still," he said.

That leaves a tempting potential opening for telecoms firms like Samsung and NEC. But building a successful 5G network is no simple task.

That is a lesson Samsung has already learned. Despite being a major player in 3G, it found itself unable to compete with the big three on 4G and struggled to win commercial contracts.

"This has been a challenge for Samsung," said

Daryl Schoolar, a mobile technology specialist at consulting group Omdia.

In building its 5G network, Samsung has so far focused on North America and parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

"So while operators may feel uncertain about Samsung Networks, they are much further along in the process of being a global presence than NEC," Schoolar added.

NEC does have some advantages, including a partnership in Japan with mobile operator Rakuten.

The firms have already cooperated on a 4G network and are now jointly developing a 5G system.

The Japanese firm is also a leader on under-sea cables, fibre optic networks and — thanks to its affiliate Netcracker — logistics management software. — AFP



CARLOS

LEADS US CALL FOR SCRAPPING OF PROTEST BAN

LOS ANGELES: John Carlos, one of the two American Olympians who famously gave the Black Power salute on the podium at the 1968 Mexico Games, is leading a call for rules banning athlete protests at the Olympics to be scrapped.

The 75-year-old former sprinter on Saturday joined with active American athletes to send a letter to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) calling for the abolition of Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter, which bans political protests.

"Athletes will no longer be silenced," read the letter signed by Carlos and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee's Athletes' Advisory Council (USOPC AAC).

"We are now at a crossroads. The IOC and IPC cannot continue on the path of punishing or removing athletes who speak up for what they believe in, especially when those beliefs exemplify the goals of Olympism."

Many sports organisations have embraced the Black Lives Matters campaign in recent months with players kneeling before competition

“

"Athletes will no longer be silenced. We are now at a crossroads. The IOC and IPC cannot continue on the path of punishing or removing athletes who speak up for what they believe in, especially when those beliefs exemplify the goals of Olympism."

LETTER SIGNED BY CARLOS AND USOPC AAC

in sympathy with anti-racism protests. Under Rule 50, that would not be allowed at next year's Tokyo Olympics.

The IOC said earlier this month that it would consult with athletes to "explore different ways for athletes to express support for the principles enshrined in the Olympic charter in

a dignified way".

Carlos, who had won bronze in the 200 metres, was expelled from the Mexico Olympics with gold medallist Tommie Smith after they raised their fists and lowered their heads during the playing of the US national anthem.

"The Olympic and Paralympic movement simultaneously honors athletes like John Carlos and Tommie Smith ... while prohibiting current athletes from following in their footsteps," the USPOC AAC letter continued.

"Carlos and Smith risked everything to stand for human rights and what they believed in, and they continue to inspire generation after generation to do the same."

"Carlos and Smith risked everything to stand for human rights and what they believed in, and they continue to inspire generation after generation to do the same."

"Aligning with such principles will allow athletes to give the world hope beyond sport - hope that voices matter and are a powerful tool for change," it said. — **Reuters**

SPORTS

IDEA FOR LEBRON'S 'THE DECISION' CAME FROM FAN

NEW YORK: Nearly 10 years after LeBron James announced his decision to play for the Miami Heat on a live show on ESPN titled "The Decision," the network revealed on Saturday that the idea for the show actually came from a fan.

There have long been rumours that a fan actually came up with the idea, as a person identified only as "Drew" from Columbus, Ohio, proposed the show in a mailbag column published by then-ESPN writer Bill Simmons. That column ran November 26, 2009 — more than seventh months before "The Decision" aired on July 8, 2010.

During "The Decision"

broadcast, a then-25-year-old James infamously proclaimed, "I'm going to take my talents to South Beach" — an instant punchline that lives on in sports lore today. In fact, the revelation of Drew from Columbus comes as ESPN prepares to air a look back at "The Decision" on Sunday night.

