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27 Ramadhan Thursday 21/5/2020			
Prayer times			
	Muscat	Nizwa	Salalah
FAJR:	03:58	04:04	04:31
DHUHR:	12:08	12:12	12:25
ASR:	03:30	03:32	03:42
MAGHRIB:	06:49	06:52	06:55
ISHA:	08:09	08:11	08:09

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HM, LEADERS EXCHANGE EID GREETINGS



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday exchanged greetings over phone on the occasion of the blessed Eid al Fitr with King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain; Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar and Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir Kuwait.

During the phone calls, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the leaders wishing them good health and happiness and praying to Almighty Allah for many returns of the auspicious occasion while the leaders and their brotherly peoples achieve more aspirations towards progress and prosperity, and wishing all Muslims blessings and bounties.

— ONA

POLICE TO STEP UP VIGIL DURING EID

83 PER CENT OF CORONAVIRUS INFECTED ARE IN THE AGE GROUP 15-50

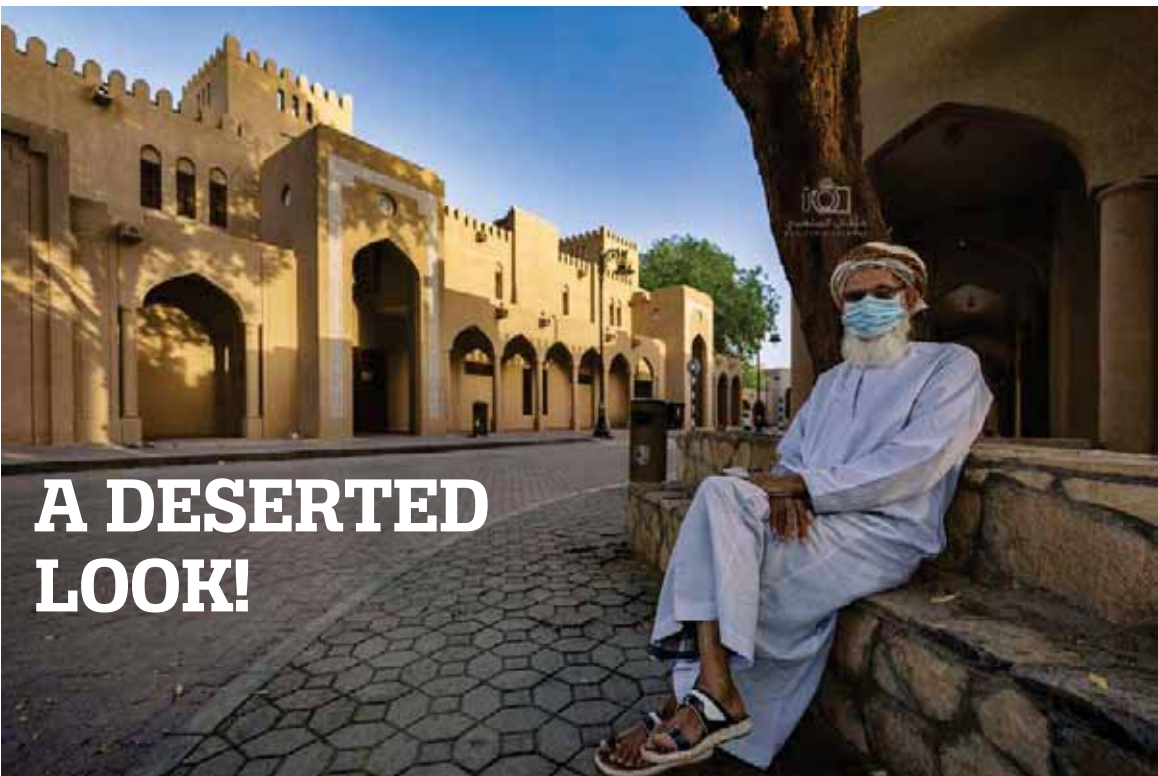
VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Mandated by the Supreme Committee to ensure the implementation of preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Wednesday specified the types of gatherings that will be prohibited during Eid al Fitr. The prohibited

activities include Eid markets (habta), Eid prayers, family visits, group celebrations and accompanying customs and traditions. Police said that these gatherings are prohibited as per the decisions of the Supreme Committee. The ROP called upon everyone to abide by the decisions to avoid infections.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health announced 372 new confirmed cases with COVID-19, out of which 152 are nationals and 220 are expatriates. This brings the total number of COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate to 6,043, including 29 deaths. The Ministry said the number of recoveries rose by 87 to 1,661.

