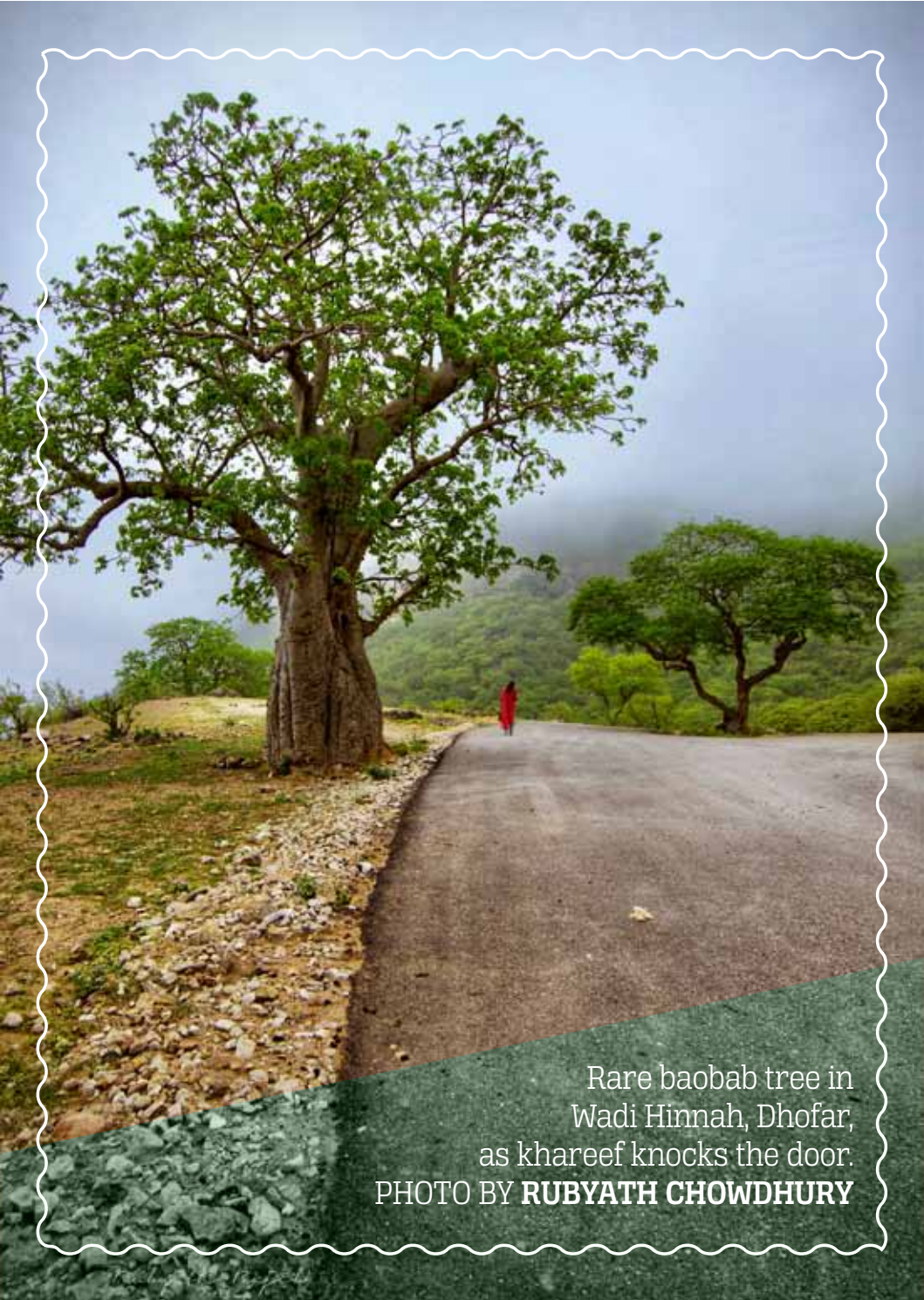




Rare baobab tree in Wadi Hinnah, Dhofar, as khareef knocks the door.
PHOTO BY RUBYATH CHOWDHURY

Masks prevented tens of thousands of infections

NEW YORK: Recommending that people wear protective face masks has prevented tens of thousands of coronavirus infections, according to researchers who assessed the effects of the measure in New York, Italy and Wuhan. Mask-wearing matters because airborne transmission is the dominant route for the spread of COVID-19, researchers from the universities of Texas and California wrote in the article published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The researchers analysed the timing of mitigation measures in three epicentres: Italy, New York and the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak originated. They shaped the study around when officials called on the public to wear masks, and compared this with infection levels before and after the guidance was issued. In China, people were told to wear masks at the same time as they were instructed to follow other recommendations including hand-washing and keeping a distance from other people. — dpa

DHOFAR AND OTHER TOURIST PLACES UNDER LOCKDOWN

ONA AND VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: In implementation of the decisions taken by the Supreme Committee for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding the closing of the Governorate of Dhofar, Jabal Shams, Jabal Akhdhar and Masirah Island, the Sultan’s Armed Forces, represented by units from the Royal Army of Oman, is pitching in with the activation of the joint checkpoints on the roads leading to the areas placed under lockdown from 12 noon on Saturday (June 13) to July 3. The Sultan’s Armed Forces calls upon all citizens and residents to abide by the decision taken by the Supreme Committee and to cooperate with the security officers in charge of enforcing the decision at the joint checkpoints to ensure public safety and contribute in curbing the spread of the pandemic.



GUIDELINES

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has issued guidelines for transporting companies carrying goods to the Dhofar Governorate.
- It may be noted that Dhofar along with parts of Dakhiliyah (Jabal Akhdhar), the Jabal Shams, South Al Sharqiyah (Masirah Island) and Al Wusta governorates, are in lockdown until July 3.
- The ministry said that the transportation of goods will continue uninterrupted to ensure the availability of food and consumer items in the markets and to avoid any shortages during the coming period.
- The ministry said guidelines to be followed by the transporting companies include permission only to drivers in the vehicles.
- Drivers have been advised not to mix or interact with others in the governorate, and stay in the truck during the download process.
- They have been told to exit the governorate immediately after the mission is completed within 24 hours.
- “Follow precautionary measures set by competent authorities such as – hand hygiene, physical spacing, wearing masks and maintaining healthy habits when sneezing and coughing”.

FERRY SERVICE SUSPENDED

The Ministry of Transport has halted all inbound and outbound passenger ferries operating to and from Masirah Island from Saturday until further notice. This is in line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19 pandemic regarding the decision of Masirah lockdown, the ministry statement said. The exception will be for operations of goods transport in coordination with the concerned authorities while adhering to the preventive measures issued by the Ministry of Health.



SQU RANKS 375TH GLOBALLY

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) hit a new milestone in global classification as it secured the 375th place out of 1,047 universities at the world level for 2021 at the QS World University Ranking. SQU has ranked 61-70 among emerging universities and eighth among the Arab world universities. The progress

achieved by SQU is in line with the Oman Vision 2040 which has set a target for SQU to be ranked among the top 300 global universities by 2030 with four other Omani universities to achieve the same ranking by 2040. The advancement in global universities ranking was due to the SQU's continued endeavours to maintain performance and quality indicators



and update its data each year as well as focusing on academic reputation of the university through encouraging the researchers to publish their

research in the international scientific research platforms. Besides, SQU accorded attention to the labour market's job satisfaction indicators for the university graduates. Assessments of research quality for researches published by the academic staff members constitutes a major indicator of the global ranking of universities. Hence,

SQU is keen on providing incentivising awards for publication in internally reputable academic journals. The student-to-staff ratio indicator, SQU is keen to follow the international standards. In the overseas student indicator, the number of international students at both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at SQU has risen. — **ONA**



شركة عُمان للجوِّف الجاف
OMAN DRYDOCK COMPANY

Expression of Interest (EOI) INVITATION

Oman Drydock Company LLC (ODC), is a limited liability company established in 2008 and fully owned by the Government (CR No. 1811371).

ODC hereby invites qualified and specialized bidders to submit Expression of Interest (EOI) for the following:

EOI Ref. No:	Tender Name	Request of information	Closing Date
ODC/2020/016	Service Operator (Waste Management and Recycling) at ODC Shipyard	During the period from 14-06-20 to 21-06-2020 (7:30 am- 4:00 pm)	22-06-2020 At 12:30 pm

1.

Please note that this EOI invitation is for prequalification purposes only, to identify qualified bidders who can participate in the RFQ when issued.

2.

Full details of the above EOI may be requested via e-mail as per below details;
Email id; Tenders@omandrydock.com Land Line: +968 25210352 Fax: +968 25210120.

3.

Interested parties can register online, please visit our website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> & <http://www.omandrydock.com>

4.

The EOI ref. No shall be mentioned in all electronic correspondence relating to the above EOI.

5.

Oman Drydock Company LLC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the EOI applications, extend deadlines, or cancel the EOI invitation without any reasons and its decision in this respect is binding and final.

6.

Applications received after the above deadline will not be considered.