For a story published on Saturday, ESPN reached Drew — 38-year-old Drew Wagner, who is actually a Detroit Pistons fan — and he confirmed the idea was his.

"That was me," Wagner told ESPN in a phone interview on Friday. "I sent that email, it's posted by Simmons, and then seven months later, it's the biggest story

in sports."

"I remember everyone was talking about where LeBron would go, and it seemed to me that LeBron should do the same thing these kids do and announce it live on TV," Wagner added. "I used to enjoy those Simmons mailbags quite a bit, and I thought it would be a fun idea to send it."

Wagner's initial pitch had suggested a televised show called "LeBron's Choice," while Simmons proposed in his column that it be called "Decision 2010: LeBron's Verdict." Simmons emailed ESPN executives about the idea to televise James' announcement in May of 2010, but did not mention Wagner in that email. — **Reuters**

“

I remember everyone was talking about where LeBron would go, and it seemed to me that LeBron should do the same thing these kids do and announce it live on TV," Wagner added. "I used to enjoy those Simmons mailbags quite a bit, and I thought it would be a fun idea to send it."

DREW WAGNER,
DETROIT PISTONS
FAN





POIRIER OUTLASTS HOOKER IN HIGHLIGHT BOUT AT UFC FIGHT NIGHT

LAS VEGAS, US: Dustin Poirier absorbed several heavy blows but delivered a few more on Saturday night, ultimately outlasting Dan Hooker for a unanimous decision victory in a "fight of the year" candidate in the main event at UFC Fight Night in Las Vegas.

Poirier (26-6) and Hooker (20-9) boxed at an incredible pace throughout the first two rounds, both remaining standing despite being rocked multiple times. Hooker nearly ended it late in Round 2, after both fighters had already been bloodied, but Poirier slowly took control down the stretch. He showed his conditioning in an



It was a tough one man. Dan came to fight. He's a tough guy on the rise.

DUSTIN POIRIER,
US

impressive final round to claim scores of 48-47 from two judges and 48-46 from the third.

It was Poirier's first bout since he lost via rear-naked choke to Khabib Nurmagomedov in a lightweight championship bout in September of 2019, the

longest time between fights in his career. In October, he had hip surgery that kept him from bearing weight on his leg for eight weeks.

But the 31-year-old proved he had the stamina to go the distance, saying afterward that he "had a few more rounds left in me."

"It was a tough one man," Poirier said. "Dan came to fight. He's a tough guy on the rise."

Hooker, a 6-foot, 30-year-old from New Zealand, caught the 5-foot-9 Poirier with a knee to the head late in the second round and followed with a series of punches to the head of his shaken opponent.

Poirier, who somehow

remained standing, said afterward that the knee caused him to "flash out for a second," and that he "came to" while being hit and didn't know how much time was left in the round. The horn sounded just seconds later, perhaps saving him from a technical knockout.

In Rounds 3 and 4, Hooker managed takedowns and did some damage, but Poirier fought back with near-misses on a few submission attempts, including guillotine chokes and an arm bar. He also landed sharp elbows in Round 3 and punches from behind while controlling Hooker's back in Round 4. — **Reuters**

SPORTS

TODD CHARGES
INTO LEAD
WITH 61 AT
TRAVELERS

CONNECTICUT, US: Brendon Todd drilled nine birdies and carded a career low nine-under 61 to take a two-stroke lead in the third round of the Travelers Championship in Cromwell, Connecticut on Saturday.

Todd's error-free round positioned him atop the leaderboard at 18-under for the tournament as the 34-year-old American continues his quest for his third win this season and fourth overall.

Todd has found his game at TPC River Highlands after missing the cut in his previous two starts on the PGA Tour, which resumed earlier this month following a three-month layoff due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Whenever I get a two or three-week stretch in a row, I tend to be playing better by the end of it," he told reporters.

"I'm peaking in the third week and

hopefully I can get it done tomorrow." Lurking two strokes behind is former world number one Dustin Johnson, whose deft iron play helped produce a career low nine-under 61 on Saturday, good for sole possession of second place.