TURN TO P2



A DESERTED LOOK!

Nizwa Souq which used to be active most of the time with crowded markets, especially the livestock market, now wears an empty look even though Eid al Fitr is around the corner. PHOTO BY KHALFAN AL SALHAMI (DETAILS ON P4)

EID AL FITR HOLIDAYS ANNOUNCED

MUSCAT: Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Chairman of the Civil Service Council, on Wednesday issued a decision on Eid al Fitr holiday 1441 AH for the state administrative apparatus.

“On the occasion of the blessed Eid al Fitr 1441 AH, and as per the Royal orders of His Majesty the Sultan, it was decided that Eid al Fitr holiday for employees of the departments of the state administrative apparatus and other legal entities will begin from

Saturday, 29 Ramadhan 1441 AH, corresponding to May 23. The holiday is as follows: In case the first day of the Eid falls on Sunday, May 24, the holiday will end on Tuesday, 3 Shawwal 1441 AH, corresponding to May 26. Therefore, work will

resume on Wednesday, May 27. In case the first day of the Eid falls on Monday, May 25, the holiday will end on Thursday, 4 Shawwal 1441 AH, corresponding to May 28. Therefore, work will be resumed on Sunday, May 31.

— ONA



CARS READED FOR DRIFTING SEIZED

The Police Command in North Al Batinah Governorate seized five cars that had been set up and prepared for drifting at specialized workshops in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, Royal Oman Police (ROP) said. Police arrested the owners of both workshops along with the owners of the cars and they will be referred to the judiciary to be sentenced.

ABATTOIRS TOLD TO ADHERE TO SAFETY NORMS

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Slaughterhouses and food outlets have been urged to ensure safety measures for their customers and own staff during Eid al Fitr, which is expected to be early next week.

Speaking to the Observer, a top official at the Food Safety and Quality Center (FSQC) at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources (MRMWR) said, “In order to take precautions to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus while preparing for the Eid al Fitr, the ministry has plans to conduct inspections and random checks across the food establishments and slaughterhouses which have been asked to use clean materials, among other precautions.”

“Eating joints, slaughterhouses and other commercial establishments are urged to use clean tools and provide sterilisers at the entrance and the main facility area. The companies renting slaughterhouses should adhere to the precautionary measures in organising and sterilising the slaughterhouses and make



sure they are free from any ticks or other issues that help breed the virus,” a spokesperson of the FSQC told the Observer.

Officials from the FSQC have met with the main companies renting the slaughterhouse premises to chalk out strict guidelines and handle each customer who wants to get animal slaughtered, and delivered.

“The MRMWR has elaborate preparations in place to ensure safety of people from Covid-19 during Eid al Fitr, taking various precautionary measures to prevent the virus spread,” he said.

Police to step up vigil during Eid

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry announced the death of a 66-year-old citizen of COVID-19. Earlier on Wednesday, a 70-year-old Omani man died of the disease.

On Tuesday, the ministry said the curve of COVID-19 infections in the Sultanate continues to move upward and that the peak of infections has not been reached so far, however, the epidemiological situation is considered to be normal. Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary for Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health, said that 83 per cent of those infected in the Sultanate are in the age group 15-50 years old.

As many as 72,000 coronavirus tests have now been carried out in the country. The number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals stands at 111, including 33 in intensive care of whom 30 patients have been put on ventilators.

OMAN DAILY

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The Khasab-Taibat rehabilitation and improvement project after a geological study concluded that falling rocks from adjacent mountains could pose a real threat to vehicles plying the road and cause serious accidents. — **ONA**

The Ministry of Transport said the decision comes within the framework of the efforts made by the ministry to regulate the public transport sector in the Sultanate in accordance with the specifications and procedures set forth by the Land Transport Law and its executive regulation. The decision stems from the ministry's keenness to upgrade public transport services in accordance with the international trend.

mcd

شركة مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع (ش.م.ع.م)

الدعوة لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة غير العادية والجمعية العامة العادية السنوية للسنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١

