

NEW GUIDELINES FOR INDIANS RETURNING TO TAMIL NADU

Indian nationals living in Oman and other countries who are returning to Tamil Nadu will need to follow the new testing procedures put in place by the government. All passengers who have shown symptoms of COVID-19, and have travelled overseas in the last 14 days must also get tested. **>A3**



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MINISTRY OFFERS INCENTIVES FOR MANGO, DATE PALM ORCHARDS

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has announced its desire to establish orchards of fruit trees. The plan also includes plantation of several varieties of mango and Omani lemon trees in the governorates. **>A5**



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International Day of Charity

OMR2.4MN RAISED FOR CHARITIES WITH CALL FOR MORE DONATION

During the period of the pandemic, there has been a huge rise in individual donations

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Charities in Oman have called for people to donate more of their time and money for helping those who need assistance

during the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite having received more money in 2020 compared to previous years.

Having raised OMR2.4 million towards worthwhile causes in

2020, on the day of the United Nations International Day of Charity, charitable organisations in the country have said volunteers who contribute their time and resources will never be turned away, as there is always a need for people who are willing to help others.

Dar Al Atta'a

This year, Dar Al Atta'a, one of the country's largest charities, has raised funds for many causes, both within and outside Oman.

"The most important donation

campaigns carried out by Dar Al Atta'a this year were the Together Campaign to help those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and the Peace Campaign for Beirut to help those affected by the explosion in Lebanon," said Mayssa Al Hinai, marketing manager for the charity.

"During the period of the pandemic, we have seen a huge increase in the total donations at the individual level, while at institutional level, we witnessed a huge decline," she admitted. "We are facing a big challenge in finding

stable sources of income for the association, and to cover operational expenses.

"Our advice to donors and society in general is that if you continue to donate, it means that individuals and families whose source of income has been cut off will continue to have a decent life," Al Hinai said.

"There are many ways to donate: you can provide direct donations, do bank transfers, put money in donation boxes, and contribute through the donate.om portal." **>A3**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Shopkeepers hopeful of rent relief

1 Business owners in Oman are hopeful that the new schemes planned for them to be able to pay their rents will help them as they are coming out of the long closure due to the pandemic. **>A3**

SPORTS

England beat Australia by 2 runs

2 England edged out Australia by two runs after the visitors required just 39 from the last six overs with nine wickets in hand. The visiting bowlers had earlier restricted England to 162/7. **>A8**



MARKET

US unemployment rate falls to 8.4%

3 US added 1.4mn jobs in August, and the unemployment rate fell to 8.4 per cent, as the nation's pandemic-ravaged labour market continues to slowly recover. **>B1**



EDUCATION



AMONG THE BEST: The ranking relies on key indicators with a number of detailed sub-criteria.

SQU among top global universities: Report

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has been ranked among the 1,000 best universities in the world, according to *The Times Higher Education* magazine.

A statement issued by Oman News Agency (ONA), said: "The Times Higher Education Magazine ranks Sultan Qaboos Univer-

sity (SQU), among the 1,000 best universities in the world for the year 2021.

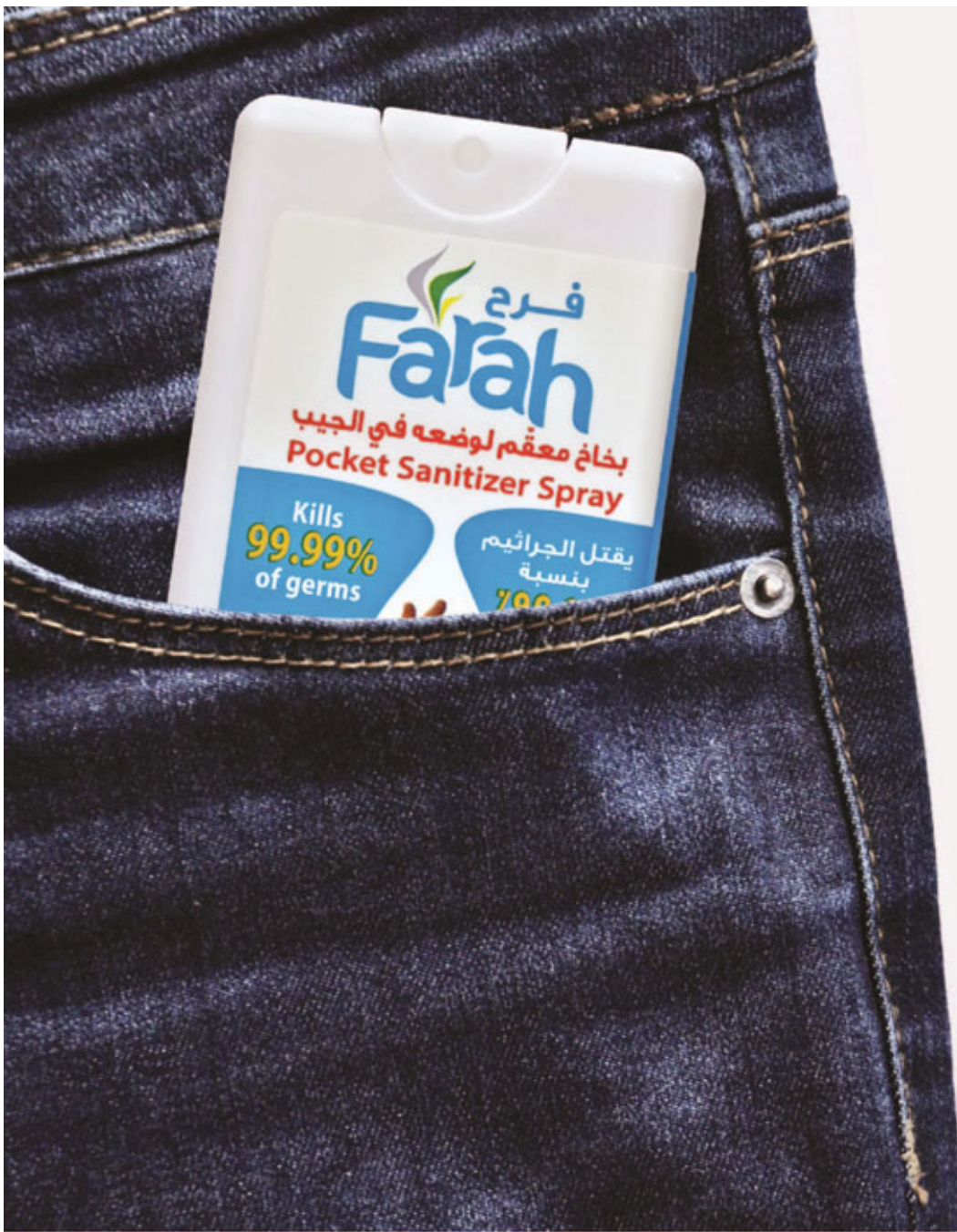
"The ranking relies on key indicators with a number of detailed sub-criteria, including fields of education, scientific research and knowledge transfer from innovations and patents."

Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur had announced the creation of SQU

during the 10th anniversary of Oman's National Day in 1980.

The construction work started in 1982 and the first batch of students were enrolled in 1986.

In accordance with the Royal Directives of late His Majesty, the Sultan Qaboos University commenced with five streams; namely medicine, engineering, agriculture, education and science.



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Data Sources Readership: IPSOS NRS 2017, Web reach: Effective Measure/Narrative, Google Analytics January 2020; Social media numbers verified online as of January 2020; *Whatsapp subscribers x 4 pass-on rate

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TIMINGS



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Maghrib.....6:25pm

Isha.....7:37pm

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OMAN



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OMR 50,000

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Times of Oman

18 h ·

The press release was issued by the Embassy of India in Muscat.



TIMESOFOMAN.COM

19 new flights from Oman added under Phase 6 of Vande Bharat Mission



New flights to India from Oman

A news story on new flights to India from Oman gathered 2,962 link clicks and 52,140 likes on Facebook.



MOST WATCHED VIDEO ON FACEBOOK

11,000 VIEWS

Maghrib minute

video in Hindi



The Maghrib minute video in Hindi received 11,000 views and 895 engagement on Facebook.



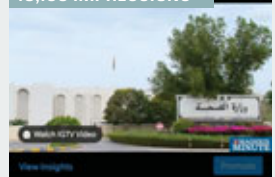


MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM

10,159 IMPRESSIONS

Omani nurses

replace expats



A photo post on Omani nurses replacing expats got 321 likes and 10,159 impressions on Instagram.



Businesses hopeful of rent relief on horizon

If there is a decision issued by the competent authorities that prevents the complete use of a leased space because of no wrongdoing by a tenant, then rent can be cancelled or dropped from the time it is prohibited to use this space, according to the Civil Transactions Law

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Shopkeepers and business owners in Oman are hopeful that the new schemes planned for them to be able to pay their rents will help them.

The news was announced by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Saidi, the Minister of Health, and a member of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, who added that since many establishments had reopened, more schemes to help tenants and landlords would be announced soon.

Several establishments have only recently reopened, having been temporarily shut to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Oman. During this period, many businesses were exempt from paying rent, with the minister confirming that tenants did not have to pay the amount

TRYING TIMES: “Earlier, I used to earn about OMR20 to 30, but now I manage only about four rials a day”, said Salim, who works as a barber. -File photo used for illustrative purposes only

due to their landlords for the duration of their closure.

Renjit, an expat who’s been living in Oman for 27 years, and runs a laundry facility, said, “When we were closed, our landlord did not take money from us, and we are very grateful for this. Our rent is about OMR220 per month, but we hope that the government will provide us with the facilities to wait until the market recovers, so that we can then cover all our financial obligations with the income we get.

Concerns

“Although we have reopened our shop, there are concerns about COVID-19 from the people who come to us to get their clothes washed,” he added. “Earlier, we used to get about OMR15 to 25 a day, but now we only get between four and 10 rials. It is tough to run things with this limited income, as we also need to send money to our families back home, and the four of us in this shop need to meet our expenses here as well.”

Salim, who works as a barber, added, “We are grateful that the

government has decided to announce schemes to help us. Our monthly rent is OMR120, but during the pandemic, our landlord was kind enough to not ask us for this sum. That exemption was indeed required.

“But now because of the need to use globes, masks and disposable single-use items that cannot be utilised for more than one customer, my expenses have risen,” he admitted. “I hope we are given time for the market to stabilise. Earlier, I used to earn about OMR20 to 30, but now I manage only about four rials a day.”

Issuing clarification over the payment of rents by tenants to their landlords, the Minister of Health had said: “Myself and the other members of the Supreme Committee receive a lot of inquiries in this context, so I would like to clarify something. There is a law that governs the relationship between a lessor and a tenant, regardless of the type of establishment, whether it is a restaurant or a store, or any other.