"I felt like I gave myself really good birdie opportunities on every hole," Johnson said.

Todd said he was looking forward to being paired with Johnson for the final round of the tournament, where no fans are in attendance.

"He's easy to play with, nice guy, doesn't show too much emotion out there," Todd said.

"So I think we're going to have a really good time and probably a really good battle. "It seems like he's starting to play really well and make some putts and we're both kind of peaking this week at the same time, so hopefully we can both go low."

— Reuters



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF SPORTS AFFAIRS
TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Sports Affairs, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
1/2020	Construction	TENDER DOCUMENT FOR REFURBISHMENT WORK TO PUBLIC AND V.I.P TOILET BLOCKS IN MAIN STADIUM AT SULTAN QABOOS SPORTS COMPLEX, BAUSHER	25/-	Second
2/2020	Construction	GENERAL MAINTENANCE OF GRANDSTAND WITH UNDERCROFT FACILITIES AND SPORTS HALL AT MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB	25/-	Second
3/2020	Services	RENOVATION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH WITH AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION FOR MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB	25/-	First & Second
4/2020	Services	CONSTRUCTION OF SYNTHETIC TURF FOOTBALL PITCH AND FLOODLIGHT TO MAIN GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB	25/-	First & Second
5/2020	Services	CONSTRUCTION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH AT MAJEES SPORT CLUB	25/-	First & Second
6/2020	Services	RENOVATION OF EXISTING GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH AT MAJEES SPORT CLUB	25/-	First & Second

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 09/07/2020.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 9:00am 10/08/2020.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF SPORTS AFFAIRS

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

FEATURES

GETTING ENGAGED WITH THE RING BUSINESS

Owning a couple of rings in his younger days and wondering whether what he has was original or fake spurred Gaith al Saifi's passion for quality rings. Now the proud owner of Al Saifi Rings, find out how he turned his passion for the bling to become a profitable business ... **page 20**



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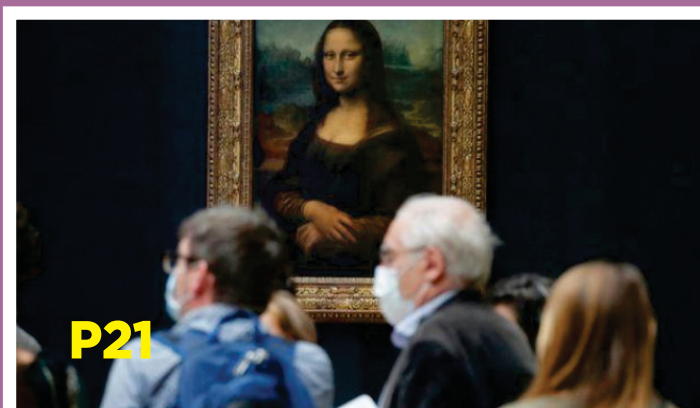
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Arctic, climate scientists say**



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Getting engaged with the ring business

RUQAYA AL KINDI

It is quite unusual to find someone who is extremely passionate about rings and gemstones; the kind of passion that forces someone to travel in search of the finest types of gemstones and investing on gadgets and devices that detect the original from the fake ones. For Gaith al Saifi, it all started with a couple of rings.

Gaith started with the ring business when he found himself allured with the couple of rings he has. He kept staring at them mesmerized by the complexity and the beauty of the carved gemstones at the same time wondering how they get their unique shine, colour and sparkle.

His initial infatuation with the beauty of rings prompted him to sell them online. Through WhatsApp, he started selling the rings and by the weeks, noticed that the demands increased.

Gaith is only 26 years old and quite ambitious but he has never imagined he would take the path of entrepreneurship. From his early beginnings of transacting business via social media, his patrons would form the base of his current business endeavour, the “Al Saifi Rings” – a store that attracts many visitors daily. The hundreds of displayed silver rings and gemstones in his store had become unmatched.