يسر مجلس إدارة شركة مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع (ش.م.ع.م) دعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور اجتماعي الجمعية العامة غير العادية والجمعية العامة العادية السنوية للسنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١ لشركة. وانقرر عندهما في تمام الساعة الحادية عشرة من صباح يوم الأحد الموافق ٢٠١٩/١٢/٧ عبر منصة للتقوية لنفاذ أعمال الجمعية العامة والتي يمكنكم الدخول إليها عبر موقع شركة مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع (www.mcd.gov.om). وفي حال عدم اكتمال المساهم الفانوني لأي جمعية سيتم عقد الجمعية الثانية في تمام الساعة الحادية عشرة من صباح يوم الأربعاء الموافق ٢٠٢٠/٠٦/١٠ في نفس النصة. لدراسة وإعتماد القرارات المتناسية ليكون جدولتي الأعمال التاليين:-

أولاً: الجمعية العامة غير العادية:

- ١- دراسة مقترح زيادة رأس المال الشركة المصرح به من (٥,٠٠٠,٠٠٠) خمسة ملايين ريال عماني إلى (١٠,٠٠٠,٠٠٠) عشرة ملايين ريال عماني والموافقة عليه.
- ٢- دراسة مقترح زيادة عدد أعضاء المجلس من (٦) ستة أعضاء إلى (٧) سبعة أعضاء والموافقة عليه.
- ٣- الموافقة على النظام الأساسي الجديد (المرفق).

ثانياً، الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية:

- ١- دراسة تقرير مجلس الإدارة عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
- ٢- دراسة تقرير تنظيم وإدارة الشركة عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
- ٣- دراسة تقرير مراقب الحسابات والموافقة على الميزانية العمومية وحساب الأرباح والخسائر عن السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١.
- ٤- إحالة المساهمين للتقديرات التي تم توزيعها على المساهمين بتاريخ ٢٠٢٠/٠٤/١٠ وذلك بنسبة (٢٥٪) من رأس المال الصمد بمعدل (١٥) أسيطة للسهم الواحد.
- ٥- دراسة مقترح توزيع أسهم مجانية على المساهمين بتاريخ الجمعية وذلك بنسبة (٦٦,٦٦٦) من رأس المال بمعدل (٦٦,٦٦٦) سهماً لكل ١٠٠ سهم) والموافقة عليه. ويرتبط على هذا التوزيع زيادة عدد أسهم الشركة من (٣,٠٠٠,٠٠٠) ثلاثة ملايين ريال عماني إلى (٥,٠٠٠,٠٠٠) خمسة ملايين ريال عماني والموافقة عليه.
- ٦- التصديق على بمل حضور جلسات مجلس الإدارة واللجان المشقة عنه الذي لقضاء الأعضاء عن السنة المالية المنتهية، وتحديد البدل لحضور جلسات مجلس الإدارة واللجان المشقة عن مجلس إدارة الشركة للسنة المالية القادمة.
- ٧- إحاطة الجمعية بالتعاملات التي أجرتها الشركة مع الأطراف لات العلاقة خلال السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١ (في حسب الإفصاح رقم ٢٦ في البيانات المالية).
- ٨- دراسة التبرعات التي صرفتها الشركة والبالغ قدرها (١,٠٠٠) ريال عماني) لدعم خدمات المجتمع خلال السنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠١٩/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
- ٩- دراسة مسألة تخصيص مبلغ (١٥,٠٠٠) ريال عماني) لدعم خدمات المجتمع خلال السنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٢٠٢٠/١٢/٣١، والموافقة عليه.
- ١٠- انتخاب أعضاء مجلس إدارة جديد للشركة من المساهمين أو غير المساهمين ، فعلى من يرغب في ترشيح نفسه تعبئة استمارة الترشح المقدمة لهذا الغرض وتقديمها للشركة قبل موعد اجتماع الجمعية ب (٥) أيام على الأقل، في موعد أقصاه الساعة الثالثة من بعد ظهر يوم الثلاثاء الموافق ٢٠٢٠/٠٦/٠٢.
- ١١- تعيين مراقب الحسابات للسنة المالية التي ستنتهي في ٢٠٢٠/١٢/٣١، وتحديد أتعابه.

وفقا للنظام الأساسي للشركة وضاوابط إنفاذ الجمعيات العامة باستخدام وسائل التقنية الحديثة الصادرة من وزارة التجارة والصناعة، نود أن نلفت عنايتكم إلى الآتي:-

- ١- يحق للشخص الاعتباري أن يغيره تفويض شخص طبيعي لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة والتصويت نيابة عنه من خلال وسائل التقنية على أن يكون لهذا الشخص الطبيعي رقم مستثمر بشركة مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع.
- ٢- يبدأ التصويت على أي من بنود المعروضة في جدول الأعمال قبل انفاذ الجمعية بعدة لا تزيد على ثلاثة أيام وحتى انتهاء عملية التصويت في يوم الإجماع، وفي حال تغير رصيدي المساهم بالزيادة أو النقصان فسيتم إلغاء عملية التصويت مرة أخرى في يوم اجتماع الجمعية.