“If it is closed under orders from the government due to an epidemic

or any other given reason, during the period of closure, the tenant has the right to not pay rent to the lessor,” added Al Saidi. “This is the law, but unfortunately, neither the tenants nor the lessors are always aware of it.”

“The incentives and measures we have in place at the moment will continue for individual tenants, as well as commercial and industrial activities affected by COVID-19, until such time as the government considers the situation having returned to normal,” said the minister. “Some incentives will be announced during upcoming meetings of the Supreme Committee.”

Commenting on the minister’s words, Tariq Al Eisa’ei, a lawyer from Sohar, told *Times of Oman* that there were also laws governing the payment of rent under such circumstances.

“According to the Civil Transactions Law, within Article 550, it states that if there is a decision issued by the competent authorities that prevents the complete use of a leased space because of no wrongdoing by a tenant, then rent can be cancelled or dropped from the time it is prohibited to use this space,” he explained.

Legal basis

“If this impacts the benefit to the lessor, the rent due by the tenant can be waived, for a period announced by the former,” added Al Eisa’ei. “But this law has been organised in such a manner that only a judge can enforce its application. The judge will interpret these laws on a legal basis, and will issue his ruling at the Court of First Instance. If neither party is satisfied with the outcome, they can appeal again, in the Court of Appeal. If they are still not satisfied, they can wait until the Supreme Court announces its verdict.”

He added that although many establishments had been required to shut during the pandemic, the impact of business lost was different between them.

COVID-19

New guidelines for Indians returning to Tamil Nadu

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Indian nationals living in Oman and other countries who are returning to Tamil Nadu will need to follow the new testing procedures put in place by the government, as it attempts to stop the spread of COVID-19.

According to the Health and Family Welfare Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu, as part of the new guidelines, all returning passengers who have not undergone a COVID test at least four days prior to arrival in the state have to undergo mandatory testing.

All passengers who have shown symptoms of COVID-19, and have travelled overseas in the last 14 days must also get tested.

The guidelines also state that “all symptomatic health care workers and frontline workers involved in the containment and mitigation of COVID-19, and all patients of severe acute respiratory infection” must be tested. This extends to all those who have come into contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19. The tests for these people must be done within five to 10 days of them coming into contact with a COVID-positive individual.

All those who show symptoms

of the disease within COVID hot-spots or containment zones will also be tested, as well those who begin to show symptoms after returning from overseas. Tests for the latter need to be conducted within a week after they’ve shown signs of the coronavirus. “No emergency procedures (including deliveries) must be delayed for lack of tests,” the guidelines added. For all those returning or travelling to Tamil Nadu from overseas, thermal screening is mandatory.

Quarantine

“All the passengers have to undergo 14 days of home quarantine,” they said. “During the period, if the individual develops fever, cough or breathlessness, they shall visit a health facility. All passengers travelling to Tamil Nadu from other countries should have

a negative RT-PCR test report. The test must be taken within 96 hours prior to arrival.

“As a transition arrangement, passengers coming through Vande Bharat flights alone will be provided RT-PCR facility in the airport on arrival, for a week,” the guidelines added. “All asymptomatic individuals will be sent for 14 days home quarantine. If the test result is positive, individuals will be asked to report to a medical facility for treatment.”

Returnees who test positive and present COVID symptoms will be taken to hospital isolation, while those who test negative and are asymptomatic will be admitted to a COVID care centre. However, people who test negative, but show signs of the coronavirus, will need to go to a doctor for further medical exams.

CHARITY

A1 Spike in donations this year

According to donate.om, the on-line donation site of the Ministry of Social Development, through which people can donate to any registered charity of their choice, a total of OMR2,464,469 has been collected between 1 January and 5 September 2020, from 168,521 donors.

Donations spiked in May of this year, when nearly more than OMR1.1 million came in the form of donations from nearly 80,000 contributors. April saw 15,000 donors chip in with more than OMR300,000, while July saw contributions of another OMR350,000 from more than 25,000 donors. OMR300,000 was also received during August, when nearly 23,000 people donated to charities.

In the last 12 years, the donate.om portal has reported contributions worth OMR6,892,996, with 2020 so far being the year with the highest amount contributed, followed by 2019, when nearly 55,000 donors made donations worth more than a million Rials.

The donations from 2011 to 2018 have steadily increased year-on-year, but continue to remain in the six-figure range. For every month so far, the top donor has selflessly contributed more than OMR1,000 in personal income.

The highest portion of donations this year has gone to the Oman Charitable Organisation, the government’s charity arm

which has received OMR503,976 from 40,769 donors, followed by zakat contributions towards the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (OMR493,991 from 4,342 donors).

Al Rahma Association, which looks after mother and child welfare, has received another OMR341,648 from 24,764 people, while Dar Al Atta’a took in some OMR319,123 from nearly 31,000 donors.

Many donations have been made to regional charity organisations, which look after the needy in places such as Manah, Saham, Amerat, Ibri, Sohar, Bahla, Samail and Al Musannah, as well as towards organisations that look after the disabled and provide healthcare to those who need it, including Al Noor Association for the Blind, the Oman Cancer Association, the Association for the Welfare of the Handicapped, and the Association for Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs.

Adding to this, Abeer Abdullah Al Mujaini, the head of psychology for the Psychology of Youth Volunteering Team, which provides mental health services to those who cannot access them, said, “We will be happy to accept volunteers who want to work with us. We specialise primarily in mental healthcare, but that does not mean we will turn people away if we feel they are the right fit.”

Everyone is welcome to ap-

proach us. When you volunteer for a greater cause, you are giving up a portion or some time of your own for an initiative that is bigger than you.”

Rahima Al Musafir, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Rahma Association said, “We have launched 12 initiatives in response to the circumstances of the pandemic, with the total donations amounting to OMR216,757.

“During the coronavirus pandemic, we did not witness a decrease in the donations, but rather the opposite: because of the people’s confidence in the association and its initiatives to support those affected, the rate of donations increased.”

“Omani society has been known for its enduring cohesion,” she added. “There are a number of needy among us who deserve from the community to translate this cohesion in providing them with assistance.”

Donate cash

“People can donate cash money through the association’s bank accounts, Thawani application and via the portal for charitable donations and cash payment directly in the association building,” said Al Musafir.

“We also receive in-kind donations such as food, used and new furniture, electrical appliances, new and old clothes, and plastic bottles covers.”



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BEAUTIFUL
OMAN

The shrimp fishing season has started in the Governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta and South A'Sharqiyah. The season will last for three months until the end of November.

The coastal villages of the Governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta and the South A'Sharqiyah have witnessed energetic activities, expecting a bumper season for the fisheries sector. The setting up of fishing seasons is important because it ensures a steady balance in the ecosystem, the reproduction of fish and the preservation of its strategic stocks, in addition to reducing overfishing.

The shrimp fishing season is one of the traditional professions in the Sultanate. Shrimp is one of the crustaceans and economically important species in the Sultanate due to their nutritional value and the increase in its demand in the local and international markets. Shrimp fishing is limited to the artisanal fishing sector as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is keen that the fishermen of the coastal villages get the utmost benefits.

Said bin Humaid Al Hakamani from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Muhout in the Governorate of Al Wusta said, "The Governorate of Al Wusta stood first in shrimp production during the period from 2015-2019, with a production rate of 70 per cent of the total catch, followed by the Governorate of South A'Sharqiyah with a production rate of 26 per cent. The total production of shrimps traditional fishing in 2019 hit 863 tons, a decrease of 19 per cent, with a total value of about OMR9.2 million. Exports of shrimps stood at 320 tons, and about 543 tons of it were consumed locally".

On the importance of the fisheries sector, Said Al Hakamani told Oman News Agency (ONA)

that the Sultanate has promising potentials, considering that this sector is a renewable resource capable of increasing its contribution to food security and in the domestic product. He pointed out that the Sultanate ranked 35th in the world in fish production and ranked 2nd in the Arab world, according to the latest statistics issued by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO) in 2018. The Sultanate's total production of fisheries sector reached 553,000 tons. The production almost twice-doubled between 2011-2019 from 192,000 tons to 580,000 tons at an annual growth rate of 19 per cent. The value of production doubled from OMR144 million in 2011 to OMR306 million in 2019.

Al Hakamani added that the department has prepared for this season by organising awareness and guidance programmes and lectures for artisanal fishermen in the wilayat to introduce them to the shrimp season, laws and regulations for shrimp fishing and how to preserve this natural wealth. He stressed that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources calls on shrimp artisanal fishermen and all companies, institutions and hotels, restaurants and individuals who deal in the areas of buying, selling, trading and exporting shrimp to adhere to the start and end dates of the shrimp fishing season and to record the quantities of shrimp they have after the end of the season. He pointed out that shrimp trading or exporting will not be allowed after the end of the season unless they are registered with the Ministry. The monitoring teams will intensify their work at the coasts of the three governorates during the season.

SHRIMP FISHING SEASON BEGINS IN THE SULTANATE



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OMAN

Ministry offers incentives for mango, date palm orchards

The applicant must be an Omani citizen and have an existing agricultural holding or farm with an usufruct contract for the cultivation of the approved crops

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has announced its desire to establish orchards of fruit trees, including the cultivation of tissue date palm offspring. The plan also includes plantation of several varieties of mango and Omani lemon trees for farmers willing to undertake the project in the governorates.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said, "Those who have the desire to implement the project must submit a request to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources by filling out the designated form in the departments/centres of social development in the various governorates of the Sultanate within two weeks of the publication of this



STRESS ON CULTIVATION: Plots should be located within the farming range and must have suitable environment conditions for cultivating date palm crops, Omani mango and lemon varieties.



announcement. Applicants must fulfil the following conditions:

The applicant must be an Omani citizen and have an existing agricultural holding or farm with an usufruct contract for the cultivation of the approved crops. Interested persons should submit the following documents: A copy of the farm ownership deed or a copy of a valid usufruct contract with a copy of the survey drawing of agricultural land and a copy of a valid agricultural possession card.

Moreover, the location of the fields should be within the farming range and in areas that have suitable environment conditions for cultivating date palm crops, Omani mango and lemon varieties. And, the soil of the farm should

be suitable for farming, and it must have an authorised well and the salinity of the water should not be too much.

There should be a commitment to plant date palm seedlings at a distance of 8.8 metres with a rate of 65 seedlings/acre and a distance of 7.7 metres should be maintained for the varieties of mango and Omani lemon trees with a rate of 86 seedlings/acre.

Irrigation system

There should be a modern irrigation system for the target area such as fountain system.