“I started working in a silver and gemstone store in 2013 to learn the secrets of the profession as much as possible,” he said. He then expanded his knowledge getting more engaged in the world of crafting and detailing rings.

As his knowledge grew, he also started to buy and acquire a large

number of gemstones and this would spur the full business.

“To be real, in the beginning, I never thought of it as a trade. I developed it as a hobby. My elder brother, Mukhtar, who was always the wiser one, pushed me to use my Instagram account to advertise what I have in my collection. Mukhtar kindled the spark and I responded,” he said.

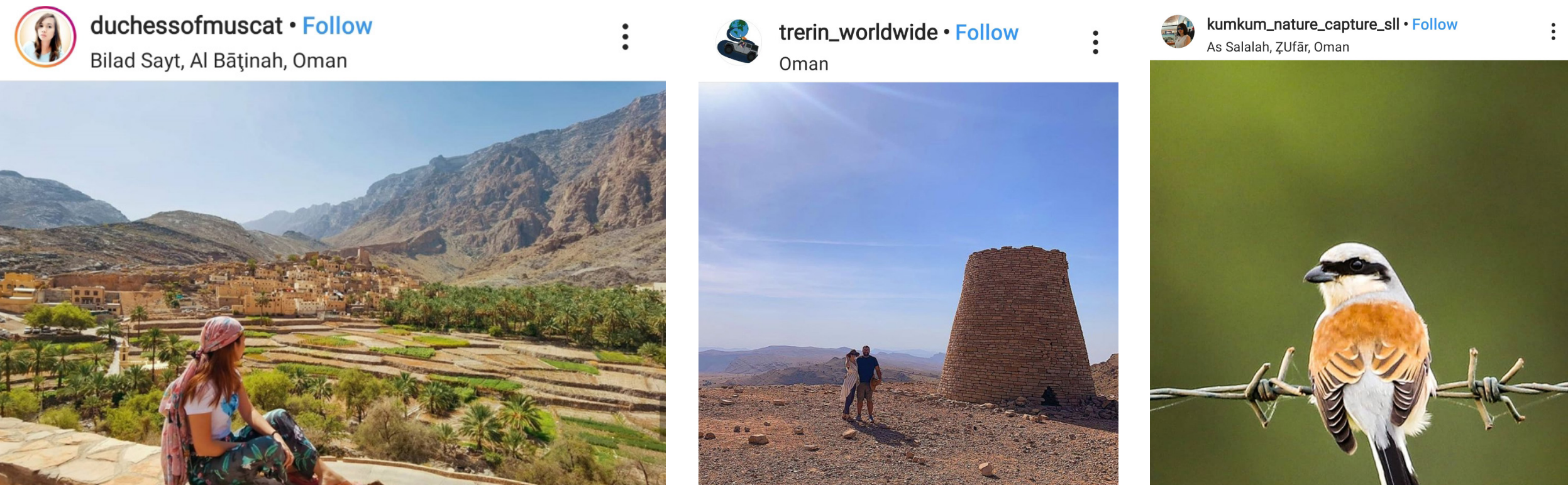
“Alsaifi_rings” store was opened in July 2019 and currently houses more than 1,800 men rings, with various gemstones of agate, sapphire, opal, emerald, zircon, turquoise ... etc,” he shared.

Gaith always makes sure that the quality of the product he provides is perfect. “The best way to know the quality is through a laboratory examination. There are two local laboratories in Muscat for testing the stones,” he said.

“I was able to form reliable relationships with jewellers and suppliers around the world (Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Australia, Yemen, Turkey) to provide stones through social media platforms. These platforms help me in forming relationships, but gaining trust comes with experience. I have experienced many fraud attempts, but every experience carries a lesson,” he said.