وفي حال وجود أي استفسار نرجو الاتصال بالفاصل/ أنور الراشدي على هاتف رقم ٢٤٨٢٢٢٢١١.

أحمد بن صالح بن أحمد الهرهون
رئيس مجلس الإدارة

Muscat Municipality

Announcement No. 34/2020

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tender:

S.N	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	28/ 2020/ MM/ PA-6	Supply of Irrigation Materials	25/- OMR	09/06/2020	25/06/2020	28/06/2020

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the tendering Website starting from the date of bids submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted as the table below:

Tender at The Serial	The box's location for Tender Bonds
1	Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Sub Entrance), located on Capital Market Street

Tenders which do not meet the required banking insurance will not be accepted.

Note:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website:(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



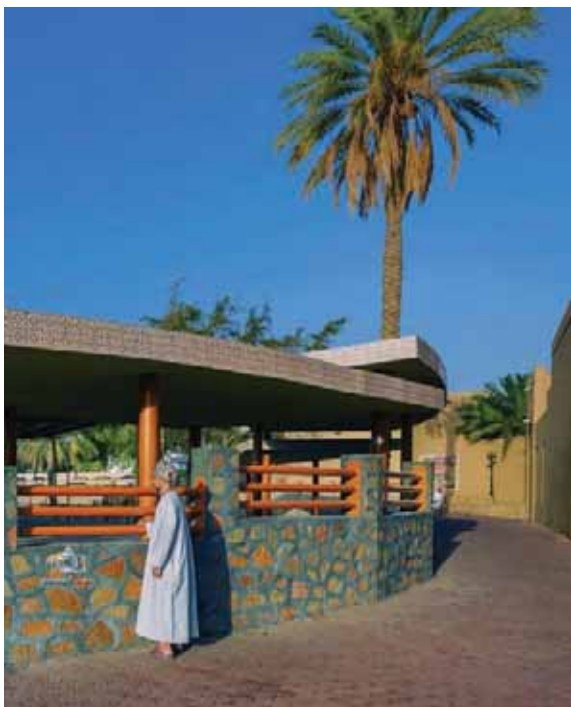
PHOTOS BY: KHALFAN AL SALHAMI

Once bustling, Nizwa wears a desolate look

AMAL AL RIYAMI

NIZWA: Nizwa, which used to be one of the most important place for traditional markets in the Sultanate with sellers and buyers flocking from across the governorates, especially during Eid time, is mostly empty now due to restrictions related to COVID-19. The bustling market square where once it was difficult to find a place to

park his/her car, and the mosques that were always full of worshippers are empty now. People who had seen the vibrancy and vitality of this place are now saddened to see what is happening. The elderlies who used to habitually visit Nizwa Centre Market every morning too are anxious about the situation. They look at the place where livestock used to be



sold, and wonder this place was never big enough at a time like this. How can this virus make it so empty? They remember the crowds, the noise, smell and the things people used to bargain over, hoping that everything will get back to normal soon. Yet, there are a few roaming around the market in protective gears looking to make a living, selling fish, vegetables, fruits and more.

ROP specifies social distancing rules during Eid

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has specified the types of gatherings that will be prohibited during the Eid festival.

- ❖ Eid markets (habta)
- ❖ Eid prayers
- ❖ Family visits
- ❖ Group celebrations
- ❖ Accompanying customs and traditions

ROP said these gatherings are prohibited as per the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Supreme Committee has authorised the Royal Oman Police to monitor the compliance of individuals and public and private institutions authorising them to directly impose fines and remand detention to violators of these decisions. In North Al Batinah police recently arrested a group of people accused of gathering, practising sporting activities and violating the decisions of the Supreme Committee and referred them to the judicial authorities to take the legal actions against them.