Oman Honey Market to be held online from June 28

MUSCAT: The 14th edition of Oman Honey Market (shahd) will be held online between June 28 and July 4, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has announced. The e-platform of the biannual event will showcase a wide range of indigenous honey varieties from mountain honey to plains honey, and wild honey to coastal honey, frankincense honey to Sidr honey, flower honey to acacia honey, and many more. The 13th Oman Honey Market, held during



December 25-28 last year at the Muscat Grand Mall, registered over RO142,000 in sales with 5,894 kg of honey sold by 62 honey keepers who participated in the event.— **ONA**

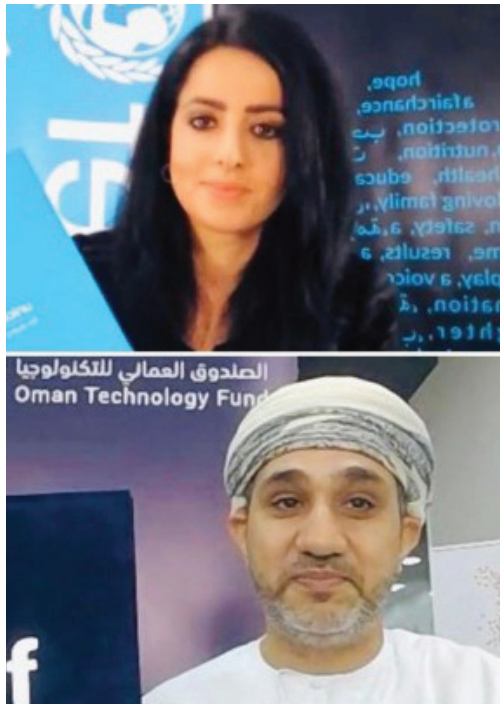
COVID-19 YOUTH TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE KICKS OFF ONLINE

140 TECH ENTHUSIASTS ARE PARTICIPATING IN 48-HOUR VIRTUAL CHALLENGE TO DEVELOP NEW ONLINE PLATFORMS

MUSCAT: The 48-hour COVID-19 Youth Technology Challenge kick-started with as many as 140 tech enthusiasts from Oman and across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are participating in the virtual challenge aimed at developing new online platforms to provide better opportunities for children and young people amidst the COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 Youth Technology Challenge, co-hosted by Oman Technology Fund and UNICEF Oman, and with support from the Generation Unlimited initiative, sees 50 teams working on innovative ideas in the categories of online access to education, training, employment and health services. In keeping with the physical distancing measures in place, this is an online challenge.

"We are delighted that



so many bright young minds from across the region are participating in our youth technology challenge," said Lana Wreikat, UNICEF Representative to Oman. "Young people inherently understand the problems they face and — as demonstrated by the number of participants taking part — possess a huge drive to find meaningful solutions."

"The teams are ready with their ideas and now the real work begins," said Talal bin Sulaiman

al Rahbi, OTF's Chairman of the Board of Directors. "We have an impressive turnout for this very first OTF-UNICEF challenge and I am equally impressed by the quality of ideas submitted. I very much see this as an opportunity for Oman to foster innovative platforms that will have an impact at local, regional and international level."

"COVID-19 has fundamentally shifted the way we interact with each other," said Yousuf al Harthy, OTF's Chief Executive Officer. "But there is no doubt that we can harness technology to develop impactful solutions to the problems this virus has created both in the immediate and longer term."

With the support of 28 mentors, teams will work flat out over the weekend to develop their ideas, before submitting video pitches to the judging panel, he added.

OVER 1,090 GEMSTONE SAMPLES INSPECTED

MUSCAT: The Directorate General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) indicated that the number of gemstone samples that were inspected in 2019 stood at 1,093, an increase of 10.96 per cent, compared to 985 samples in the same period in 2018.

The MoCI is making huge efforts to monitor and ensure the quality of the precious stones displayed in jewellery shops. It is also providing service for testing and analysis of these precious stones and issuing certificates of origin using the best methods and technology used for the process. This is to ensure that the global standards required for this purpose is adhered and credibility and trust of consumers is assured.

Nasser bin Ashraf al Balushi, Head of the Valuable Stones Testing Laboratory of the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, said that the test samples in the first category reached to 802 which is an increase by 4.5 per cent over 767 samples tested during the same period in the year 2018.

OMAN دَائِلِي

Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team

Mohd Al Rashdi : Head Office	99841230	m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com
Ali Al Maashari : Head Office	99639264	wadialmeeh@yahoo.com
Bakhit Al Shihri : Salalah Office	92998577	bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com
Abdullah Al Abri : Nizwa Office	99429094	nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om
Musalam Al Saidi : Suhar Office	99429192	sohardaily@outlook.com

DONATE BLOOD, BE PART OF A LIFESAVING MISSION

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Having infected and recovered from COVID-19 is not a deterrent to donate blood and save a life. All citizens and residents of the country can donate blood subject to their health conditions, according to the Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

Speaking to the Observer on the eve of World Blood Donors Day (June 14), Dr Zainab bint Salim al Fanna al Araimi, Director of Blood Banks Services at the Ministry of Health, said a large number of patients needed blood transfusion.

"We have many patients who need regular blood transfusion, including people with genetic blood disorders such as sickle cells anemia and thalassemia, tumors and or RTA (road traffic accidents) and have lost a lot of blood, as well as those who need emergency surgeries," Dr Fatma said.

"As community members,



we have much to give to ensure that we all have a healthier place to live in. As an individual, you may encourage your friends and family to become regular blood donors, you can volunteer with the blood service to reach out to members of your

community, provide care to donors, and you may also help manage local blood donation sessions and campaigns. Your very first action can be to find out your blood type and register yourself as a blood donor," Dr Jaffer Hussain, Regional Adviser and WHO

Representative, said.

"Because blood and its components can be stored only for a certain period of time, we all need to have access to safe and quality-assured blood and blood products. That is why there is a constant need for a regular supply of blood," he added.

The Central Blood Bank is facing 50 per cent shortage of blood due to COVID-19 and limited time given for donation during the holy month of Ramadhan, whereas the demand for blood is doubled, particularly in some extraordinary circumstances such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyone who wishes to donate blood can send a WhatsApp to 94555648 for appointment. Masks and gloves are distributed to all those who enter the Blood Bank besides checking body temperature prior to any procedure for blood donation.

Low accident rate enabled more ICU beds

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The low volume of traffic accidents enabled the Health Ministry to admit more people infected with coronavirus in the intensive care units (ICUs) in the hospitals in the Sultanate. According to Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, stay at home orders coupled with lockdown measures have led to significant drop in road accidents as motorists did not come out on the roads.

"Low rate of traffic accidents contributed to a higher rate of admission of infected people in the intensive care units for treatment," the minister said.

The number of beds in the intensive care units in the Sultanate currently stands at 147 beds.

Speaking at the press conference



held by the Supreme Committee to brief about the COVID-19 pandemic situation, Dr al Saeedi appreciated the Royal Oman Police for its role in the decreasing level of road accident rate in the Sultanate.

Except for an accident that killed four persons in an accident in Thamrait, an official at the ROP said that there have not been any major accidents during the recent months.

"The traffic department attended a very few calls related to road acci-

dents during the lockdown period," said the official. The minister said that COVID-19-related mortality rate in the Sultanate has been very low at 0.5 per cent.

"No country has accurately predicted the peak of the virus so far, because COVID-19 is different from earlier viruses," he said with an advice that "people who show the first symptoms should stay at home and resort to health establishments only if their condition escalates".

FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS GEAR UP FOR VIRTUAL YOGA DAY

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Yoga has come handy for every fitness enthusiast during COVID-19, as it has been offering mental and physical solutions. Its propagators are claiming specific postures and practices that help build body immunity as well. No wonder that the vast fraternity of yoga practitioners has decided to observe the International Yoga Day (June 21) virtually. The organisers are gearing up with calls on social media to join the event at a given time. Individual houses across the world will be the venues of this year's International Yoga Day due to its mass appeal.

The Yoga Forum of the Indian Social Club in Salalah has started contacting members to join the event at 7.30 pm on June 21, a common link for which is

soon to be announced.

PR Sri Kumar, Convener of the Yoga Forum, said the International Yoga Day event used to be very big due to a large audience and people joining from most of the international communities at a given venue. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, has forced everyone to stay at home for safety reasons, and that is why the event is being organised virtually this year.

"We are organising this virtual event in association with the Indian Embassy in Oman and Art of Living. Since we have announced this on social media, we have been receiving hundreds of inquiries about the link and platform to be used during the event," said Sri Kumar, who is also a coordinator of Art of Living.

At a time when people are



forced to live inside the four walls for safety reasons, Yoga has come as a natural fitness solution for many. The Internet is flooded with all sorts of suggestions. Still, the real Yoga followers suggest going for reliable schools and trainers for this. He said the Art of Living is active these days in offering online courses and programmes daily. "People are joining from several countries.

Schedules are there, keeping in mind people working from home and even those who are managing going to offices depending upon the urgency of work."

"Yoga Day has become more relevant in the current situation. This is a nice way to take care of your physical and mental fitness at a time when wellness of both is needed to fight the menace of the pandemic," said Sri Kumar.



SULTANATE A MAJOR REGIONAL TELECOM HUB: BUDDECOMM

SYDNEY: The Sydney-based telecommunications research and consultancy company BuddeComm, said the Sultanate has established itself as an important communications hub in the Middle East with access to numerous submarine cables including the recently announced 2Africa submarine cable, which should become available during 2023-2024.

In a recently published report about the development of the telecom sector in Oman, BuddeComm said that the

launch of a third mobile network operator in the Sultanate this year will increase competition in the mobile sector, with the current operators of Omantel and Ooredoo having a similar and sizeable market share. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the Sultanate agreed that the Vodafone Group, along with a local consortium of investors, could form the third mobile network operator.

BuddeComm said in its report that Oman has

established a progressive mobile sector which comprises substantial coverage of both 3G and 4G LTE networks. There have also been trials conducted, networks upgraded, and spectrum allocated, in readiness for 5G. Oman is improving its fixed broadband infrastructure with the building of fibre-based networks as part of Oman's National Broadband Strategy. By 2040 it is hoped that all homes and businesses will be connected to the national broadband infrastructure, the report said. — ONA

BREATHE SAFELY WITH A FACE MASK

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Many questions are being asked about use of masks. Wearing masks alone can protect us or will prolonged use of the same lead to CO2 intoxication or oxygen deficiency?

Different types of masks are being made and it's no wonder today we are able to identify a person even with masks on, due to its rapid popularity.

However, some reports suggest that masks are two-edged sword, the improper use of which can lead to problems than benefits, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and medical experts.

Contrary to what we believed that wearing a mask will protect, what we actually do not know that we might increase our risk of infection if we do not wear them properly.