Every profession involves challenges, and Gaith's path was not a paved one. “My biggest challenge from the beginning was capital. Jewellery, in general, is very expensive and providing the rare ones is difficult. Working in such a challenging field will certainly require wide feasibility study and continuous efforts to keep in track,” he pointed out.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Grief over virus deaths sets Hungarian artist on darker course

HUNGARIAN ARTIST Jozsef Szurcsik lost four of his friends in a matter of weeks to COVID-19 and the tremendous pain and grief he feels has transformed his art.

“I have four friends who were important to me, there are four people whose passing away is very shocking... If this epidemic had not happened they could have been with us for a long time,” he said.

He can still hardly talk about his loss. One of his friends who died was little over 40 years old.

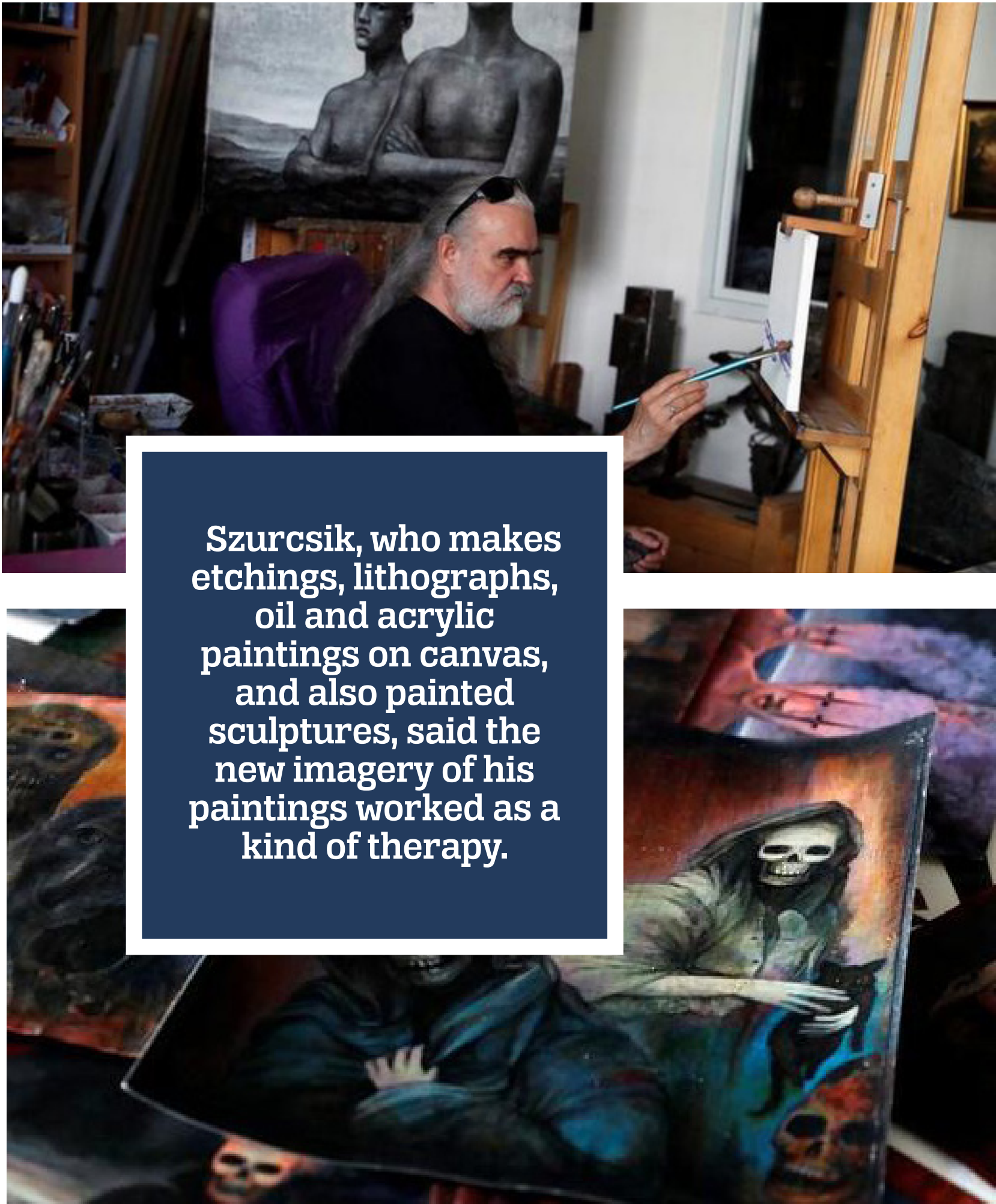
Hungary, which has a population of around 10 million, had recorded 4,079 cases of COVID-19 as of Thursday, including 568 deaths.