OWNERS SAY BUSINESS TO PICK UP AFTER EID

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Despite rolling back of restrictions on a large number of commercial activities, several shops that were allowed to do business did not open on Wednesday. And shops that opened in some parts of the capital city witnessed only lukewarm response from customers. On the popular Honda road, which is the hub for supply of construction materials, only a few shops opened as confusion prevailed among owners about the withdrawal of the restrictions. "With restrictions on the movement of people still in force, we do not expect much business. We expect the momentum only after lifting of the full lockdown", said Haris Mettil, owner of a construction material shop. The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources had earlier announced a list of over 60 commercial activities including shops selling construction materials, cement, ceramics and electrical appliances etc.



that could reopen. Following this, the Muscat Municipality on Tuesday said that the decision does not include the shops in malls, the industrial area of Wadi Kabir and Muttrah. Abdul Shukkoor, in charge of a ceramic showroom, said that there were only a few visitors to the shop. "We opened the shop for business after taking all the precautionary measures in accordance with the health protocols and guidelines. All the safety measures are in place", he said. He expects the business to pick up after the end of the lockdown as construction activities are currently facing a slowdown due to restrictions.



Ministry of Higher Education

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education announces the extension of the date for the bid submission as shown in the following table below:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Extension period	
		From	To
08/2020	Rehabilitation Ip Phone System for Sur College of Applied Sciences Project	04/05/2020	26/05/2020

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

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

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

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

Chairman of Tender Committee
Ministry of Higher Education



www.moh.gov.om

WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD IN USING INTERNET

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: There are more women Internet users than men in Oman. Women stand at 97 per cent compared to 94 per cent men, who are catching up because in 2019 the percentage of male Internet users was 91 per cent while women were 97 per cent.

Out of the total Internet users under the category of 'Use of Internet by individuals across nationality and gender' – Omanis and non-Omani see same percentage of 95 per cent.

Ramadan Iftar Program

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He who provides a fasting person something with which to break his fast, will earn the same reward as the one who was observing the fast, without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter."

The Oman Charitable Organization is pleased to announce that it will receive donations for Ramadan Iftar Program in Sultanate of Oman for the year 1441 AH / AD 2020 through the following accounts :

Omantel users cost 1 RO
Send Donate to **90022**

Ooredoo users cost 1 RO
Send Donate to **90909**

Or donate via devices automated payment of a company * ONEIC *

National Bank of Oman
10 49 33 77 98 001

Bank Dhofar
010 40 60 90 90 001

Donations Portal for Charitable Organization
www.donate.om



OCO Headquarters : Muscat Governorate , Al Khuwair 33 , Street No. 47, next to Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, or one of its branches :

South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate 24297961 Sur / Al-Musalla	North Al-Batinah Governorate 28864241 Sajdah Al-Hamra	Musandam Governorate 28731888 Kharab Al-Shaikh	Dhofar Governorate 23234739 Salalah / Al-Saada
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OCOOMAN

First Indian repatriation flight from Salalah takes off

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The repatriation flight carrying about 177 to 180 passengers took off from Salalah Airport on Wednesday afternoon. The flight is part of the Vande Bharat Mission to evacuate Indian nationals who are stranded in many countries in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Air India Express flight (IX 342) from Salalah to Calicut, which was scheduled at 3.25 pm, was rescheduled and it was late almost by two hours.

Indian Embassy sources said one more flight from Salalah to some Indian destination likely to take off on May 27.

Manpreet Singh, Chairman Indian Social Club Salalah, said among the passengers were patients, people having social issues back home, job loss and many others who were on tourist or visit visas.

He thanked the Omani authorities, Indian Embassy and Government of India on behalf of the Indian community for taking care of the community.

All the passengers were seen wearing protective



equipment like mask and hand gloves and were hugely thankful to the Omani and Indian authorities for arranging flight to go home.

They were seen taking extra care for elderly and children with frequent use of sanitisers for hand hygiene and proper use of protective equipment.

Some passengers were caught in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic as the decision of the suspension of the flight was so sudden that they could not plan their journey back even as their tourist or visit visa got expired. They admitted to have received cooperation from the Omani authorities

in getting their visas extended to smoothen their journey back home.

MORE FLIGHTS FROM MUSCAT

Three flights of Air India Express left with 500 expatriates stranded in Oman to various destinations in India, as part of the second phase of the national repatriation programme on Wednesday.

Accordingly, IX 818 left for passengers from Muscat to Bangaluru at 1.15 pm and IX 714 from Muscat to Kannur at 3.15 pm.

Kannur flight left with 180 passengers and two infants and Bangalore flight left with 177 passengers and two infants.