The WHO has issued guidelines on proper way of wearing facemasks. It said, "The use of a mask alone is insufficient to provide an adequate level of protection, and other measures should also be adopted."

According to the WHO, these measures include social distancing and frequent hand washing, in addition to wearing and removing the mask correctly.

The prolonged use of masks can be uncomfortable. However, it does not lead to CO2 intoxication or oxygen deficiency, according to the WHO.

"There are no proven dangers as such of wearing face masks, not true what has been circulated on WhatsApp groups. We, doctors and surgeons wear them for



Prolonged use of masks can be uncomfortable. However, it does not lead to CO2 intoxication or oxygen deficiency, according to the WHO.

several hours during operations," says Dr Mezon Tufail al Rahman.

Surgical masks are flat or pleated and are affixed to the head with straps or have ear loops. Make sure it fits properly and that it is tight enough to allow you breathe properly, while wearing the masks. Do not reuse a disposable mask and make sure you change it as soon as it gets dampened.

"Proper use and discarding of masks is a major challenge now. Many people are seen keeping the mask over the chin not covering the nose or mouth which beats the very purpose," says Dr Benny Panakkan, Medical Director and Cardiac Specialist.

"Moreover, if you keep

**THERE ARE NO
PROVEN DANGERS
AS SUCH OF
WEARING FACE
MASKS, DOCTORS
AND SURGEONS
WEAR THEM FOR
SEVERAL HOURS
DURING
OPERATIONS**

the mask like below your chin and adjust it, often your risk increases as you are touching the face with contaminated hands more times."

Washing or sanitising hands after touching the outer surface of the mask is ideal as it may harbor the virus.

If using a reusable cloth mask after every use

washing with soap and water thoroughly and drying before reuse is also important.

PROPER DISPOSAL

Careless dumping of used masks will increase community spread hence, it should carefully be disposed of.

Single-use masks are made of plastic and a thin strip of metal and are often not being disposed of properly.

"These masks are being found on footpaths and roads in many cities of the world. Environmental groups have found thousands of them littering beaches and hiking trails, where they pose a threat to marine, animal and bird life," said Dr Nigel Kuriakose, SQU Hospital.

Beijing in ‘wartime emergency’ due to fresh virus cluster



Authorities closed Xinfadi meat wholesale market in Beijing after it was linked to a fresh cluster of coronavirus cases. — AFP

BEIJING: A Beijing district put itself on a “wartime” footing and the capital banned tourism and sports events on Saturday after a cluster of novel coronavirus infections centred around a major wholesale market sparked fears of a new wave of COVID-19.

Forty-five people out of 517 tested with throat swabs at the Xinfadi market in the city’s southwestern Fengtai district had tested positive for the coronavirus, Chu Junwei, a district official, told a briefing.

None were showing symptoms of COVID-19, he said, but added that 11 neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the market, which claims to be the largest agricultural wholesale market in Asia, had been locked down with 24-hour guards put in place.

“In accordance with the principle of putting the safety of the

masses and health first, we have adopted lockdown measures for the Xinfadi market and surrounding neighbourhoods,” Chu said. The district is in a “wartime emergency mode,” he added.

The closure of the market and new restrictions come as concerns grow about a second wave of the pandemic, which has infected more than 7.66 million people worldwide and killed more than 420,000.

They also underline how even in countries which have had great success in curbing the spread of the virus, clusters can sometimes easily arise.

The entire Xinfadi market was shut down at 3 am on Saturday, after two men working at a meat research centre who had recently visited the market were reported to have the virus. It was not immediately clear how they had been

infected.

On Saturday, market entrances were blocked and police stood guard. Beijing authorities had earlier halted beef and mutton trading at the market and had closed other wholesale markets around the city.

They plan for more than 10,000 people at the Xinfadi market to take nucleic acid tests to detect coronavirus infections.

According to the Xinfadi website, more than 1,500 tonnes of seafood, 18,000 tonnes of vegetables and 20,000 tonnes of fruit are traded at the market daily.

A city spokesman told the briefing that all six COVID-19 patients confirmed in Beijing on Friday had visited the Xinfadi market. The capital will suspend sports events and tourists from other parts of China, effective immediately, he said.

— Reuters

IN BRIEF

INDIA RECORDS BIGGEST SINGLE-DAY JUMP IN CASES

NEW DELHI: India reported its biggest single-day jump in coronavirus cases on Saturday, adding 11,458 confirmed infections and taking its total count to more than 300,000, according to data from the federal health ministry. India is the fourth-worst affected country in the world, having surpassed the United Kingdom on Friday, with cases steadily increasing despite a nationwide lockdown that began in late March and has since been loosened. Confirmed cases in the worst-hit western state of Maharashtra moved past the 100,000 mark, data showed on Saturday. The national capital New Delhi, where the health system has also been reeling, saw more than 2,000 new cases.

PHUKET AIRPORT REOPENS AFTER VIRUS CLOSURE

BANGKOK: The airport in the southern Thai island province of Phuket reopened for domestic flights on Saturday, amid the country’s efforts to ease measures imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand announced late on Friday that domestic flights will resume from midnight on Friday. However, international passenger flights are still banned until the end of June. Phuket has reported a total of 227 coronavirus cases to date, with three deaths, according to the province’s public relations department.

POLAND REOPENS BORDERS TO EU NEIGHBOURS

WARSAW: After almost three months, Poland has opened its borders to all of its European Union neighbour countries on Saturday. After relaxing controls on the border with Lithuania on Friday, the reopening of borders to Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia came into effect at midnight. Requirements for entry from non-EU countries have also been relaxed, while controls at the borders with Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian exclave Kaliningrad remain in place. — Agencies

WORLD

Thousands march for racial justice in Australia

PERTH: Thousands of protesters rallied for racial equality in cities across Australia on Saturday despite official warnings the demonstrations could undermine the country's success in suppressing the coronavirus.

The biggest demonstration took place in the Western Australian capital Perth where several thousand people gathered in a park waving "Black Lives Matter" signs and Aboriginal flags.

Smaller protests for Aboriginal rights were held in Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory, and towns in neighbouring Queensland — both regions with numerous indigenous communities.

"We are here to support our future as indigenous people and to walk against the injustices of... what happens to our people, with over 400 black deaths in custody", one unidentified protester told public broadcaster ABC at the Darwin march.

With the exception of the Darwin demonstration, which had authorisation, the other protests violated official injunctions against mass gatherings instituted three months ago to curb



Protesters participate in a Black Lives Matter rally in solidarity with those in the US protesting the death of George Floyd, in Perth, Australia, on Saturday. — Reuters

the spread of the coronavirus.

But organisers made efforts to keep the protesters spread out and mostly wearing face masks, and police did not intervene.

It was the second straight weekend of large protests in Australia, initially organised in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States following

the killing by a white policeman of African-American George Floyd.

Elsewhere in Asia, hundreds gathered in a Taipei park with some holding signs with slogans such as "This is a movement, not a moment".

At one point the crowd went down on one knee to mourn black people killed by police in the United States

and held eight minutes of silence to remember Floyd.

Dozens also marched in Tokyo in the rain to raise awareness about racial discrimination.

The movement has resonated particularly strongly with many in Australia, a country also wrestling with the legacy of racial injustice towards the country's indigenous peoples. — AFP

10 dead, 117 injured in China oil truck blast

BEIJING: At least 10 people were killed and more than a hundred injured after an oil tanker truck exploded on a highway in China on Saturday, state media said. The force of the blast caused nearby homes and factories to collapse, the government said on social media, and sent huge clouds of black smoke billowing into the air as flames engulfed several cars. Dramatic video footage of the accident near Wenling city in the eastern province of Zhejiang published by state media showed a huge ball of fire shooting into the air as people screamed.

Tunisia estimates tourism sector losses at \$2 billion

TUNIS: Tunisia estimates losses of 6 billion dinars (\$2.1 billion) in its tourism sector in 2020 due to the novel coronavirus, its tourism minister said. Tunisian Tourism Minister Mohamed Ali Toumi said his country was expecting revenues of 7 billion dinars this year before the outbreak of the global pandemic, up from 5.6 billion dinars in 2019. Tunisia is the first Arab country to declare that it has coronavirus under control with near-zero cases in the recent days. It has recorded a total of 1,093 infections of the virus. The country, which eyes to revive its tourism sector, is set to reopen its air, land and sea borders as of June 27.

North Korea warns of 'action' against South

SEOUL: North Korea will take "action" against the South and entrust its military to carry it out, Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un, threatened on Saturday in a statement carried by the KCNA news agency. "I feel it is high time to surely break with the south Korean authorities. We will soon take a next action", she said in the latest denunciation of Seoul. Since last week the North has issued a series of vitriolic condemnations of the South over activists sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets over the border — something defectors do on a regular basis. — Agencies



A woman wearing a face mask holds a placard as Michigan Conservative Coalition protests against the state's extended stay-at-home order. — Reuters

A revolt against masks creates new danger as California reopens

LUKE MONEY AND RONG-GONG LIN II

As California rapidly reopens its economy, health officials have made clear the only way to avoid a wave of new coronavirus infections is with strict safety rules, including social distancing, limits on the capacity of businesses and wearing face coverings when around other people.

But a mask rebellion is under way in some parts of the state, with residents pushing back on mandatory face-covering rules even with coronavirus cases on the rise and as more businesses open their doors and some people yearn to return to old routines.

The potency of mask politics became clear this week in Orange County, where the health officer resigned after weeks of attacks — and a death threat — over her mandatory mask rules. Her replacement on Thursday rescinded the rules amid intense pressure from the Board

of Supervisors.

Instead, Orange County “strongly recommends” wearing masks in public settings, and the county’s top health official was left to explain the change even while acknowledging face coverings could prevent more deaths.

“I want to be clear: This does not diminish the importance of face coverings”, said Orange County Health Care Agency Director Dr Clayton Chau, who is now also the interim health officer. “I stand with the public health experts and believe wearing cloth face coverings helps to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community and save lives”.