It is stipulated that the area of the field for cultivation should not be less than 5 acres and not more than 10 acres for one of the

two groups, date palms or Omani mango and lemon varieties, and the cultivation should be done at one site.

For the cultivation, approval should be made by the Ministry of Agriculture from date palms (Farth, Kalasa, Majhool, Fahool) and the varieties recommended by the Ministry for mangoes in addition to Omani lemon variety.

The date palm project is implemented by planting the field according to the following (cultivation of 100 per cent of the above-mentioned varieties) or agriculture by 80 per cent of the Farth variety and 20 per cent of the other mentioned varieties), or (cultivation of 50 per cent of the Farth and 50 per cent of the other varieties.)

The Ministry will support the acquisition of tissue palm seedlings produced in the tissue culture laboratory, Farth (OMR2), Khalas (OMR5), Al Majhool (OMR1) and Fahool varieties (OMR1) and Omani mango and lemon seedlings are free of charge, in accordance with Ministerial Resolution No. 95/2010.

Those interested in the cultivation and care of date palms, mango trees and Omani lemons, should commit to implement farming practices in accordance with the recommendations of the Ministry.

The approval of the beneficiary of the project will be based on the Ministry's specialists' visit to the project site to verify that it meets the above-mentioned conditions

before starting planting, along with continuous follow-ups and evaluation of the farm.

The beneficiaries of the project will be selected provided they meet the above conditions before starting the plantation.

A period of one month will be given to the beneficiary to complete the installation of the irrigation system, otherwise his right to benefit from the project will be forfeited and replaced by another beneficiary from the reserve list.

While the deadline for receiving applications is September 17, 2020, the Ministry has the right to accept or reject the application that doesn't meet the given criteria.

ONLINE INTERACTION

Indian ambassador praises work of teachers

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Embassy of India, Muscat, organised an online interaction with Indian school teachers and faculty members of higher education institutes in Oman, on September 3, 2020. The event started with observance of one-minute silence as a mark of respect for late Pranab Mukherjee, former president of India.

Tributes

Ambassador Munu Mahawar gave a brief speech and paid tributes to late Pranab Mukherjee, who was a remarkable teacher and a global statesman. Ambassador expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and Government of Oman for extending generous support.

Conveying his best wishes to all the teachers, he said: "Teachers from India Campaign", start-



INTERACTIVE SESSION: Teachers and faculty members expressed their views and ideas on various topics with Ambassador Munu Mahawar.

ed by the Ministry of Education honours and recognises the contribution of Indian teachers across the world."

He appreciated the contribu-

who have won awards was played after the speech by Ambassador. Two teachers from Indian School Muscat, Eskalin Gonsalves and Venkatson Karthikeyan, who have recently won CBSE Teacher Award 2019 were commended for their achievement.

Dr. Baby Sam, Chairman – Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman also gave a short speech and thanked all the teachers for ensuring continuity of education during the COVID-9 pandemic.

The main highlight was the open interactive session, where teachers and faculty members expressed their views and ideas on various topics with Ambassador Munu Mahawar.

The ambassador in his concluding remarks appreciated the suggestions given by various participants and again conveyed his best wishes to all the teachers on the occasion of teacher's day.

ACCORD

Growth to be priority as peace dawns in Sudan

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates helped bring various Sudanese rebel groups to the negotiating table, which eventually led to the historic peace accord in Sudan, a top Sudanese diplomat told Emirates News Agency.

"The UAE has played a significant role in achieving the peace accord. They closely followed the negotiations since the beginning and offered assistance to bring more parties to the negotiation table," Mohammed Amin Abdullah Al-Karib, the Sudanese Ambassador to the UAE, said in an exclusive interview.

In coordination with the transitional government in Sudan, the UAE held talks with some important Sudanese factions and convinced them to become involved in the peace talks, he said.

"That was a crucial effort for the success of the peace talks and top Sudanese leaders appreciated the UAE's role in their statements on the occasion of signing the peace accord," Al-Karib noted.

On August 31, the transitional government of Sudan signed a peace agreement with an alliance of rebel groups from different parts of the country, including the conflict-torn states of Blue Nile, Darfur and South Kordofan.

The UAE, the GCC, and major world nations and international organisations welcomed the pact.

Talking about the impact of the peace accord, the ambassador said, "Now there will be no war in Sudan. The money and efforts spent for conflicts can be diverted for developmental projects; people were waiting for this moment." -WAM

BIRD LOVER

A Palestinian aviculturist's passion for parrots

RAMALLAH: Visitors to the house of Nashat Tmaizi, an aviculturist from the southern West Bank city of Hebron, are usually amazed to see his large and unique collection of brightly coloured parrots.

With a passion for pet parrots, Tmaizi, 32, has been dedicated to acquiring, taking care of, and making a profit from various parrot species.

Every morning, Tmaizi prepares the feed and seed mix for the parrots while observing the anti-coronavirus measures by wearing a face mask. With parrots perched on his hands and shoulders, he told Xinhua that he has been keeping parrots for 15 years.

Highlighting the fact that parrots are not low-maintenance pets, he said that rearing parrots requires a large amount of capital. "I started with purchasing a limited number of parrots, raised the baby birds and sold them as they grew up to the local pet market in order to buy new species. That's how I became a parrot aviculturist."

Enjoying the sound of the chirping parrots surrounding him, Tmaizi said that he has some 40 parrot species, including Macaws, the African Grey Parrot, the Cockatoos and the Budgerigar, with the number of parrots in his posses-



UNIQUE COLLECTION: Palestinian aviculturist Nashat Tmaizi feeds a parrot at his house in the village of Idna, near the West bank City of Hebron. - XINHUA



sion ranging from 80 to 100.

He said that parrots require a considerable amount of attention, and the food they eat includes fruits, vegetables, chicken, hard-boiled eggs, nuts and various grain crops. They also require environmental enrichment through the provision of T-stands, which would add to the aviculturist's financial burden.

Tmaizi, a well-off father of one

girl, said that he pays attention to the daily needs of his pet birds as much as he does to his small family, and he has to pay hundreds of U.S. dollars in monthly expenses to buy nuts, seeds and fruits for his parrots. Nevertheless, he said he is happy with what he is doing as an amateur parrot aviculturist.

Tmaizi acquired his unique collection of birds, which are rare to find in the West Bank, through

purchasing them from Israeli dealers at high prices.

Although he has been in possession of various species of parrots, he pledged not to squander them regardless of the high prices. He will only sell the baby parrots as they grow up to expand his parrot farm and purchase new species.

The Palestinian aviculturist said that he had received calls from prospective clients in the

West Bank as well as in Israel, stressing that he takes into consideration not to sell parrots during the hatching season.

Commenting on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on his business, Tmaizi said that he has not received prospective clients in his house since March, and the clients may have shifted their priorities away from purchasing pet birds, amid the economic impact

of the pandemic such as declining income and growing unemployment rates.

Enjoying the support and encouragement from his family, Tmaizi said he looks forward to purchasing a piece of land to set up a large farm housing hundreds of parrot species, so that it would turn into a must-visit destination for the people in West Bank.

-Xinhua



WORLD



WORSHIPPERS

Dozens injured in Bangladesh gas pipeline explosion

DHAKA: At least 50 people were injured in an explosion at a mosque outside Dhaka on Friday night just as worshippers were about to end their prayers, authorities said.

The explosion, believed to be caused by leakage of a gas pipeline that runs underneath the mosque, took place at Baitus Salat Jame Masjid in Narayanganj district, nearly 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) south of Bangladeshi capital.

About 38 people were rushed to Dhaka's state-run specialized burn and plastic surgery hospital, with most of them sustaining 60 to 70 percent burns.

The mosque's imam and another senior cleric were among those with severe injuries being treated at the hospital, according to The Dhaka Tribune newspaper.

A seven-year-old boy died in the

hospital, Samanta Lal Sen, a coordinator of the hospital was quoted as saying by the DPA news agency.

Several firefighting units were rushed to spot, and an investigation into the blast is underway.

"We are primarily suspecting that gas had leaked from the line and accumulated inside the mosque since the windows were shut. When the air conditioner

was turned on, due to sparks the gas might have exploded," firefighting department official Abdullah Al Arefin was quoted as saying by a newspaper.

Several air conditioners on the ground floor of the mosque exploded during the incident. A police bomb disposal unit also collected evidence from the scene to examine the nature of the blast.

-DW



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India's COVID-19 tally surpasses 4 million, deaths near 70,000



According to the data, as many as 86,432 new COVID-19 cases and 1,089 deaths were recorded during the past 24 hours

NEW DELHI: India's COVID-19 tally surpassed 4 million on Saturday, reaching 4,023,179, while the number of deaths due to the pandemic soared to 69,561, according to federal health ministry's data.

According to the data, as many as 86,432 new COVID-19 cases and 1,089 deaths were recorded during the past 24 hours from across the country. A report published in a national newspaper said the country's tally rose from 3 million to 4 million in just 13 days, adding that it has been the fastest 1-million rise so far across the globe.

India continued to be the third worst-affected country by the pandemic, after the United States and Brazil.

Still there are 846,395 active cases in the country, while 3,107,223 people have been cured and discharged from hospitals.

Over the past several weeks, the country's focus has been on ramping up samples testing, which has partly led to the sudden jump in



CORONAVIRUS: The maximum number of 25,586 deaths have been registered in the southwestern state of Maharashtra, followed by the southern state Tamil Nadu with 7,608 deaths.

new daily cases.

As per the data from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 47,738,491 samples had been tested till Friday, with 1,059,346 samples tested on Friday alone.

The country's federal health ministry said on Friday that despite the very high testing levels, daily positivity rate is below 7.5 percent and the cumulative positivity rate is less than 8.5 percent.

Meanwhile, India's Case Fatality Rate (CFR) has touched 1.74 percent following a steady decline.

The health ministry also said there were less than 0.5 percent of patients on ventilators, 2 percent in intensive care units (ICUs) and less than 3.5 percent on oxygen support.

Most of the new cases were recorded in south and southwestern

states. Five states, namely Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh accounted for nearly 65 percent of the cases, according to an official at the federal health ministry.

Delhi, which showed a marked improvement in reducing COV-

A report published in a national newspaper said the country's tally rose from 3 million to 4 million in just 13 days, adding that it has been the fastest 1-million rise so far across the globe

ID-19 cases over the past few weeks, has once again witnessed a rise in fresh cases. Active cases in Delhi rose to 17,692 as per the latest data, out of which 1,190 were recorded in the past 24 hours. As many as 19 deaths were recorded since Friday, while the total death toll in the Indian capital rose to 4,500.