Indian schools change annual vacation

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman has decided to reschedule the annual vacation for the staff and students of Indian Schools to December 2020 for a period of one month, in light of the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic and resultant lockdown.

The decision has been taken in order to optimise the academic year for maximum productivity while also ensuring maximum benefit to parents and students, offering better

prospects for travel during the annual break, a press release said.

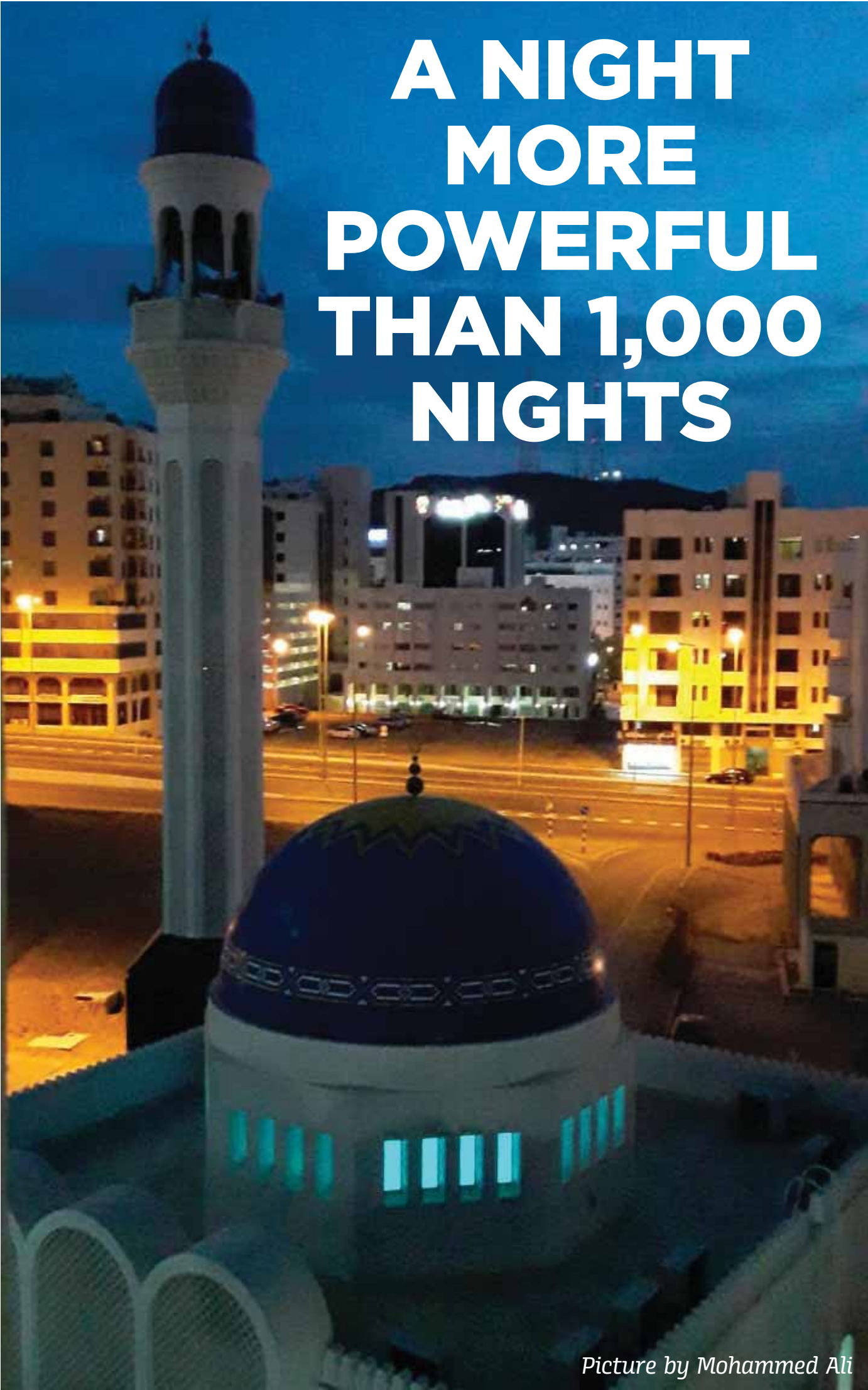
Consequently, the schools shall continue online classes during the months of June and July with a short term-break of one week from June 29 to July 2, 2020. However, there will be no online classes conducted during the Eid holidays. The schools intend to make optimum use of the lockdown period by providing students with informative modules pertaining to different topics in the syllabus.