Other counties have also buckled to public pressure. Fresno County had a face mask rule for less than a day before it was pulled back. Riverside and San Bernardino pulled their orders after blowback. Stockton’s mayor, Michael Tubbs, proposed face covering rules but failed to get any support from the City Council this week. — dpa

My glasses keep fogging up... and I am not happy!



RAY PETERSEN
petersen_ray@hotmail.com

Like most of you, I detest having to wear a mask. They are uncomfortable in this hot weather, and I sweat beneath the mask something awful. I am an asthmatic, and I think too, that probably affects my psychological perspective, and consequently, my breathing, which becomes laboured and somewhat desperate. Or maybe it is not all in my head...

The Centers Disease Control in the United States says, “If you have a chronic respiratory condition such as asthma, covering your mouth and nose can be especially challenging. The physical barrier of the mask makes it harder to take in air; it also traps some carbon dioxide as you exhale, which means you end up breathing in air that is warmer and moister. Add a compromised respiratory system to the equation and a mask can feel downright suffocating”.

Founder of the Asthma and Chest Foundation, Professor Gregory Erhabor, added “Asthmatics, could react to some of the materials used in the masks, which could serve as irritants and provoke an (allergic) attack. This could be idiosyncratic and patients

may react in different ways. Some asthmatics can become claustrophobic and breathless, so a mask will worsen their condition. Also, wearing masks may result in hypoxia, with subsequent difficulty in breathing”.

I noted that the various consequences of hypoxia include inflammation and swelling of the airways, destruction of lung tissue, called alveoli, restricted blood flow affecting heart and brain health, hypercapnia, which is the excessive retention of carbon dioxide in the lungs. Untreated, hypoxia can lead to depression and mood swings, fatigue, headaches, hypertension, pulmonary hypertension, an increase in red blood cells, polycythemia, respiratory or heart failure.

If I wasn't already a ‘cot-case’, I am now, as David Abrams, a New York University psychologist, suggests that many of us “don’t like to wear masks because it shows that we are afraid for the consequences of COVID-19, and of course, especially we ‘alpha males,’ don’t want to show fear!”

Hmmmm... So, I am being paranoid about my health... and I cannot see through these fogged-up glasses!

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

Instant Banking Services

Mobile Payments System

Transfer money to anyone, anytime instantly through **BankDhofar MobilePayments System.**

Welcome to the most hassle-free way to transfer money from your account to any other account instantly, with BankDhofar Mobile Payments System.

Instantly transfer Cash to any other wallet in the Sultanate.
Quick pay and transfer to merchants.

For more information: https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/COVID_19_Preventive_Measures.aspx

بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

the best bank for you 24791111 www.bankdhofar.com

Goal to elevate Oman into a REGIONAL FOOD HUB

“

ENG SALEH MOHAMMED AL SHANFARI,
CEO – Oman Food Investment Holding Co

We are ready to look at privatisation and we are ready to invite private investors to take (stakes in our subsidiaries), because our role is to promote and develop projects.



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A plethora of government agencies are working in concert to support Oman's aspirations to evolve into a food hub for the wider region – a proposition that opens up the Sultanate to investment opportunities and food-related innovation, according to a key industry executive.
Eng Saleh Mohammed al Shanfari (pictured), CEO – Oman Food Investment Holding Co (OFIC), the wholly government-owned food sector investment and development flagship, also held out the potential for the privatisation of government stakes in the expanding portfolio of subsidiaries promoted by OFIC. The underlying objective, he said, is to position the Sultanate as a destination for investment and innovation in the food and agribusiness catering to the wider region.
OFIC, now part of the newly restructured Oman Investment Authority, oversees a portfolio of over 10 food related ventures spanning the dairy, poultry, red meat, fisheries, logistics, and veterinary pharmaceutical segments of the industry, with investments topping \$1 billion.
“We are ready to look at privatisation and we are ready to

STRONG AMBITIONS:
Subsidiaries of state-backed Oman Food Investment open to investment and privatisation

invite private investors to take (stakes in our subsidiaries), because our role is to promote and develop projects,” said Al Shanfari. “Whoever comes to us with ideas, we will work together with other stakeholders to ensure the success of food related projects in Oman.
After all, Oman is planning to become the food hub for the region, and we welcome investors to join in our initiative.”
OFIC’s Chief Executive Officer made the appeal during a webinar hosted by The Business Year (TBY) last week.

TURN TO PAGE 12

Port of Salalah

INVITATION TO TENDER – CATERING AND ASSOCIATED SERVICES

Port of Salalah is one of the largest multi-purpose Ports in the Middle East located at Salalah in Sultanate of Oman.
Port of Salalah invites specialized, professional, experienced and commercially registered Catering Services Company to manage the catering services in Port of Salalah.
We invite application, company profile, list of existing customers and registration papers from interested companies those who are specialized and experience in Catering, Housekeeping, Laundry Services and Supply of cafeteria staffs. The interested parties should meet the minimum of the following criteria;

1. Minimum Criteria to participate in the tender:

a) The bidder must be a duly registered company in Oman with sufficient track record of doing Catering Services to large industries with proper certification.

b) The bidder must have at least 5 years' experience in Catering and Associated services to reputed institutions such as government, semi government or reputed large public/private firms.

c) The bidder must have an experience in serving minimum 5000 meals per day.

d) The bidder should have minimum 5 active Catering contracts with reputed largest companies in Oman.

e) Document to prove the valid ISO, HACCP certificates, Health & Safety records of the company for the past 10 years.

2. A documentary evidence to fulfill the above minimum criteria shall be provided.

3. Online Tender bidding process will be initiated with shortlisted companies.

4. Preference will be given to those who have working experience with Sea Port or large Industries.

5. The last date of sending your interest to participate in this Tender shall be on or before **21st June 2020.**

6. Port of Salalah reserve the right to reject any or all Companies without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

If interested please write with subject of this advertisement to Tender@salalahport.com

FOOD VENTURES SWELL OMAN TECH FUND'S PORTFOLIO

THRUST AREA:
14 FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE RELATED
START-UPS AMONG 120
VENTURES SUPPORTED
BY OTF



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Local and international start-ups backed by Oman Technology Fund (OTF), the Sultanate's leading venture capital investment fund, have ballooned to over 120 ventures – a growing portfolio boosted in recent months by technological innovations fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic.

According to Eng Yousef bin Ali al Harthy (pictured), CEO, food-related start-ups represent one of the fastest growing segments within the portfolio, reflecting the state-backed fund's – and indeed the Omani government's – ambitions to build the nation's food sector, as well as strengthen food security.

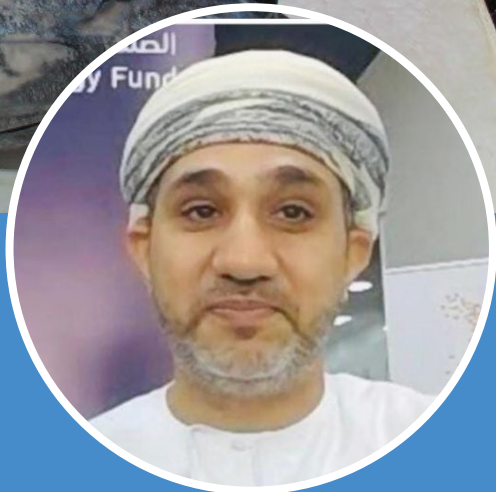
Of over 120 start-ups supported by OTF, fourteen are related to food and agriculture – the fastest growing of 11 different segments supported by the Fund across its portfolio, said Al Harthy. Other ventures backed by OTF are

distributed across Enterprise, Lifestyle, Logistics, Media & Content, Healthcare, Finance, Education, Manufacturing & Smart Cities, Retail and Tourism.

The CEO shared details about OTF's growing role during a webinar hosted by The Business Year (TBY) on the theme, 'Fisheries and Agriculture: Technologies Opportunities', last week. Fellow panelists included Dr Saoud Hamood al Habsi, Under-Secretary of Fisheries Wealth – Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries; and Eng Saleh Mohammed al Shanfari, CEO – Oman Food Investment Holding Co (OFIC).

"Of particular interest to us is fish farming because it will account for 60 per cent of Oman's fish production by 2040," said Al Harthy.

"Presently, fish farming accounts for just around 1,000 tonnes out of a total annual fisheries output of 850,000 tonnes; but fish farming supersede con-



“

Of particular interest to us is fish farming because it will account for 60 per cent of Oman's fish production by 2040.

**ENG YOUSEF BIN ALI
AL HARTHY,
CEO, OTF**

ventional farming, and we are taking a big interest in this. OTF has so far invested in one Omani fish farming tech start-up in collaboration with the Ministry, which has given them test-beds for their venture."

Another Omani venture supported by OTF aims to enhance honey production in the Sultanate. The start-up, which harnesses drone

technology to support the pollination of date palm trees, is working with the government-backed One Million Date Palms Project. The drone-based pollination technology is being tested over 10,000 trees as part of this initiative, he said.

OTF was recently credited with facilitating the speedy roll-out of an eCommerce platform that helped Omani fishermen access wholesale customers when the pandemic forced the closure of a number of markets across the Sultanate.

Behar – an initiative of young Omani entrepreneurs backed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – enables fishermen to auction their fresh catch using this first-of-its-kind platform.

Between 10,000 – 20,000 tonnes of fresh fish offloaded every day by fishermen at the Central Fish Market in Al Fulaij are bought up by wholesale in these online auctions.

The CEO credited Oman's unique characteristics, coupled with the groundswell of tech entrepreneurship being witnessed among young Omanis, with the success of these start-ups. Also playing a supportive role is the leadership in government agencies that has done away with bureaucracy in support of the national agenda, he noted.

The pandemic has had a positive side to it, said Al Harthy. It has helped bring together the country as a whole – encompassing the government and private sector, as well as the citizens and youngsters in particular – in finding solutions amid the crisis.