The maximum number of 25,586 deaths have been registered in southwestern state of Maharashtra, followed by southern state Tamil Nadu with 7,608 deaths, Karnataka with 6,054 deaths, Delhi with 4,500 deaths and southern state Andhra Pradesh with 4,200 deaths.

India is currently in the Un-lock-4 phase after the pandemic hit the country over seven months ago. Schools and all educational institutions remain shut, though efforts are ongoing to resume the services of Metro Rail with effect from Sept. 7 in a graded manner.

Restaurants would also be opened from September 9 after over five months of closure. *Xinhua*

VACCINE DEVELOPMENT

Russia's Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccine trial shows 'encouraging' results

MOSCOW: Patients involved in early tests of a Russian coronavirus vaccine developed antibodies with "no serious adverse events", according to research published in the medical journal The Lancet on Friday.

The so-called "Sputnik-V" vaccine produced an antibody response in everyone who participated in the early-stage trials.

Nevertheless, experts expressed caution, saying the trials were too small to prove safety and effectiveness.

Small step

Naor Bar-Zeev of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who was not involved in the research, said the trial results were an "encouraging but small" step. The professor added that it did not give any data on older age groups, who are significantly more vulnerable to the virus that has killed almost 900,000 people worldwide.

"Showing safety will be crucial with COVID-19 vaccines, not only for vaccine acceptance but also for trust in vaccination broadly," he said in The Lancet.

"Since vaccines are given to healthy people and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially to everyone after approval following phase 3 trials, safety is paramount."

Concerns about speed

Russia announced last month that "Sputnik-V" had already been given the green light.

But this raised concerns among



Western scientists over a lack of information, with some suggesting that moving too quickly could be dangerous. Russia denounced the backlash as an attempt to undermine its work.

Two small groups

In the analysis, Russian researchers reported on two small groups, each involving 38 healthy adults aged between 18 and 60, who were given an immunization in two parts.

Each participant was given a dose of the first part before being given a booster 21 days later.

The volunteers were then studied carefully over 42 days and all

developed antibodies within the first three weeks.

Brazil set for trials

Brazil's Tecpar, which has signed an agreement to produce the Russian vaccine, said on Friday that it plans to conduct phase III trials on 10,000 volunteers in the South American country at the start of next year.

Jorge Callado, head of the technology institute in the southern Brazilian state of Parana, said approval for the trial will be requested of Brazil's health regulator ANVISA by the end of September and that doses will be imported for the tests. *DW*

IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION



NATO calls for 'international response' over Alexei Navalny poisoning

BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Friday called on Russia to fully cooperate with an "impartial investigation" led by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) into the suspected poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Responding to a question from DW's Teri Schultz, Stoltenberg said NATO's response to the poisoning stems from the illegal use of a chemical weapon banned under international law and norms.

"It is not just an attack on an individual but it is also an attack on fundamental democratic rights," said Stoltenberg. "This is a blatant violation of international law and it requires an international response."

Earlier this week, the German government announced that Navalny had been poisoned with the

military-grade nerve agent Novichok, the same chemical weapon British authorities say was used against Russian double agent Sergei Skripal in 2018.

Trump: US hasn't seen 'proof'

US President Donald Trump on Friday said that Washington did not have any evidence of Navalny's poisoning. "I don't know exactly what happened. I think it's tragic, it's terrible, it shouldn't happen," he said.

"We haven't had any proof yet, but I will take a look at it," Trump said at a White House press conference.

He said that he had no reason to doubt the evidence by German investigators but added the US had not seen it. "Based on what Germany is saying that seems to be the case," Trump said. "I would be very angry if that's the case."

Earlier on Friday, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun met with the Russian ambassador in Washington and urged Moscow to cooperate with an international probe into the attack.

The State Department official expressed "grave concern about German government findings that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned by a chemical nerve agent," according to a spokesman.

'Completely unacceptable'

EU officials and German political leaders have proposed taking disciplinary action against Russia, including using sanctions.

"The use of chemical weapons is completely unacceptable under any circumstances, constitutes a serious breach of international law and international human rights standards," said EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell. *DW*





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Curbs imposed on anti-lockdown rallies in Australia

Authorities imposed restrictions, including a night curfew, to contain the COVID-19 spread in Melbourne, which has been hit hard by the pandemic

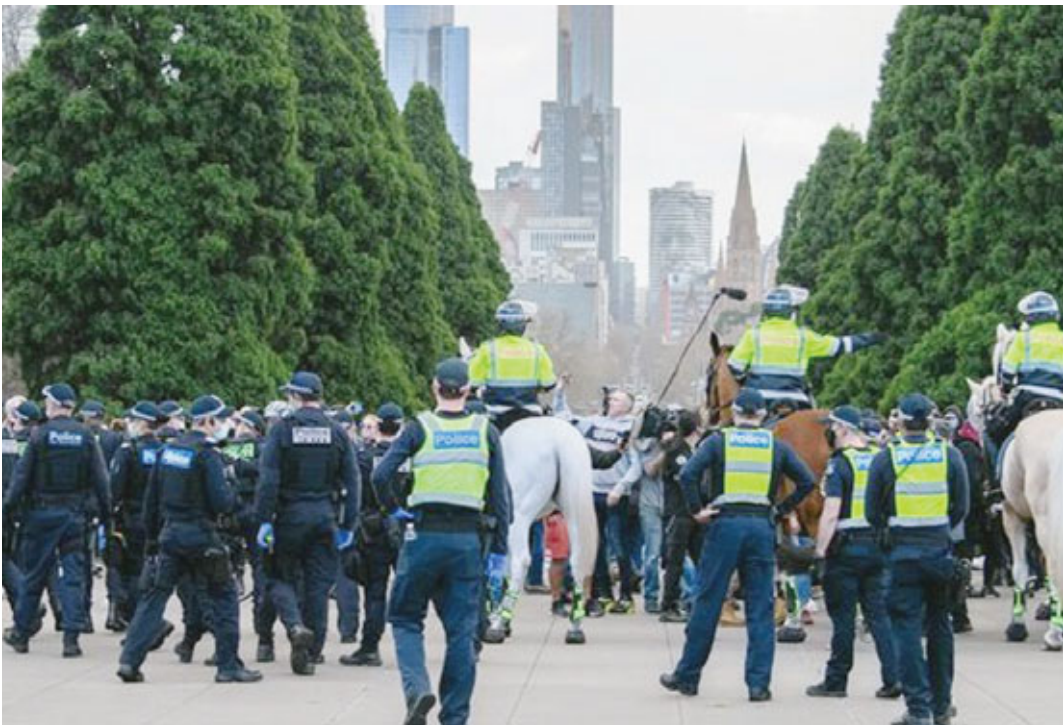
CANBERRA: Police in Australia's Victoria state made several arrests among a crowd of about 300 people protesting the coronavirus lockdown in Melbourne.

According to a news agency, around 300 people participated in the rallies on Saturday. Police arrested at least 20 people, including one of AAP's photographers, the news agency said.

Authorities imposed restrictions, including a night curfew, to contain the COVID-19 spread in the state, which has been hit hard by the pandemic.

Despite instructions to adhere to social distancing rules, hundreds of people took to the streets on the so-called "Freedom Day" to protest against lockdown measures. Local media posted images of a heavy police presence in the city and scuffles with protesters at a rally taking place at the city's Shrine of Remembrance.

"Police have formed their line at



LOCKDOWN: Police in Australia's Victoria state made several arrests among a crowd of about 300 people protesting the coronavirus lockdown in Melbourne.

the steps to the shrine. Ugly scenes. Punches thrown. Many arrests," a reporter at the scene tweeted.

Similar rallies held in Sydney and Byron Bay in the state of New South Wales also breached local restrictions against large gatherings.

'Absolutely selfish'

Victoria is in the midst of a stage-four lockdown – the harshest coronavirus restrictions in the country. It includes an 8 pm to 5 am curfew, a 5 kilometer (3.1 miles) travel limit, and a daily on-hour outdoor workout limit.

On Saturday, Victorian Premier

Daniel Andrews issued a stern warning to people planning to protest against the government's lockdown measures.

"It is not safe, it is not smart, it is not law. It is absolutely selfish for people to be out there protesting," he said.

Economic recession

The central government and businesses have urged Victoria, which makes up about a quarter of the nation's economy, to ease restrictions as the country has sunk into its first recession since 1991.

Andrews said he would take a

"steady and safe" approach out of the lockdown.

"This is a health problem in the first instance and until you fix the health problem, there can be no economic repair," he said.

According to Andrews, 76 new coronavirus cases were recorded overnight on Saturday, with at least 11 coronavirus-related deaths, taking the state's death toll to 661 and the national total to 748. As of Saturday, Australia has recorded 26,207 COVID-19 cases.

The six week lockdown across Melbourne is expected to be lifted on September 13. **bw**

ECONOMIC RELATIONS



Serbia and Kosovo agree to normalise economic relations

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump hailed a "major breakthrough" on Friday after former foes Serbia and Kosovo agreed to normalise economic relations.

Serbian President Aleksander Vucic and Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti signed the pact in the White House – voicing optimism about the deal, but while noting that differences remain.

"By focusing on job creation and economic growth, the two countries were able to reach a real breakthrough on economic cooperation across a broad range of issues," Trump said, flanked by the two Balkan leaders.

The details of the deal have not yet been released, but it is expected to be limited to easing some commerce measures and opening up road, rail and air ties between the two countries.

Although Trump praised Friday's deal as a "truly historic day," Serbia made clear during the talks that it would not go so far as to recognize Kosovo as a fully-fledged state. Both countries also agreed to halt talks on normalizing political ties for a year to allow the economic agreement to roll out.

Situation 'could 'actually get worse in Kosovo'

The Trump administration's mediating team – headed by Richard Grenell, the former US Ambassador to Germany – said they hope improved economic ties will lead to an improvement in overall relations between the two.

Analysts voiced skepticism over who effective the economic deal will be without addressing the elephant in the room – formal recognition of Kosovo.

"Until you do that, you're not going to have much economic progress either," Edward P. Joseph, the former Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, told DW.

Joseph, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, noted that the deal also doesn't address how "mismatched" the two countries' economies are.

"Kosovo is much smaller. It runs the highest trade deficit in the region. What that means is if you then take down all the trade barriers, who benefits? Serbia, the stronger country. And the trade deficit could actually get worse in Kosovo," he said. **bw**

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

EC proposes common criteria for COVID-19 travel restrictions

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Friday unveiled a plan for a coordinated approach to the restriction of movement resulting from measures being implemented by individual member states to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

In a proposal to the European Council, the Commission said it wanted the restrictions on free

movement to be coordinated and clearly communicated at the level of the European Union (EU).