Szurcsik, who makes etchings, lithographs, oil and acrylic paintings on canvas, and also painted sculptures, said the new imagery of his paintings worked as a kind of therapy.

“I did not want to visualize a concrete figure, far from it... and still there are figures who resemble those whom I will not meet anymore,” he said.

He said society is split between those who belittle or even doubt the seriousness of the coronavirus, and those who believe it is a deadly reality.

“There are those who deny the virus and those who believe in it, experiencing on their own skin and through their losses... staying alive but suffering the pain.” — **Reuters**



FEATURES



Siberian heat wave is a ‘warning cry’ from the Arctic, climate scientists say

PINE TREES are bursting into flames. Boggy peatlands are tinderbox dry. And towns in northern Russia are sweltering under conditions more typical of the tropics.

Reports of record-breaking Arctic heat – registered at more than 100 Fahrenheit (38 Celsius) in the Siberian town of Verkhoyansk on June 20 – are still being verified by the World Meteorological Organization. But even without that confirmation, experts at the global weather agency are worried by satellite images showing that much of the Russian Arctic is in the red.

That extreme heat is fanning the unusual extent of wildfires across the remote, boreal forest and tundra that blankets northern Russia. Those blazes have in turn ignited normally water-logged peatlands.

Scientists fear the blazes are early signs of drier conditions to come, with more frequent wildfires releasing stores of carbon from peatland and forests that will increase the amount of planet-warming greenhouse gases in the air.

“This is what this heat wave is

doing: It makes much more fuel available to burn, not just vegetation, but the soil as well,” said Thomas Smith, an environmental geographer at the London School of Economics. “It’s one of many vicious circles that we see in the Arctic that exacerbate climate change.”

Satellite records for the region starting in 2003 suggest there has been a dramatic jump in emissions from Arctic fires during just the last two summers, with the combined emissions released in June 2019 and June 2020 greater than during all of the June months in 2003-2018 put together, Smith said.

Atmospheric records dating back more than a century show Arctic air temperatures also reaching new highs in recent years. That leads Smith to believe the scale of the fires could be unprecedented as well.

“What we’re seeing happening right now is the consequence of the past” industrial emissions, Smith says. “What will happen in 40 years’ time is already locked in. We can’t do anything about that. That’s why we should be concerned; it can only get worse.”

Smoke rises from wildfires near Berezovka River in Russia in this June 23, 2020 color infrared image supplied by Maxar Technologies. Image taken June 23, 2020. Satellite image ©2020 Maxar Technologies via REUTERS

Although peatland covers only 3% of the Earth’s land surface, those deposits contain twice as much carbon as all the world’s forests together.

A NEW NORMAL

Scientists have known climate change is causing the Arctic to warm twice as quickly as the rest of the world, and the Siberian heat wave, which began in May, is typical of that trend.

“It becomes like an oven,” said Walt Meier, a senior research scientist at the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado who specialises in sea ice. “You are doing that on top of the longer-term warming trend, so you are getting the oven nicely baking a pie to scorching it.”

“What used to be extreme is becoming normal. Warmer temperatures are now relatively frequent,” Meier said.—**Reuters**