Young Omani tech entrepreneurs have emerged as the "real players", with OTF just an instrument in the successful rollout of some of these applications, he added.

BUSINESS

Goal to elevate Oman into a regional food hub

FROM PAGE 10

A robust agribusiness environment thriving in the Sultanate has enabled investors across multiple segments of the food supply chain to work together and develop Oman into a food hub, said Al Shanfari.

“From the outset of the pandemic, there has no panic-buying of food in Oman because of the availability of foodstuff. We have worked together with Asyad Group, and various airlines and logistics companies, to position Oman as a food hub. To this end, we are also supporting the neighbouring countries address their food requirements. We want to be the food hub in the region, working with every country to bring their food here, process and package it, and re-export it. We will also extend all support to investors to market their products globally.”

Also as part of this goal, OFIC is supporting the development of a Food Technopark in Muscat, said the CEO. “This concept will allow various players and stakeholders within and outside Oman to bring in new ideas. The Park will allow for ideation, conceptualisation and commercialisation – with help from Sultan Qaboos University, The Research Council, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, R&D agencies, as well as innovators and SMEs.”

MSM DROPS MARGINALLY ON FOREIGN SELLING PRESSURE

MSM 30 closed the week lower by 0.11 per cent. The turnover and volumes were higher than last week by 42.3 per cent and 72 per cent, respectively. Locals were net buyers while foreigners were net sellers.

All the sub-indices closed lower except Financial. Industrial index was down by 1.83 per cent, Services Index was down by 1.11 per cent while the Financial index was up by 0.85 per cent. Shariah Index closed up by 0.06 per cent during the week.

Bank Muscat completed an unsecured bilateral loan facility of \$150m, which has a 5-year tenure, with China Development Bank (CDB), a development finance institution of the People's Republic of China.

The closure of the \$150m bilateral loan follows the closure of a Club Loan for USD 650m recently from a consortium of 20 relationship banks from around the globe.

National Life & General Insurance received circulars by regulators in Oman and UAE to pay claims for COVID-19 notwithstanding the exclusion. Following the regulatory directive, the reinsurers of the Company have agreed to pay their share of the claims as a special case. As at May 31, 2020 claims reported for COVID-19 at Company level is around RO 0.6m on gross basis and RO 0.4m on net basis (net of reinsurer share).

Raysut Cement results came with a surprise as the company reported net loss of RO 4m in 1Q20 (generally

Oman Public Finance (OMR mn)			
	1Q19	1Q20	Change
Oil Revenue	1,631	1,397	-14.4%
Gas Revenue	458	365	-20.2%
Other Revenue	621	853	37.3%
Revenue	2,710	2,616	-3.5%
Current Expenditure	2,070	1,960	-5.3%
Investment Expenditure	457	351	-23.1%
Actual expenditures under settlement	374	327	-12.5%
Participation & Support	119	14	-88.2%
Expenditure	3,020	2,652	-12.2%
Deficit	(309)	(36)	-88.2%

Source: CBO

one of the best quarters because of seasonality and lesser COVID-19 impact till March). Revenue during the period was higher by 11.3 per cent to RO 25.6m compared to RO 23m last year. Expenses on the other hand rose significantly by 31.5 per cent to RO 29.8m compared to RO 22.7m.

Galfar Engineering revised its loss after tax from RO 59k to RO 6.294m for the year 2019. Revenue was changed marginally from RO 253m to RO 251m.

Company which earlier recorded impairment of receivables at RO 242k changed it to RO 18.1m because of IFRS requirements. Management and board are however confident of collecting the old outstanding receivables against which provision is created in the books of account resulting in reversal of those provisions in near future. Company recorded RO 15.2m profit from sale of discontinued operations.

Galfar Engineering order book as of 2019 stands at RO 401m of which RO 111m is from the oil and gas sector. Company's unpaid certified receivables stand at

RO 60m at the closing of 2019.

Oman National Engineering reported net income of RO 379.4k compared to RO 356.3k, growth of 6.5 per cent. Revenue during the period was higher by 3.96 per cent to RO 12.2m. Expenses in the same period were up 3.88 per cent.

Oman reported surplus in the month of March 2020 at RO 280m. Surplus was largely because of growth in other revenue segment which were recorded at RO 629m (up 238 per cent m-o-m) in the month of March.

Overall deficit stood at RO 36m in 1Q20 compared to RO 309m in 1Q19, drop of 88 per cent. Revenue during 1Q20 stood at RO 2.6bn compared to RO 2.71bn last year, drop of 3.5 per cent.

Oil and gas revenue were lower by 14 per cent and 20 per cent respectively during 1Q2. While other revenue segment reported a growth of 37.3 per cent YoY to RO 853m in 1Q20 compared to RO 621m in 1Q19. Expenditure dropped by 12.2 per cent to RO 2.65bn compared to RO 3.02bn last year.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

UK property prices at 10-year low

A gauge of UK house prices hit its lowest level in a decade in May, but signalled confidence ahead as the country emerges from months of lockdown.

A survey from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Rics) showed that 32 per cent of estate agents reported a plunge in property prices in May. That marked the lowest gauge of UK house prices since 2010.

This deepened April's low of minus 22 per cent, as the housing market froze following the closure of estate agents and the banning of house viewings. As Britain entered lockdown in March, buyers and sellers were told to delay any sales and cancel viewings.

But there are signs of recovery for UK house prices on the horizon as estate agents begin to reopen. Rics forecast house prices to gain momentum over the next 12 months, as new buyer enquiries recovered



ANDY JALIL

andyjalil@aol.com

from a record low of minus 94 per cent in April to minus five per cent last month.

Ross Counsell, Director at Good Move said: "The results point to a slight improvement in the outlook for sales over the coming 12 months.

We must not forget the impact that the current pandemic has had. Today, people are a lot more cautious with their finances due to a decrease in home income caused by loss of work and other factors".

Rics Chief Economist Simon Rubinsohn said house sales that had been put on hold during the lockdown were now largely going through.

"But it remains to be seen how sustained this improvement will prove", he added.

He noted caution about a potential jump in unemployment when the government's jobs retention programme expires at the end of October.

Property website Zoopla said that house sales in England had recovered since the government allowed estate agents to reopen last month. However, London lags behind the rest of the country and markets in Scotland and Wales remain closed.

"May's Rics survey provides more evidence that housing market activity recovered quickly after the government permitted home-seekers to view properties in person and surveyors to inspect properties again", said Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist

at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

However, Tombs added he "remained concerned" that housing demand will "peter out later this year, once some of the pent-up demand has faded".

UK house prices data released last week by Halifax showed that the average price dropped 0.2 per cent in May to £237,808.

The lockdown showed signs of permanent change for UK house prices. It showed 81 per cent of people surveyed expressing an increased desire for a garden or balcony.

Three quarters of people surveyed said they now valued property near green space more.

Meanwhile, 78 per cent of respondents predicted there will be a fall in appeal for tower blocks.

More than half said they were less likely to seek property in urban spaces, showing signs that property outside of metropolitan areas might tick up.

US senators draft plan to reform new plane design approvals

WASHINGTON: Two key US senators are circulating a bipartisan draft bill that would reform how the Federal Aviation Administration certifies new aircraft in the wake of two fatal Boeing 737 MAX crashes that killed 346 people.

The measure seeks to eliminate the ability of aircraft makers like Boeing Co to unduly influence the certification process and marks the most significant step toward reforms following the 2018 and 2019 crashes, which sparked calls to change how the FAA approves new airplanes.

The draft is authored by Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, a Republican, and the top Democrat, Senator Maria Cantwell.



Grounded Boeing 737 MAX aircraft are seen parked in an aerial photo at Boeing Field in Seattle, Washington. — Reuters

The FAA, Wicker's office and Boeing declined to comment on the draft bill.

It aims to grant the FAA new power over the long-standing practice of delegating some certification tasks to aircraft manufac-

turer employees. It would give the agency authority to hire or remove Boeing employees conducting FAA certification tasks and allow the FAA to appoint safety advisers.

One congressional aide

said the bill would put the FAA "back in the driver's seat" overseeing airplane certification.

Boeing's best-selling plane has been grounded since March 2019 and the manufacturer faces an ongoing criminal probe and investigation by the Transportation Department's inspector general.

The largest US planemaker hopes to conduct a key certification test flight late this month as it works to resume flights.

The draft bill would require reforms aimed at preventing "undue pressure... or instances of perceived regulatory coziness or other failures to maintain independence between the FAA" and Boeing employees conducting certification tasks.

— Reuters

BUSINESS



A shopper browses in a supermarket while wearing masks to help slow the spread of the coronavirus in north St Louis, Missouri. — Reuters

US consumer confidence rises; unemployment shadow lingers

WASHINGTON: US consumer sentiment perked up in early June as households cheered the reopening of businesses and a surprise rebound in hiring, though they did not expect a significant improvement in the economy amid fears of a resurgence in COVID-19 infections.

The survey from the University of Michigan on Friday is broadly in line with economists' expectations that the recovery from the recession would be a long slog. The National Bureau of Economic Research, the arbiter of US recessions, declared on Monday that the economy slipped into recession in February.

"While uncertainty about the future is beginning to ease, it is still higher than it was at anytime during the Great Recession", said Joel Naroff, Chief Economist at Naroff Economics in Holland, Pennsylvania. "That raises questions about the willingness to purchase big-ticket items. If we don't see that happen, the recovery will be slower than hoped for".

The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index increased to a reading of 78.9 from 72.3 in May. It said "few consumers anticipate the reestablishment of favourable economic conditions anytime soon". Two-thirds of consumers in the survey expected "bad times financially" during the year ahead, while half antici-

Layoffs are more than double their peak during the 2007-09 Great Recession

pated a "renewed downturn".