It called for common criteria and thresholds on which the decisions about travel restrictions are based, including through the use of a color code, a common framework for measures applied to travelers from high-risk areas as well as clear and timely information to the

public about any restrictions.

The criteria are aimed at eliminating the wide discrepancy between national criteria for introducing measures that restrict free movement in the EU. The proposed color code will group countries in four categories: green, orange, red and grey.

The Commission recommended taking into consideration the to-

tal number of new infections per 100,000 people in a given area in a 14-day period, the percentage of positive COVID-19 tests and the number of tests carried out per 100,000 people in a given area during a seven-day period.

It urged the EU member states not to restrict travel from states where the number of new cases is less than 50 per 100,000 in a 14-

day period or when the percentage of positive tests from all COVID-19 tests in a given area is below three percent.

"We must avoid further disruption of already fragile economies and additional uncertainty for citizens who have made huge sacrifices. They expect this from us after so many months living with COVID-19," said European Com-

missioner for Health Stella Kyriakides. Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders said: "Our right to move freely in the EU has been heavily impacted by the pandemic... We are proposing straightforward criteria, applicable without discrimination, which are easy to follow by member states and enable us to inform Europeans properly." **Xinhua**

READY TO TAKE TO THE SKIES

SriLankan Airlines to play pivotal role as country reopens for tourism

COLOMBO: Once Sri Lanka reopens its borders for travellers, tourism is expected to be one of the primary economic drivers and the National Carrier, SriLankan Airlines, is expected to play a pivotal role in the country's economic recovery.

Fully owned and backed by the Government of Sri Lanka, the Airline was forced to suspend scheduled services in early April as Sri Lanka took a tough stand on battling COVID-19. Now, with Sri Lanka's health and safety situation under control, the Airline is ready to take to the skies and connect Sri Lanka with the world again.

Discussing the reopening of Sri Lanka's borders, the Chairman of SriLankan Airlines, Ashok Pathirage said, "Despite the challenges we face, we are looking forward to the reopening. Even though scheduled services were suspended, as the National Carrier, we have been working to provide relief flights to repatriate stranded Sri Lankans and other nationals. We have also been providing much needed cargo facilities to support our export industries and bring down essential emergency equipment and supplies to deal with the pandemic. We have been working around the clock to adapt our operations to meet health & safety guidelines and the challenging requirements of the 'new normal'."

Ashok Pathirage is one of Sri



Lanka's foremost business leaders and is the founder of the Softlogic Group, a leading Sri Lankan conglomerate. In addition to his role as Chairman of SriLankan Airlines, Pathirage oversees more than 50 market-leading companies with interests in retail, telecommunications, healthcare, finance, IT, leisure and autos. He was invited by the Government of Sri Lanka to assume control of SriLankan Airlines in late 2019, with a view to transforming it into a more profitable and progressive enterprise.

Health and Safety

SriLankan Airlines has implemented extensive protocols for

health and safety onboard its aircraft and across its terminal facilities in line with directives and guidelines issued by local and global aviation and health and safety organisations such as the ICAO, IATA, EASA, WHO and Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health and Department of Civil Aviation.

These measures include physical distancing, facemasks and other protective gear for passengers and workers, routine disinfection of aircraft and terminal environments, health screening, contact-tracing, passenger health declarations and testing.

Elaborating on the health and safety measures taken by SriLan-

kan Airlines, Pathirage explained, "We have taken every reasonable precaution to minimise the risk of transmission of disease, thus ensuring the safety of our passengers and crew. Each aircraft is subjected to cleaning and disinfection before and after each flight. We have even removed all reading material from seat-back pockets and provided a mechanism for online pre-ordering of in-flight duty-free items to minimize physical contact."

Pathirage went on further to say, "Each aircraft is also equipped with regularly serviced and replaced, industry-standard hospital-grade HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate

Air) filters, certified to remove 99.97% of all viruses from circulating air within the passenger cabin. Therefore, we are happy to say that our passengers can travel with us and enjoy our signature Sri Lankan hospitality without fear. In fact, my own business and personal travel arrangements will see me flying on SriLankan's scheduled services once operations recommence."

During the new routine cleaning processes, all contact surfaces in the passenger cabin are sprayed & wiped down with approved effective disinfectants in accordance with WHO standards, including windows, seatbelts, tray tables, armrests, handsets, inflight entertainment displays, lavatories and other surfaces.

All passenger consumables & amenities such as headsets, headrest covers, pillow covers, blankets and other items are replaced with fresh, disinfected items. All air and ground crewmembers are regularly tested and have been strictly instructed to stay at home if feeling unwell, and extra caution is being taken with regard to food preparation and handling.

Special protocols are also in place to deal with aircraft that are known to have been exposed to COVID-19, which include extensive and rigorous disinfection and cleaning using approved effective disinfectants and an extensive wipe down of the entire interior of the aircraft.

SEARCH SUSPENDED

Typhoon halts Japan coastguard's search for ship survivors

TOKYO: Japan's coastguard has suspended its search for a cap-sized ship as the country braces itself to be hit by a typhoon expected to produce winds of nearly 300 kilometers an hour.

The ship, Gulf Livestock 1, had 43 crew members and nearly 6000 cattle onboard. It sent a distress call on Wednesday after being caught up in Typhoon Maysak on its way to China from New Zealand.

Two crew members have since been found alive, including the vessel's chief officer. Another man was found in the water, but he was pronounced dead in hospital on Friday.

But the search for more survivors has been temporarily called off as another storm, Typhoon Haishen, is expected to hit the area with winds reaching up to 290 kilometers per hour (180 miles per hour). "We resumed our search operation this morning by dispatching an airplane," a local coastguard said.

"But due to high waves, we could not send any patrol boats to the site."

"We still plan to send ships to join the search operation but it's not certain as another typhoon is approaching the region," the official said, adding that there were no clues to the fate of the rest of missing crew. **bw**

CHINA'S KEY ROLE

China is a driving force of world economy and increasingly plays an important role as a supply-demand hub in services trade, said a senior World Trade Organization (WTO) official. - Xinhua

MARKET
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MANUFACTURING SUMMIT

Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit (GMIS) 2020 to identify new index to measure industrial, environmental, social, corporate governance performance.

US unemployment rate falls to 8.4% in August



US BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS: Notable job gains in August occurred in government employment, which was largely buoyed by temporary hiring for the 2020 census. - Xinhua

The unemployment rate previously soared to a record 14.7 per cent in April

WASHINGTON: US employers added 1.4 million jobs in August, and the unemployment rate dropped to 8.4 per cent, as the nation's pandemic-ravaged labour market continues to slowly recover, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on Friday.

"These improvements in the labour market reflect the continued resumption of economic activity that had been curtailed due to the

coronavirus pandemic and efforts to contain it," the bureau said in its monthly employment report.

Notable job gains in August occurred in government employment, which was largely buoyed by temporary hiring for the 2020 census. Employment in government increased by 344,000 in the month, accounting for one-fourth of the over-the-month gain in total nonfarm employment.

There was also a marked increase in retail trade, professional and business services, leisure and hospitality, and education and health services, according to the report. Retail trade added 249,000 jobs in August, with almost half the growth occurring in general merchandise stores.

The US unemployment rate previously soared to a record 14.7 per cent in April as COVID-19 dev-

astated the economy. It declined slightly to 13.3 per cent in May and continued to fall to 11.1 per cent in June as businesses gradually reopened across the country.

Amid a resurgence in COVID-19 cases, US employers added 1.76 million jobs in July, and the unemployment rate dropped to 10.2 per cent. Even with the August data, payrolls are still more than 11 million below pre-pandemic levels. - Xinhua

OIL PRICE SLIPS



Oil prices drop amid risk aversion

NEW YORK: Oil prices slipped on Friday, weighed by increasing risk-off sentiment.

The West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for October delivery dropped 1.6 US dollars to settle at 39.77 dollars a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The US benchmark ended below 40 dollars a barrel for the first time since early July.

Brent crude for November delivery slid 1.41 dollars to close at 42.66 dollars a barrel on the London ICE Futures Exchange.

Both crude benchmarks settled at their lowest since July 9, based on the front-month contracts, according to Dow Jones Market Data.

Growing risk aversion in response to the wild sell-off on the US stock market had an impact on the oil market, Eugen Weinberg, an energy analyst at Commerzbank Research, said in a note Friday.

"If WTI were to dip below 40 dollars per barrel, this could trigger another wave of selling," he warned.

Meanwhile, weak demand amid the pandemic continued to be a concern on the oil market.

For the week, WTI crude decreased nearly 7.5 per cent, while Brent logged a weekly fall of 6.9 per cent. - Xinhua

DOMESTIC SCANDAL

European Union needs new trade chief at critical, uncertain moment

BRUSSELS: The European Union (EU) lost its highly rated trade commissioner Phil Hogan due to an Irish domestic scandal over pandemic regulations. It needs a new one fast given the volume of critical issues mounting up.

The resignation of Phil Hogan as the European Commissioner for Trade came about in bizarre circumstances and has presented EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen with a policy headache when she needed it least.

Hogan was forced to resign after breaking various government guidelines related to COVID-19 restrictions while on an extended break to his native Ireland from Brussels.

While his movements in Ireland between July 31 and August 21 contravened several of the Irish government's public health guidelines, the most egregious was his attendance alongside 80 people at a golf society dinner in Connemara, far west on Ireland's Atlantic coast.

Hogan's initially nonchalant response to the scandal angered the Irish government, who pressured him to step down amid mounting public anger. The commission initially backed him, but Hogan's explanations to von der Leyen about his movements were inconsistent and incomplete. Trust was damaged and he resigned.

Ireland will soon submit two names, a woman and a man, for consideration to be the country's next Commissioner. It's up to von der Leyen as to the portfolio the chosen person gets, with no guarantees that it will continue to be the EU's trade brief.

Valued member of the EU 'College'

Before Hogan's fall from grace, he was one of the most valued members of von der Leyen's "College" — that's the preferred collective noun for the 27 commissioners, who are tasked with heading various departments of EU policy.

Her faith in Hogan was reflected in the fact that she promoted him



Former EU trade commissioner Phil Hogan. - nw

from the agriculture portfolio to the more powerful and influential trade role when she was tasked with heading the commission one year ago.

Hogan was regarded by Brussels insiders as a strong performer. As well as being an informed voice on Brexit for the EU side, he had made progress in his negotiations on trade with the Trump administration.

The US and Europe had just agreed its first package of joint tariff reductions for several years. Indeed, collecting notes relating to ongoing EU-US negotiations was one of the reasons Hogan gave for some of his travel during his time in Ireland.

He had a strong relationship with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and had helped to smooth transatlantic trade tensions, simmering after a few difficult years.