In addition to concerns about a second wave of COVID-19 infections, consumers also worried that persistently high unemployment could slow the economic recovery. Though the economy created 2.5 million jobs in May, an employment gap of nearly 20 million remains since March when non-essential businesses were shuttered to slow the spread of COVID-19. Layoffs are more than double their peak during the 2007-09 Great Recession.

While the University of Michigan survey showed consumers' inflation expectations easing slightly in June, they remained above their pre-COVID-19 shutdown levels. Consumers' one-year inflation expectations slipped to 3.0 per cent from 3.2 per cent in May. Five-year inflation expectations dipped to 2.6 per cent this

month from 2.7 per cent.

Consumers' inflation perceptions in the past months have been driven by higher food prices, amid meat shortages caused by COVID-19 outbreaks at processing plants.

"That provides some reassurance that the recent plunge in prices for travel-sensitive services like airline fares and motor vehicle insurance will not lead to a more widespread period of falling prices", said Andrew Hunter, a senior US economist at Capital Economics.

Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher, recouping about half of the previous session's sharp losses. The dollar rose against a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices fell.

Deflation fears were further assuaged by a separate report from the Labour Department showing import prices rose 1.0 per cent in May, the largest gain since February 2019, after falling 2.6 per cent in April. Import prices, which exclude tariffs, were driven by higher costs for petroleum products and food.

The government reported consumer prices falling moderately in May and a solid rebound in producer prices. Deflation is a decline in the general price level, which is harmful during a recession as consumers and businesses may delay purchases in anticipation of lower prices. — Reuters

OHA updates referees with latest rules

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: As many as 37 referees took part at the video conference meeting which was conducted recently by the Oman Handball Association (OHA). The virtual meeting for the umpires was focused on explaining the latest update of the International umpiring which was released by the International Handball Federation (IHF).



The Syrian refereeing expert at the OHA, Zuhair Samha, was the lecturer of the workshop. He told Oman Daily Observer that the workshop discussed and addressed a variety of topics. "The two days online training workshop with the domestic umpires featured discussion on slight changes for some of the refereeing chapters. For instance, if the referee shows the red card to the player for misbehaviour then the player will be stopped for four minutes instead of two minutes and that follows many other related conditions. Another topic was decisions related to the Video Assistant Referee (VAR)," he added.

On the other hand, the OHA is gearing up to announce the new schedules of the remaining matches of the top division league and the Ministry of Sports Affairs' Shield. The new dates will



be announced after the Supreme Committee and Ministry of Sports Affairs take a decision on restarting the sporting activities that were stopped on March 15.

Commenting on the main precautionary steps which should be implemented by the associations and clubs after resuming the leagues and the domestic competitions, Zuhair responded, "all the players should do the test of COVID-19 prior to the beginning of any matches. In case if any player has a positive case of coronavirus, then he is prohibited to play any matches. The presence of the fans in the leagues matches is not preferred and should be very limited with safety measures," the technical expert said.

IHF shared with all the member associations on the best practices for returning back to the season, competitions and matches taking into consideration the health and safety of the players, coaches, managers, club staff and audience. "One of the main items mentioned in the IHF guidelines is the presence of the medical staff with the team besides the availability of a doctor inside the indoor hall during the competitions.

He should act accordingly in case of any emergency occurring during the matches. We have a detailed plan for resuming the season and will do the necessary coordination with the related stakeholders to ensure the safety and health of everyone belonging to handball activities," he ended.



Serbian players Novak Djokovic (back) and Filip Krajinovic do a chest bump during an exhibition doubles match in Belgrade on Friday. – AFP

THIEM, ZVEREV, DIMITROV JOIN DJOKOVIC IN US OPEN DOUBTS

BELGRADE: Dominic Thiem, Alexander Zverev and Grigor Dimitrov on Friday joined world number one Novak Djokovic in expressing their reluctance over playing at the US Open under current conditions while the coronavirus pandemic is still active.

“All of these circumstances are pretty tough,” world number three Thiem told a press conference in Belgrade.

“So I think some circumstances will have to change (for it to) make sense to go there,” the 26-year-old Austrian said.

Germany’s Zverev, the world number seven, echoed that view.

“It’s great if we get the opportunity to play, but under these circumstances I don’t think a lot of players will feel comfortable in the environment there,” he said. “So that’s my opinion. But it’s not really up to us players in that way, in a way the US Open decides.”

Like Djokovic recently, Zverev cited notably the obligatory 14-day quarantine for players arriving in the US, housing in airport hotels near the tournament and not allowing them to be accompanied by more than one mem-



Novak Djokovic of Serbia, Filip Krajinovic of Serbia, Alexander Zverev of Germany, Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria, Dominic Thiem of Austria and other participants of an exhibition doubles match pose for a photo in Belgrade.

ber of the team. Thiem stressed that a “Grand Slam can be pretty demanding physically and you’ll have to choose your coach or your physio”.

But both Thiem and Bulgaria’s Dimitrov said they would wait until a decision on the US Open - widely expected to be announced on Monday - before taking a final position.

“Well nobody knows, maybe things improve, maybe not, so we’ll have to wait until the facts are out and then decide,” Thiem said when asked wheth-



Austria’s Dominic Thiem (R) and Serbia’s Novak Djokovic return the shot in Belgrade.

er he will participate at the tournament. The US Open main draw is due to get underway in New York on August 31. The three players arrived in Belgrade for a charity tournament hosted by Djokovic, which kicks off on Saturday. The Adria Tour will be held until July 5 in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia.

Djokovic, also the ATP players’ council president, suggested on Wednesday that his season might resume on clay ahead of the French Open rather than at the US Open as he repeated concerns about playing in North America.— **AFP**

Varner leads, McIlroy charges

SPIETH POISED TO STRIKE AT HALFWAY STAGE
IN PGA RETURN AT COLONIAL



Harold Varner III of the USA plays his shot from the 14th hole at Colonial Country Club. — USA Today Sports

LOS ANGELES: Harold Varner overcame a triple-bogey start to maintain the lead at the halfway stage of the Charles Schwab Challenge on Friday as the hard-charging Rory McIlroy and Jordan Spieth appear poised to strike.

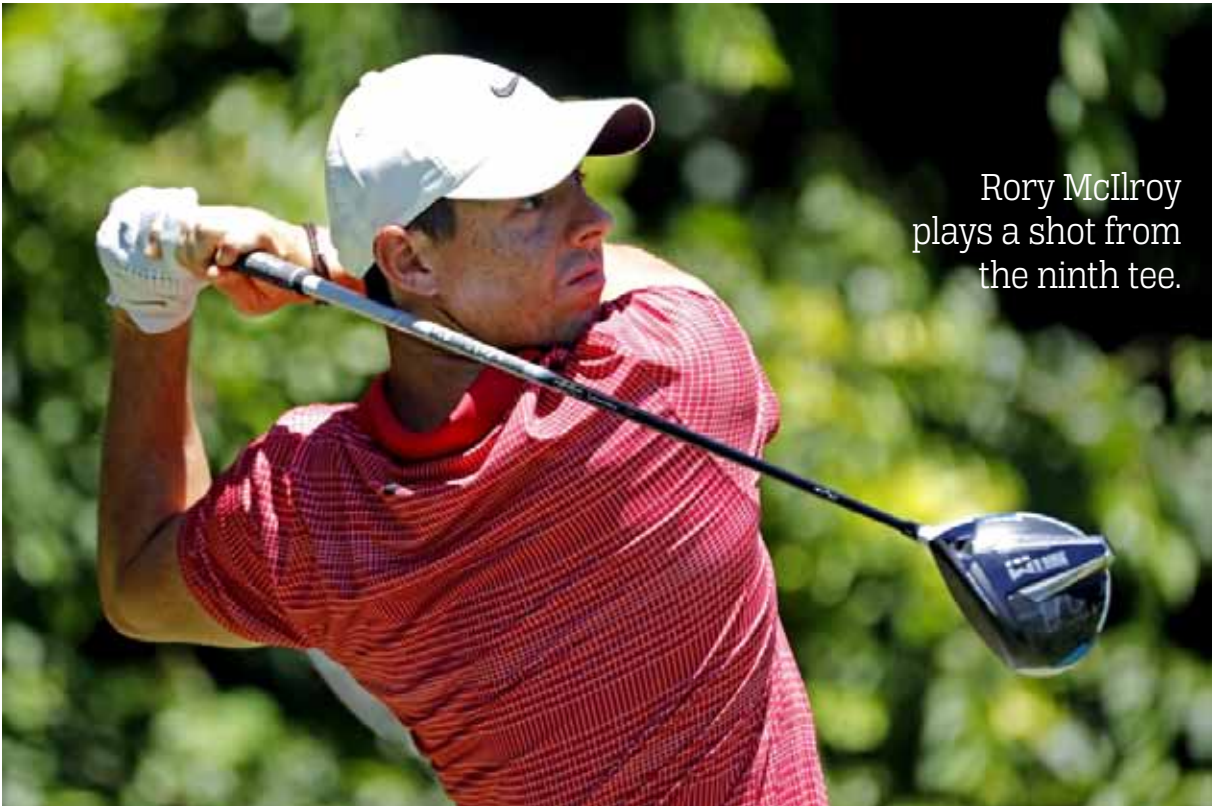
Varner, one of three black players in the top 200 in the world rankings, fired a four-under-par 66 at Colonial Country Club to reach 11-under 129 after 36 holes in the US PGA Tour's return event after a three-month shutdown due to the new coronavirus pandemic.

"I have learned a lot about myself through adversity. America is going through adversity right now so it is pretty eye-opening," said Varner, later referring to protests against the death of George Floyd, a black man killed recently as he was detained by white police officers.

Jordan Spieth and Bryson DeChambeau are tied for second, one stroke back after a second consecutive 65s, while world number one McIlroy fired a 63 to join Collin Morikawa and Xander Schauffele sharing third on 131.

England's Justin Rose and American Justin Thomas are tied for seventh.

This week's Charles



Rory McIlroy plays a shot from the ninth tee.

Schwab Challenge is full of firsts, the biggest change being the absence of spectators.

Players have to undergo temperature screenings, regular COVID-19 testing and practice social distancing.

"When that first birdie putt went in and I didn't get a clap... my hand was trying to go up to wave to someone in the gallery, but there's obviously no one there," McIlroy said.

The field includes 15 of the world's top 20 players, but some bigger names from outside of North America skipped it because travelling to the US would mean two-weeks quarantine.

After an opening 63 to match Britain's late-starting Rose for the first-day lead, Varner took a seven at the par-four 10th hole to begin his second round, soaring off the tee and finding a bunker and rough before reaching the green.

Varner bounced back with birdies from four feet at 11 and 10 feet at the par-three 12th and par-three 16th holes.

"If you're going to make a triple, do it while you are playing well," said Varner, seeking his first PGA Tour win.

"I got it back in a hurry, so that was nice... The way I finished was pretty awesome."

After a bogey at 18, Varner closed with a flourish that started with a 31-foot birdie putt at the par-three fourth. He made three more in a row, the last a 20-footer at seven, and closed with a 10-foot birdie putt at the ninth.

The Tour is also holding a moment of silence every round at 8:46 am, marking the time - 8 minutes 46 seconds - George Floyd spent pinned down by a white police officer kneeling on his neck.

— AFP

CHARLES SCHWAB CHALLENGE SCORES
SECOND ROUND
(USA UNLESS NOTED, PAR-70):

129 - Harold Varner 63-66
130 - Jordan Spieth 65-65, Bryson DeChambeau 65-65
131 - Xander Schauffele 65-66, Collin Morikawa 64-67, Rory McIlroy (NIR) 68-63
132 - Justin Thomas 64-68, Daniel Berger 65-67, Justin Rose (ENG) 63-69, Gary Woodland 65-67, Branden Grace (RSA) 66-66
133 - Corey Connors (CAN) 66-67, Joel Dahmen 68-65
134 - Bubba Watson 68-66, Brian Harman 65-69, Peter Uihlein 69-65, JT Poston 68-66, Abraham Ancer (MEX) 64-70
135 - Im Sung-Jae (KOR) 66-69, Rafael Cabrera (ESP) 68-67, Patrick Rodgers 67-68, Mark Hubbard 67-68, Tyler Duncan 65-70, Harry Higgs 70-65



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo (C) shoots on goal during the Italian Cup semifinal second leg match against AC Milan at the Allianz stadium in Turin, the first to be played in Italy since March 9. — AFP

JUVE SQUEEZE PAST MILAN

SERIE A CHAMPS ADVANCE ON AWAY GOALS TO REACH CUP FINAL AS FOOTBALL RETURNS TO ITALY

ROME: Juventus reached the Italian Cup final on Friday after a goalless draw with 10-man AC Milan in the semifinal, second leg in Turin on the day football returned to Italy after three months.

Serie A champions Juve advanced on away goals to Wednesday's final in Rome thanks to February's 1-1 first-leg draw at the San Siro, despite an under-par display against a Milan side who played 74 minutes with a man less and which featured a missed Cristiano Ronaldo penalty.

At the capital's Stadio Olimpico, Maurizio Sarri's side will face either Napoli or Inter Milan, the last side Juve faced before football entered into its coronavirus-enforced hiatus in March.

Napoli take on Antonio Conte's Inter at Naples' Stadio San Paolo on Saturday with a 1-0 lead from the first leg, in another match set for an eerie atmosphere without supporters.



Juventus' Argentine forward Paulo Dybala (R) outruns AC Milan's Danish defender Simon Kjaer at the Allianz stadium in Turin. — AFP

"It was odd and difficult at the start, playing in an empty stadium after 90 days away," said Leonardo Bonucci to public broadcaster RAI 1.

"We've shaken off a dark moment for the whole world. I hope being back will offer the fans at home a bit of hope and joy. We want to give them something more on

Wednesday."

A feisty start belied the two teams' long absence from the pitch, with Juve -- missing the likes of Giorgio Chiellini and Gonzalo Higuain -- roaring out of the blocks and Milan putting in some questionable challenges to try to stop themselves from being overrun.

Juve should have been

ahead with just 15 minutes on the clock when Andrea Conti clipped the ball in the penalty area with his elbow and conceded a penalty after a VAR check.

Ronaldo hit the woodwork with the resulting spot-kick, but while that should have been a reprieve for the away side, they found themselves a man down seconds later when Ante Rebic kicked Danilo in the head.

With Zlatan Ibrahimovic out injured and Samu Castillejo suspended, Stefano Pioli's side were missing some firepower going forward, but managed to create problems for Juve despite spending most of the match on the back foot.

Hakan Calhanoglu had Milan's best chance two minutes after the restart, flashing a free header wide, while Simon Kjaer should have done better with another header 10 minutes from the end.

— AFP

FEATURES

Iranian photographer sees chance for solidarity

SUSANNAH WALDEN

Iranian photographer Gohar Dashti has created a body of work that explores the relationship between nature, human migration and the ripple effects of conflict and social upheaval.

The coronavirus pandemic presents, she believes, an opportunity to remind us of our mutual responsibility toward each other.

With the pandemic creating a collective sense of unmooring from the familiar, what is important is that “it will make us understand that we’re all in the same boat,” she said.

“This is a shared pain,” she said from Cambridge, Massachusetts in the United States, where she has been based for several years.

“I hope that from this situation, we will come to an understanding that the world is one. If a tree is cut in Africa, it impacts the life of someone in France,” the 40-year-old photographer and video artist said.

“It’s good that we understand the relationship between the world, economy and nature and maybe this epidemic has allowed us to think about all these issues again.”

Nature and its relationship to mankind trace a thread through Dashti’s 15-year oeuvre — exhibited worldwide and featured in prestigious permanent collections — with nature often acting as a foil for examining social issues and identity in her large-scale, staged photographs.

Dashti’s own life was marked by conflict and its legacy. She was born in Iran’s Khuzestan province at the start of the Iran-Iraq war that ravaged the oil-rich eastern region that borders Iraq and killed hundreds of thousands from 1980-1988.

‘NOT SEPARATE’

One of her series, “Today’s Life and War”, placed a couple going about day-to-day domestic life —

cooking, watching TV, hanging up washing — amid the trappings of a battlefield, with tanks and soldiers looming in the background.

Another series, “Stateless”, produced in 2014/2015, features scenes similar to those familiar in news coverage of refugees and migrants but rendered stark and semi-theatrical against vast and towering landscapes.

Touching on ongoing conflicts, she said she hopes people, particularly those in wealthy countries, will come to recognise amid the pandemic that they are not unaffected by the suffering of others around the world.

“What is much more important to me is the view of countries with high economic power. For them to understand that they are not separate ... we all live in the same world,” she said.

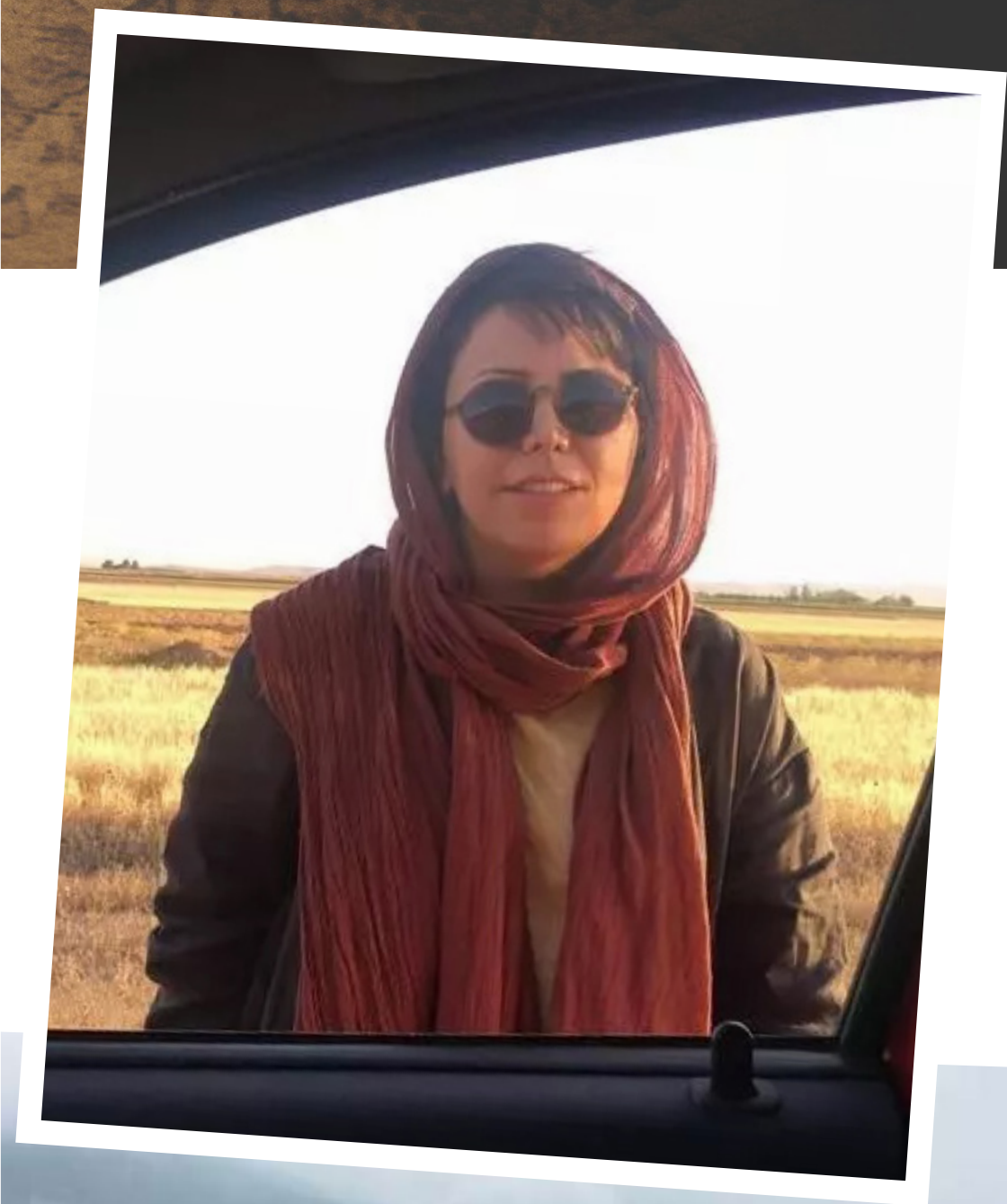
“Sometimes we see something like war in the media and think that it has nothing to do with us — that’s Afghanistan’s problem or that’s Yemen’s problem.