On Brexit, Hogan had a significant role to play as the head of the bloc's trade policy. Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator, paid tribute to him earlier this week. "I will miss Phil Hogan, on whom I could always count to relay any Irish concerns to me very directly over the last four years," he said. "I used to meet him once a week as a Trade Commissioner."

Celtic confusion

Hogan's departure has complicated things both for the Commission and for Ireland at a sensitive time.

Before the "golfgate" scandal, Hogan's influential presence in Brussels was seen in Ireland as a diplomatic boon. Although Hogan's poor communication around the scandal ultimately damaged von der Leyen's faith in him, it was Irish domestic pressure rather than European pressure which came most to bear.

"Viewed from a European context, there is disbelief that Ireland would jettison its respected and successful trade commissioner," said Eoin Drea, a researcher at the Wilfried Martens Centre, the official think tank of the European People's Party (of which Hogan's party is a member). "That is not to downplay his actions or minimise the impact of the pandemic on Ireland, but a simple reflection of how important Hogan was in the EU hierarchy," he wrote in *The Irish Times*.

A commissioner's mandate is strictly EU-wide and it is not their job to promote national interests. Yet they can explain a national position at the most senior level. They have a major influence.

At a time when Ireland is under pressure at EU level over its corpo-

rate tax arrangements with multinational companies, and when the question of its post-Brexit border arrangements remain complex, it needs such voices more than ever.

For von der Leyen, she now needs to find a new trade commissioner at a time when the international trading system is at its most frayed in decades.

The EU-US relationship remains tense, with a potential showdown looming over the Boeing-Airbus rivalry. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has entered a period of major transition, with the question of relations with China likely to determine that body's future. Then there are the Brexit talks, which are going badly with less than four months to go before the deadline for an EU-UK trade deal is reached.

A key decision

For now, the trade role is being held on an interim basis by Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

The least complicated solution for von der Leyen would be to put the next Irish candidate straight into the trade portfolio but she is unlikely to do that unless the person is a very suitable fit, given the importance of the role.

Various Irish politicians, both at domestic and European level, are in the frame to be nominated. But reports from Brussels suggest they will get a different portfolio, with one of the existing commissioners slipping into the trading post. The Irish nominees are likely to be confirmed by the end of the week, with the final decision, pending European Parliament approval, to be made by von der Leyen.

It is an important decision for the commission president. Picking commissioners is not always such a tricky business. But given all that is at stake in the world of trade at the moment, it may prove to be one of the most significant moves of her time at the top. - nw

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE REPORT



The US Federal Reserve headquarters in Washington, DC, the United States. - Xinhua

US federal debt to be larger than size of economy in 2021

WASHINGTON: Driven by the massive fiscal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, US federal debt is projected to exceed the size of the economy for the fiscal year 2021, the highest level since World War II, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said.

In an update to the Budget Outlook: 2020 to 2030, the CBO projects a federal budget deficit of 3.3 trillion dollars in the fiscal year 2020, which ends on September 30, more than triple the shortfall recorded in 2019.

"That increase is mostly the result of the economic disruption caused by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and the enactment of legislation in response," the CBO said, noting that federal budget deficit will reach 16 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, the largest since 1945.

The deficit in 2021 is projected to be 8.6 per cent of GDP, according to the report. In CBO's projection, annual deficits relative to the size of the economy generally continue to decline through 2027 before increasing again in the last few years of the projection period, reaching 5.3 per cent of GDP in 2030.

Government spending surged in recent months, as Congress has already approved roughly 3 trillion dollars since March to cushion the economic impact

of the pandemic. That, coupled with a plunge in tax revenue, caused federal deficits to soar and pushed up federal debt.

The CBO report showed that federal debt held by the public is projected to rise sharply to 98 per cent of GDP in 2020, compared with 79 per cent at the end of 2019 and 35 per cent in 2007, before the start of the recession in 2008.

It would exceed 100 per cent in 2021 and increase to 107 per cent in 2023, the highest in the nation's history, the report said. By 2030, debt would equal 109 per cent of GDP. The previous peak occurred in 1946 following the large deficits incurred during World War II.

Against the backdrop of a ballooning debt level, lawmakers are still under immense pressure to craft a new fiscal relief package but remain in a deadlock over the size and scope of the package, which could again hit the trillion-dollar level.

Democrats have pushed for a 3 trillion dollar relief package, while the White House and Senate Republicans have proposed a 1 trillion dollar package. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she spoke to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on Tuesday, but the two sides failed to bridge their differences. - Xinhua

MARKET

Summit identifies new index to measure industrial performance

GMIS virtual meeting focused on the need and opportunity to develop an index which would successfully integrate the economic, environmental, social and governance dimensions of industrial development and the manufacturing sector

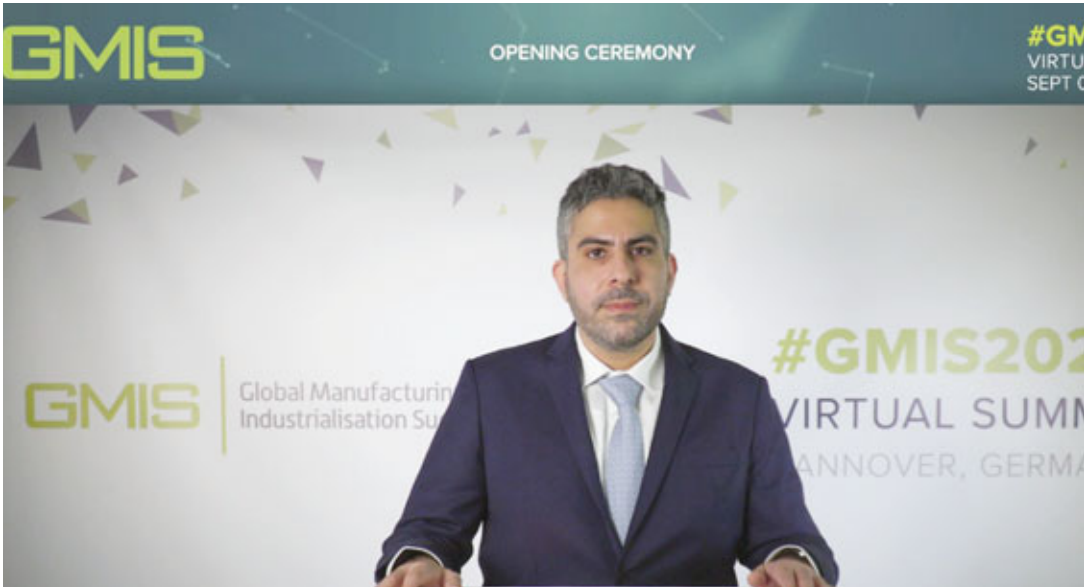
HANNOVER: The Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit (GMIS) held a working group on the sidelines of the first day of the #GMIS2020 Virtual Summit, gathering a cross-section of experts from world-leading organisations to help drive and develop a new Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Performance Index that will help measure the Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) performance of public and private sector entities.

While industrialisation results in many acknowledged benefits, it also generates a number of challenges, particularly about the environment and therefore critical actions are needed to minimise the environmental degradation caused by industrial pollution, as well as to advance decent work and equitable social welfare as the foundation for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID).

4IR technologies

Fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies hold huge potential to bring about ISID and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 9. Technological progress is the foundation of efforts to meet environmental objectives such as increased resource and energy-efficiency. However, the diffusion of advanced digital production technologies remains concentrated globally, with only weak adoption in most emerging economies.

The virtual meeting of the working group focused on the need and opportunity to develop an index which would successfully integrate the economic, environmental, social and governance dimensions of industrial development



Badr Al-Olama, Head of the Organising Committee for the Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit. - **WAM**

and the manufacturing sector, and which would take into account considerations about 4IR and impact investment.

Participants in the working group included Sorin Cohn-Sfetecu, ISO 56008 Project Leader for Innovation Measurements, International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), Geoffrey Hamilton, Chief Cooperation and Partnership Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Rene Kamp, Professorial fellow at UNU-MERIT and Professor of Innovation and Sustainable Development at ICIS, Maastricht University, Valentin Todorov, Senior Manager, UNIDO, Nathan Fabien, Chief Responsible Investment Officer, UN Principles for Responsible Investments (UNPRI), Jose Pineda, Senior Researcher, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Kate Field, Global Head Health, Safety and Wellbeing British Standards Institution (BSI), and Maria del Sorbo, Monitoring, Indicators & Impact Evaluation

Unit, Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission.

Moderating the session, Fernando Cantu Bazaldua, Chief Statistician, UNIDO, said, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution cannot function without high-quality data, statistics and knowledge products, as these are fundamental for evidence-based policymaking and monitoring inclusive and sustainable industrial development.”

Maria Del Sorbo, of the Joint Research Centre at the European Commission added, “Advanced innovation is underpinned by data. For an inclusive and sustainable future of manufacturing, we must ensure that digital industries are built on reliable, comparable, robust and disaggregated data.”

At a country level, a considerable number of tools aimed at systematically measuring and benchmarking the industrial performance of economies exist, with some placing emphasis on the inclusive and environmental dimensions. Prominent examples include the ISID Index, the Competitive Industrial Performance (CIP) Index, the SDG9 Index, and the Green Industrial Performance Index (GIP index), among others.

Badr Al-Olama, Head of the Organising Committee for the Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit, said, “There is a clear need for a multi-dimensional industrial performance index that can assess a country’s industrial progress while also measuring the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance of its private sector entities.

“The index could serve as an objective tool for governments to enhance their policy-making and their regulatory frameworks, assist in monitoring and evaluating the progress towards sustainable development, and support investors and the private sector in making responsible investment decisions that are not purely based on financial metrics.” - **WAM**

STATISTICS

New orders of German manufacturing industry up 2.8% in July: Destatis



FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE: Compared with February, the month before COVID-19 measures including the temporary closure of shops and factories were in place in Germany, new orders were still down 8.2 per cent. - **Xinhua**

BERLIN: New orders of the German manufacturing industry in July increased 2.8 per cent month-on-month, the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) announced.

Compared with February, the month before COVID-19 measures including the temporary closure of shops and factories were in place in Germany, new orders were still down 8.2 per cent, according to Destatis.

July was the third consecutive month in which Germany’s manufacturing industry recorded more orders, but the increase was not as large as in the previous months, according to Destatis. For June, a revision of the preliminary outcome resulted in an increase of 28.8 per cent compared with May 2020. The provisional rise was 27.9 per cent.

“Following the initial upturn in May and the strong recovery in

June, the catching-up process of incoming orders in the manufacturing sector slowed down,” the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) said in a statement.