“But what’s happening now shows that it has to do with all of us. If a war breaks out in Yemen or in Afghanistan, it also has an effect on our lives, so we can’t stay silent.”

She said her compatriots in Iran, which is facing the deadliest coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East, had rallied in solidarity in the face of the pandemic, drawing on resilience from previous crises.

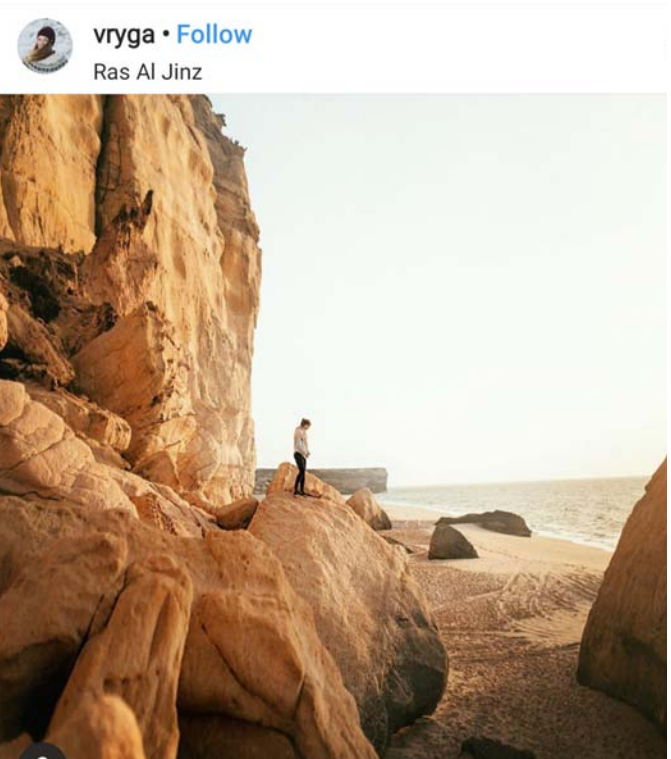
“Iran, like all countries, was taken unawares by the virus and experienced very difficult conditions and continues to see very difficult conditions. But, really, with the cooperation between people and the commendable efforts of medical staff, they have been able to manage the crisis,” she said.

“In my opinion, the people in Iran have shown a lot of solidarity — one reason is that they are a people that have known crisis.” — **AFP**



FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



For Colombia’s quarantined poor, lunch is served - by trendy restaurants

BOGOTA: In the bustling kitchen of one of Bogota’s trendiest restaurants, a team of chefs that usually caters to the Colombian capital’s well-heeled citizens is preparing meals for a community of people cut off from work and housing during the Andean

country’s coronavirus quarantine. A nationwide lockdown declared by the government of President Ivan Duque to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus has cratered Colombia’s economy and particularly hurt its poor and vulnerable, who

must make do without their usual informal jobs. Now, two restaurants - El Chato, run by chef Alvaro Clavijo and winner of Colombia’s best restaurant award in 2019 from Latin America’s 50 Best Restaurants, and Chicheria Demente, have teamed up to bring nutritious meals to people renting beds by the day in central Bogota. “A lot of the food we take to the lodging isn’t what they’re used to,” Clavijo said. “We’ve been taking them on a discovery.” Some 48 people live in the austere building, paying about \$2.70 per day for a room, or \$1.35 for a bunk bed. Many are informal workers who have seen their incomes plummet under quarantine. Chefs from the two restaurants take turns preparing meals before delivering them and also donate other

food. The initiative has received donations worth close to \$6,000. “We take them different things, a daily meal, eggs so they have something else during the day, sometimes rice, sometimes water,” said Natalia Carreno, one of the partners at Chicheria Demente. Colombia entered the nationwide quarantine in late March. While restrictions have begun gradually lifting in some places, Bogota’s high infection rate has meant the city continues to observe stricter protocols. The meals are a lifeline for residents, who did not leave the building for the first 40 days of quarantine. “I’m very grateful to them,” said Miryam Tellez, who helps run the house. “They have always come, they have never left us alone.” — Reuters

FEATURES

Atelier Zuhra:
Inspiring
joy through
glammed up
clothing

RUQAYA AL KINDI

To become a fashion designer, you will need to become a multi-skilled individual and must include in your talents the ability to draw, design, and sew on top of your knowledge of the fashion industry, and unparalleled perseverance.

Rayan AlSulaimani, the Omani fashion designer at the helm of Atelier Zuhra specialized in creating unique and high-quality dresses. Her passion for glamour clothing is fueled by her ambition of working with celebrities and international personalities and fashion influencers.

Rayan decided to strike out on her own with a line of dresses. Her business blossomed over the years with her products selling through retail outlets.

"My fashion style is chic, it is matchless because of the high-quality fabrics and materials I used in making the dresses. Inimitable fashion style is found at Atelier Zuhra," she said.

The moment you see Rayan's designer, you will notice right away that her designs are influenced by her Middle Eastern culture but also incorporate some western styles.

"Being born and brought up in the Middle East, my beautiful culture has somehow reflected in my designs. I draw a lot of inspiration from art as well as nature and I try to combine my inspirations into every piece I make," she said.

The Swan Lake Collection, for example, was inspired by Swan Princess of the art of Mosaic. The collection called "Infinity" draws inspiration from different colored gemstones. For another Collection, the inspiration was taken from "Barcelona

and the Modern Mosaic" by Antonio Gaudi.

Designing is a creative field and for most of the designers. To be innovative and creative is challenging but exciting. The fashion designers, usually, must constantly stay up-to-date regarding the fashion world to have insights about the trends in the industry and become an excellent competitor.

As for Rayan, "I stay up-to-date through browsing on the internet, by surfing the social media and fashion blogs, fashion stores, attending various fashion shows, film festivals exhibitions, being attentive to what people wear on the streets and various global collections," she said.

Any fashion designer has to have many skills because talent alone is not enough, it is only an addition to success. Rayan believes that successful fashion designers need to possess a high level of creativity, artistic skills, teamwork skills, good communication skills, quality consciousness, visualization ability (Imagination of seeing a product/dress before even being produced), and knowledge of fashion trends.

Rayan's entry into the fashion design field was not planned.

"I used to work for my father's company, but at the same time, as soon as I finished my work, I went to my mom's company to see what is new in the world of fashion," she pointed out.

The motivating factor that made Rayan step in fashion design was her mother Mouza Al Aufi whose aspiration was to design glamorous and fabulous dresses for fashionable women.

"Besides my love in fashion and dresses, I had a strong pas-



sion to progress in the business. I had been watching my mother work towards her goal closely from the very beginning. She has been a major influence for me, choosing this path," she explained.

One of the challenges that Rayan faces constantly is competition especially since her company is headquartered in Dubai where many talented fashion designers exist.

"This creates more urgency that makes Atelier Zuhra striving constantly to show new and

prominent designs," she noted.

Nevertheless, Rayan has a great background in business management that helps her to be a strong competitor. Where, she said, "I attended various prestigious educational institutions in Dubai and globally. I got my Diploma in Business Administration from the Queensland University of Technology in Australia; and obtained my Bachelor's degree in Commerce from the University of Wollongong in Dubai."

FEATURES

Atelier Zuhra: Inspiring joy through glammed up clothing

Omani fashion designer Rayan al Sulaimani is proud of her Omani and Middle Eastern background and culture. Headlining Atelier Zuhra, she tries her best to showcase the beauty of the said cultures through her designs. Oman Observer chatted with this ambitious fashion designer to understand what inspired her to pursue this career and what the road was like for her... **page 22**

FIND US ONLINE



omanobserver

WE ARE ALSO
ON TELEGRAM

**OMAN OBSERVER
NEWS**

WHAT'S INSIDE

**For Colombia's quarantined
poor, lunch is served - by
trendy restaurants**



P20

**Iranian
photographer
sees chance
for solidarity**

Iranian photographer Gohar Dashti has created a body of work that explores the relationship between nature, human migration and the ripple effects of conflict and social upheaval **P19**



DID YOU KNOW?

Oman Daily Observer is the country's most comprehensive digital advertising and marketing platform for you



AVE. MONTHLY WEB HITS

3.5m

www.omanobserver.com

AVE. DAILY WEB HITS

150k



FOLLOWERS

167k

POST REACH/MO

16m

POST ENGAGEMENTS/MO

3m

VIDEO VIEWS
PER MONTH

7m



FOLLOWERS

76.8k

TWEET IMPRESSIONS
PER MONTH

6.5m

VIDEO VIEWS
PER MONTH

250k



FOLLOWERS

25k

POST IMPRESSIONS
PER MONTH

1.5m

VIDEO VIEWS
PER MONTH

500k

WEBSITE EPAPER
DOWNLOAD/DAILY

50k

MOBILE EPAPER
DOWNLOAD/DAILY

45k

JOIN US ON TELEGRAM



DOWNLOAD FOR IOS

DOWNLOAD FOR ANDROID

FOR INQUIRIES AND DETAILS, CONTACT US:

95210257