In the automotive industry, the largest sector of Germany’s industry, new orders in July increased “significantly” by 8.5 per cent compared with the previous month. Nevertheless, incoming orders were also below pre-COVID-19 levels. Although orders from domestic customers in July fell by 10.2 per cent, foreign orders increased by 14.4 per cent from the previous month, Destatis noted.

Referring to a lower number of short-time workers and improved business expectations of companies, BMWi expects the catch-up process of new industrial orders in Germany to continue over the next few months. - **Xinhua**

SUPPLY-DEMAND HUB

China playing key role in services trade: WTO official

GENEVA: China is a driving force of world economy and increasingly plays an important role as a supply-demand hub in services trade, said a senior World Trade Organization (WTO) official, adding that China can positively influence and significantly contribute to international cooperation by supporting and advancing the services agenda of WTO.

In his online speech for the opening of the 2020 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing on Friday, WTO Deputy Director-General Yi Xiaozhun said that the event itself “not only highlights China’s success in the combat against the COVID-19 pandemic but also demonstrates that the Chinese government constantly promotes market opening and trade in services.”

Highlighting services as the new frontier of global trade, the

WTO official noted that services trade plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth, adding that it is of crucial importance that policy-makers place services at the centre of their future work.

Yi called for further international cooperation to harness the potential of services trade and ensure a win-win outcome.

“Recognising that unilateral protectionist actions lead to international trade tensions and bring damage to the global economy, most WTO Members choose to cooperate within the multilateral trading system which provides rules-based, transparent and predictable conditions for services trade,” he added.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 has also underscored the necessity of international cooperation, as services will be key to the post-pandemic economic recovery, he said. - **Xinhua**

SECURE PAYMENT

Leading European delivery platform partners with Mastercard to fully digitise its payment chain

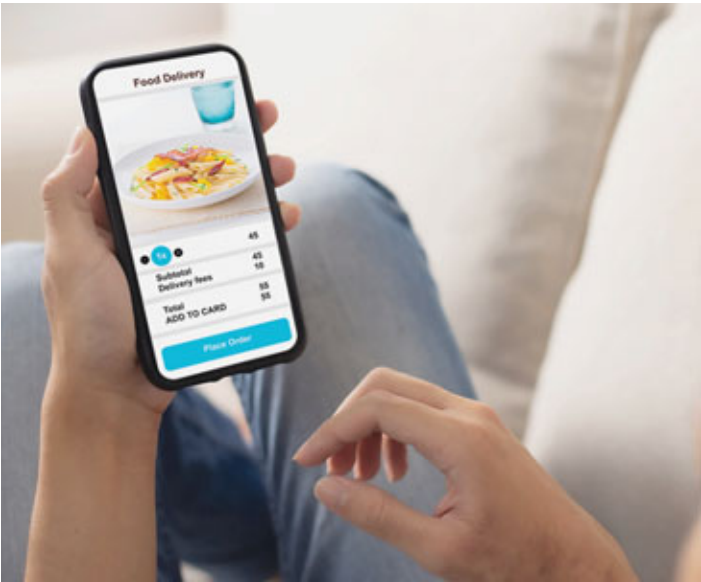
Times News Service

MUSCAT: Delivery Hero SE, the world’s leading local delivery platform, has partnered with Mastercard to fully digitise its payment chain within its ecosystem across all their brands in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Enabling secure digital payments will lead to superior consumer experience and financial security for consumers, riders and restaurants, spearheading the growth of digital inclusion across the region and additionally drive operational efficiencies across Delivery Hero’s platforms.

Operating in the region with brands including Talabat, HungerStation and Zomato, the global food network will leverage Mastercard’s expertise as a preferred technology provider to drive digital transformation for consumers, delivery riders and restaurant partners. The initiative spans the UAE, Saudi Arabia (KSA), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt, through brands including Talabat, HungerStation, Zomato.

For over 20 million consumers who order food online through Delivery Hero’s apps, the partnership means being able to pay on delivery with a contactless solution in addition to having the option of paying through a digital wallet for their food orders. The wallet solution will enable consumers to make secure digital payments for orders and bring in



FINANCIAL SECURITY: Enabling secure digital payments will lead to superior consumer experience and financial security for consumers, riders and restaurants. - Photo used for illustrative purpose only.

a range of additional exciting rewards and offers. The outbreak of COVID-19 has increased the importance of digital payments significantly. Within the first half-year of 2020, the share of orders paid online grew by over 40 per cent in MEA.

The partnership will see the launch of a virtual card solution, through which over 650,000 delivery riders in the region will be able to receive instant access to their earnings, through their mobile devices, providing near real-

time earnings disbursements for the first time. The riders will be able to make everyday purchases instore and online, as well as enjoy additional unprecedented access to financial services and lifestyle discounts.

Additionally, over 100,000 restaurant partners in the MENA region will be able to quickly and securely settle payments of orders through Delivery Hero’s regional brands. The restaurants will also be able to make supplier purchases, pay employee salaries and

transfer payments. The solution will displace the need for cash and deliver a faster and secure way to pay within their value chain. The transformation towards digital financial services also plays a crucial role in supporting local businesses and accelerating their recovery from COVID-19.

“Our strategic partnership with Delivery Hero is a remarkable milestone, as we collaborate to transform numerous pillars of their ecosystem into digital. For Mastercard, this means consumers and business owners being able to pay safely and securely, delivery riders receiving access to financial services for the first time, thus driving greater financial inclusion and innovation across the region. As a trusted payments technology provider, we are committed to enabling our partners in their digital transformation journey and boosting the digital economy,” said Amnah Ajmal, Executive Vice-President for Market Development, MEA, Mastercard.

Orkhan Abdullayev, Vice President Fintech, Delivery Hero, said: “At Delivery Hero, innovation is part of our DNA. Our Fintech team is constantly pushing industry standards to drive our ambition to deliver amazing experiences to our customers, restaurants and riders. Working alongside a strong and reliable partner like Mastercard in our MENA region ensures that we can shape the future of Fintech together.”

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Procurement Officer 20 years experience in Oman looking for suitable position. Contact 97903411

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Procurement officer with 19 yrs experience in construction. Email u.bati307@gmail.com

Indian male Purchase Assistant - documentation M.Sc Computer science 26 yrs old.experience 2 yrs Oman with valid licensense. NOC available. Visa status- employment. Email tijuklr@gmail.com Contact 92676197, 98944397

SALES / MARKETING

Indian male experience in Sales and Marketing for 12 years with Driving License looking for suitable placement. Contact 92085257

Indian male, 18yrs of experience in outdoor sales of FMCG and electronics is seeking suitable placement. DL and NOC available. Contact 91290046

Salesman/office driver, 15 yrs experience. Valid D/L. Muscat area. Contact 79818772

B.E Civil Indian M 24 Y Sales Exp in Sales/Marketing/Team Lead/ Manager/Business Development. Available in Oman with NOC. Looking for Any Job. Contact 78186546

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Senior Copywriter with 21 years Oman experience seeks placement in Ad Agencies/Corporate Communications. Call 95234657.

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Smart Indian, Arabic speaker, Excellent English, Masters-Journalism, Finance, Oman experience in Corporate/Marketing Communications, Press Releases, CSR Programs, Marketing, Customer Relations, Events, Campaigns., #99283938. NOC

Indian male, 31 Age, Single, B.E (Civil), 10Years experience in the construction field (7 years in Oman & 3 years in India), NOC available, seeking job for the post of Project engineer. # 79218189, ganeshkumargk1188 @gmail.com

IT System administrator Indian male 28 BE CSE CCNA graduate with 5 yrs experience in Indian looking for suitable job.On visit .Contact 93674784

23 Years Indian Male, Diploma In Mechanical Engineering. 1 Years work experience in Oman. Available on family join visa. Looking for suitable placement. Contact 968- 79121923, 99224057

An Experienced HR Professional (around 2 Years) seeks opportunity in HR, Administration, IT-Support, Data Entry or IT Teacher. Can Join Immediately.IELTS: 6.5-Bands. # 949773471 Email hshakjaveed@gmail.com

Indian Female, B.E. in Electronics & Communication + CCNA (Routing & Switching) fresher,studied in Oman, looking for suitable placements.Contact 99636352

Indian Male-43 yrs. Experience in trailer driver, GCC holding valid heavy licence.Seeking suitable job. NOC available. Mob - 99449686, 91- 9526956869.

Female, Planning Engineer, BE Mech, 13 years experience with oil & gas Engineering Field and construction Projects seeking a suitable job Contact no : 97408929

B.Tech in Civil Engineering (structural), 23 yrs fresher(trained for 5 months)seeking job as structural Engineering, familiar with various software. Contact 78274434.Email mohammedarshadjunaid@gmail.com

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Indian Male-43 yrs. Experience in trailer driver, GCC holding valid heavy licence. Seeking suitable job. NOC available. Mob - 99449686, 91- 9526956869.

Female, Planning Engineer, BE Mech. 13 years experience with oil & gas Engineering Field and construction Projects seeking a suitable job. Contact no : 97408929

Diploma in Electrical Engineer (8 years Experience in Installation of LT line, Vendor Coordination, Arrange Quotation from supplier for Tender/Work). Contact 91-9771492886

Filipino male w/ release., with 8 years exp. in OMAN: ADMIN, accounting, purchasing, Knows Tally ERP 9 and microsoft's excel, 97890657, email: hernandezjanlouis27@gmail.com

B.Tech in Civil Engineering (structural), 23 yrs fresher (trained for 5 months) seeking job as structural Engineering, familiar with various software. Contact 78274434. Email mohammedarshadjunaid@gmail.com

Indian well experienced sr accountant or Chief accountant, looking for suitable placement. Contact 95362046. Email srjobinoman@yahoo.com

AutoCAD Draftsman with 8 years of Oman Experience, Architecture & Structural drafting. NOC available. Contact: 78253720

HSE OFFICER, 15 years experience. Seeking job to join a reputed firm. Contact WhatsApp-968-99626821

Accountant Indian Male 26yrs with MBA Finance having 5yrs experience, 3yrs in Oman looking for suitable position of an Accountant. NOC Available. GSM: 95394439. Email: mohdanas040@gmail.com

A Technical Graduate with around 2 Years' Experience in HR-Admin, seeks opportunity in HR, Administration, Desktop-Support (IT), Data Entry or IT Teacher. IELTS: 6.5-Bands. Contact / WhatsApp: +968949773471. Email: hshakjaveed@gmail.com

Indian/male (28)/MBA/4 years' experience in procurement and coordination with valid Oman. licence. Available for immediate joining. Contact: 92536194. Email: suhailbs@gmail.com

Mechanical engineer - NIT Surat, Gujarat, India - Oman resident with DL - one year work experience - Contact: 91756930

Indian male M.Tech(ECE) 4 yrs exp. as a Sales Engineer in Industrial Automation, PLC, SCADA with a valid Saudi D/L. Looking for a good opportunity. # 98240758 mohdrashidali87@gmail.com

Indian 15 yrs Oman experience B.Com, ICWA9(Inter) PGDBM head-ed Finance, logistics established Company. 93870808, 93883272

Electrical Engineer 4 yrs 6 months experience with NOC available. Contact 90863138. Email guntisiddharth@gmail.com

An Experienced HR Professional (Indian) (around 2 Years) seeks opportunity in HR, Administration, IT-Support, Data Entry or IT Teacher. Can Join Immediately. On visit expires 6th Feb. IELTS: 6.5-Bands. Phone / WhatsApp: +968 94977347. Email: hshakjaveed@gmail.com

Civil Engineer Contact 78012115

Indian Male HR /Admin - MBA, BCOM having 9 years experience in Gulf 5 yr and India 4 yr looking for suitable placement. # 97914340. Email: rahulkv30@yahoo.com

Part time Accounts/Data entry. Experienced Accountant looking for part time Accounts/Data entry job. Please contact: 98649698

Indian Male, 15 years Oman experience with valid Oman D/L looking for job in sales. NOC available. Contact 95356820

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Indian Male 29 years B.E(Civil) having 6 yr Gulf experience as Project coordinator looking for suitable placement. Oman D/L # 99682689. fayiz.yh@gmail.com

Indian Male HR /Admin and Purchase - MBA, BCOM having 9 years experience in Gulf 5 yr and India 4 yr looking for suitable placement. Contact : 97914340. Email: binthjumatrading@gmail.com

Indian Male - Accountant MCOM, BCOM having 7 years experience in Gulf 4 yr and India 3 yr looking for suitable placement. Contact : 97432723. Email: tonythomasjohn777@gmail.com

Looking part-time housemaid job surrounding area of Ghobra / Aziba like cooking, washing & cleaning post-delivery support, baby care. contact 79293053.

Male, looking for a job in administration or office coordinator, extremely familiar with the Oman market. Not looking into Sales or Marketing. Looking forward to hearing from potential companies. Having D/L. # 93264375 email: vpnandakishore@gmail.com

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Indian Female 10 years, experience As Cook, South Indian, Gujarati Special, looking For Part Time. Contact : 95795971

Indian Male (30), MBA-Finance, 6 years experience in electrical and lighting industry as Sales Executive-project sales (outdoor), specialized in lighting for residential and commercial projects. Contact 94560161. Email qaisebukhari@gmail.com

Situation Wanted* Mechanical engineer specialized in quality inspection with cswip 3.1 & ASNT LEVEL II certifications looking for an opening in oil & gas industry. currently in Muscat. # 96206400 or awrunedathil@gmail.com

Indian male Diploma (Cinematography) & BA English with 5 yrs of experience in sales and Marketing field. Seeking suitable placement. currently in Oman on visit. Contact 78150989. Email: alexthomas927@gmail.com

B.Tech Electrical Engineer Indian male with 11 yrs of experience in contracting and consultant firms. Looking for job with Valid GCC driving license available. Contact 968-94343694. Email: ymansoor2@gmail.com

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33 Year old Indian male With 12+ Years' Experience As Operation Supervisor Project Expeditor /Quality Control in Oil & Gas, Water Line Industry. Contact 596661571. nasir03ahmed@outlook.com

Filipino, female 41 B.Sc accounting mgt., with 10 years' experience in Oman: admin, accounting, finance, secretarial, ticketing. Knowledge with excel. 96901439 email lorelie_a@yahoo.com

B.Com Graduate with four years of experience in Sales & Marketing in Oman with D/L. Can join immediately. Contact 93568656

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Indian male 29 yrs having 5 yrs experience in FMCG sales & marketing in Oman with D/L. Can join immediately. Contact 78057807. Email nozi70072@gmail.com

MA B.Ed in English language, Indian female, 5 yrs experience in teaching seeking suitable positions in schools. Currently in Oman on family visa. # 79716167, 24033571

HSE Officer, 15 years experience. Seeking job to join a reputed firm. Contact WhatsApp 99626821

Indian Male (30) 8 Year's Experience in Sales and marketing and Office Administration on visit, seeking a challenging careers. D/L available. Contact 9412 2402. Email: shinto.samuelit@gmail.com

Indian male, 24 years holding a bachelor's in management and Masters in finance, presently pursuing ACCA. Looking for relevant job, holding valid GCC driving license. Contact 98189064. Email shahahr806@gmail.com

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ROUND-UP

BANK MUSCAT

Woqar banking package improves financial inclusion in Oman



MUSCAT: The Woqar Banking Package for pensioners launched recently by Bank Muscat has been hailed as an important tool to improve financial inclusion in the country. The package provides a range of banking facilities and services and allows pensioners to lead a dignified and financially secure life on their terms.

Woqar was launched by the bank, which is the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, as part of its commitment to society and provision of banking facilities to all.

As the nation's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat attaches great importance to social responsibility initiatives aimed at sustaining the country's progress and development and greatly improve financial inclusion. Bank Muscat launched the Woqar Bank-

ing Package after studying in great detail and understanding the needs of retirees who were working in both government and private institutions.

Flexible term loans

Flexible term loans ranging from one to 10 years and credit cards based on the value of the pension are a key part of the Woqar banking package. The loan facility will be available for pensioners up to 70 years of age while the credit card facility is available for those up to 75 years.

The bank has been encouraged by a large number of queries and applications that have come from across the Sultanate after the launch of this new product. By addressing the financial inclusivity needs of this customer segment, the bank hopes to further improve

living standards for all segments of society. Customers can get more information about Woqar products by visiting any of the bank's branches across the Sultanate or by contacting the call centre.

Earlier, the pensioner segment was not served by any bank for flexible-term finance or credit cards based on their pension and Bank Muscat was the first bank to extend a financing solution for pensioners in Oman. This new product will enable pensioners to live a dignified and financially secure life and are part of the bank's strategy to further improve financial inclusion in the country. Bank Muscat continues to debut new financial products and services targeting different sections of society in step with the changing needs of its customers and the development march of the nation.

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MUSCAT: Regular service schedule and usage of genuine parts in your Hyundai car can make it run smoothly and reduce the risk of it breaking down and incurring expensive unexpected repairs. Wear and tear due to usage requires timely maintenance, if delayed it can fast become a costly major repair or replacement requirement.

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OTE – Hyundai Service has been regularly recognized over the years for its service excellence and has been presented with numerous awards & accolades at various regional and global platforms by Hyundai. The recent one being, bronze medal in the biennial Hyundai World Skill Olympics, held at the Hyundai Cheonan Global Learning Center in Korea after fiercely competing with 66 entrants from 51 countries from across North America, Central and South America, Europe and Russia, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.

OTE Group constantly innovates to offer best ownership experience to its customers throughout the ownership cycle. OTE – Hyundai service offers tailor-made service/maintenance packages to suit individual customer as well as high-running fleet customers. More details on the service/maintenance packages can be obtained



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BEST EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Omantel claims Happiness at Work Award 2020

MUSCAT: Omantel accords high attention and emphasis to the health, safety and capacity building of its employees. Over the years, Omantel has been engaging with its employees on various levels through innovative engagement programmes.

Omantel recently won the Happiness at Work Award in the Best Employee Engagement Programme (private sector) category 2019 at the third edition of the Happiness at Work Award virtual ceremony that was organiaed by Sustainable MindZ (Dubai).

The award witnessed competition between 62 nominations that were evaluated by an independent panel of jurors after a thorough assessment based on multiple parameters.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic demanded a more innovative approach in reaching the company's goal of employee engagement and development while making sure the health and safety of our employees are at the utmost priority and that our customers are not put at risk.

The pandemic enhanced the way Omantel engages with its employees and customers, the company spared no time in upgrading its programmes making them adaptable online, while keeping their intended efficacy.

The company has continued to offer a variety of educational and recreational programmes to enhance employees' motivation and further instil their sense of belonging to it, particularly during the current challenging period.

This is in addition to further bolstering the productive relationship between Omantel's various management levels.

The initiative has been envis-



aged to be positively reflected in the high-quality services and innovative solutions provided by Omantel to the satisfaction of its customers.

Commenting on this initiative, Najla Khamis Al AlBahlouli; Senior Manager, Employee Engagement at Omantel's Human Resources Unit said: "Our employee engagement experience has created a unique, attractive and productive work environment that stimulates innovation and provides everything that brings satisfaction to Omantel customers.

Employee engagement revolves around the employee irrespective of his/her position or job grade, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became necessary that we continue to adopt the same approach that enhances the relationship among employees on one hand and between employees and the Company on the other."

Further detailing the initiative, she said, "At the outset, we have implemented business continuity plans by enabling our employees to work remotely from home to ensure the safety of our custom-

ers. The new approach involves all employees who are provided with the latest devices, facilities and programmes required for working from home without affecting the quality of service provided to our customers."

Al Bahlouli commented that the COVID-19 pandemic demanded a new and effective work system aimed at the continuity of Omantel's services even though employees could no longer access their workplace.

"We devised effective communication plans through which

we were able to implement the diversification and integration programmes that facilitated providing telework-based services. These programmes include the principles of safety and ongoing communication, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), digital gadgets, IT programmes and equipment, instant messaging, HR communication, training and e-learning opportunities. These programmes also provided flexible working schedules, virtual physical fitness sessions, functional cooperation, regional

events, leadership engagement initiatives, activities relevant to engaging employees in providing advice, virtual gatherings, various events" Al Bahlouli added.

The next stage of Omantel's employee engagement plan depends on the cultural transformation and employees' experience. Other initiatives are expected to strengthen cooperation and communication between various teams and units located at home or the Company's headquarters, regional offices, sale outlets or at other sites.

To achieve these objectives, Omantel has provided social platforms and direct information boards that help in managing an employee's experience thoroughly, starting with the early induction stages up to the employee's departure from the company. Moreover, Omantel has been developing and enhancing its HR policies, including part-time employment, flexible hours, and telework.

It is worth mentioning that Omantel was adjudged one of the best companies to launch employee engagement programmes in the Private Sector Category out of 62 nominations in various categories at the 'The Happiness at Work Award 2019'. The award followed a comprehensive, multi-criteria evaluation carried out by an independent jury panel.

Omantel is the pioneering telecommunications company in the Sultanate and the primary provider of integrated internet services for individuals, companies and government agencies. The company strives to promote growth and prosperity in all sectors of the Sultanate, along with providing a new concept of businesses and bringing in the global content and means of entertainment.

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