Students will be given opportunities to showcase their diversified talents

in different domains through online cultural and art competitions. Efforts are also ongoing to facilitate creativity among students through online means of displaying their skills.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Indian schools in Oman have been able to ensure academic continuity. Classes for the new academic year started in the first week of April by all schools.

Currently, online coaching and follow-ups are being carried out for different classes by all the 21 Indian Schools across the Sultanate.



Picture by Mohammed Ali

KABEER YOUSUF

There's a night in the holy month of Ramadhan that is more powerful than 1,000 nights and that is one of the odd nights of the last ten nights of the month.

Allah Almighty has said in the Holy Quran that there is a night in the odd nights of the holy month which is more powerful than 1, 000 nights and it is the night when the Holy Quran, the guiding book for the entire mankind, is sent down to the people.

Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha was quoted saying that Rasool Allah Peace Be Upon Him said, "Look for Laylat-ul-Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan". (Bukhari).

Just as believers reached 27th day of fasting, they sat without a wink of an eye on the 27th night and engaged themselves in prayers, supplications and prostration at their homes aiming to

grab the blessings of the night on which the Holy Quran was introduced to humanity.

Believers in the Sultanate joined their brethren from across the world in the prayers called 'Qiyamul Lail' which denotes long, standing supplications and prostration which is a part of the last ten days of the holy month with their family members at homes.

Yet another important and the last odd night in the holy month is tomorrow (on the eve of 29th of Ramadhan) when believers will be engaged in prayers and supplications and 'Qiyamul Lail' prayers that keep them engrossed to the thoughts of Allah Almighty.

Hazrat Aisha Radiallah Anha further stated that, "I asked Rasool Allah Peace Be Upon Him, 'If I find Laylat-ul-Qadar then what should I do? To this, Allah's prophet (PBUH) said, recite this Dua. "ALLAH HUMMA INNAKA A'FUVUN TOHIB BUL AFVA FA'AFU ANNI" (Tirmidhi).

FATWA

Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili
His eminence grand mufti of Oman

Question

If a woman vomits alot during her first trimester of pregnancy, does it break the fast? And does she have to make up that day?

Answer

No, it does not as it happened undeliberately and there is nothing swallowed back.





OMAN OBSERVER
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Ramadhan Mubarak
2020 / 1441 AH

WORLD

Millions batten down as 'super cyclone' Amphan hits Bangladesh, India



Residents of the Bangladeshi island of Bhola evacuate on Tuesday before Cyclone Amphan makes landfall on Wednesday. — AFP

KHULNA, Bangladesh:

Millions of people batten down on Wednesday as the strongest cyclone in decades slammed into Bangladesh and eastern India, killing at least three and leaving a trail of devastation.

Authorities scrambled to evacuate more than three million people from low-lying areas, but the task was complicated by the need to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

As it made landfall, Cyclone Amphan tore through coastal villages, flattening mud houses, blowing off roofs, uprooting trees and laying waste to crop fields.

In Bangladesh officials confirmed three deaths including a five-year-old boy and a 75-year-old man, both hit by falling trees, and a cyclone emergency volunteer who drowned.

Two other fatalities were reported by Indian

media, including an infant crushed when the mud wall of the family's hut collapsed in heavy rain in Odisha state.

AMPHAN IS THE FIRST "SUPER CYCLONE" TO FORM OVER THE BAY OF BENGAL SINCE 1999, AND PACKED WINDS GUSTING UP TO 185 KILOMETRES PER HOUR.

Houses "look like they have been run over by a bulldozer", said Babul Mondal, 35, a villager on the edge of the Sunderbans, a vast mangrove forest area home to India's biggest tiger population. "Everything is destroyed".

Amphan is the first "super cyclone" to form over the Bay of Bengal

since 1999, and packed winds gusting up to 185 kilometres per hour.

Forecasters also warned there could be storm surges of several metres.

Such walls of water can cascade several kilometres inland and are often the main killers in major weather systems.

Kolkata was battered by heavy rain and the muddy Hooghly river was rising under dark skies, while in the coastal resort of Digha, large waves were pounding the shore.

"Scores of trees and electricity poles have been uprooted", hotel owner Partha Tripathi said by phone. "There are washed up boats on the beach".

Bangladesh's low-lying coast, home to 30 million people, and India's east are regularly battered by cyclones that have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in recent decades. — AFP

Abbas warns of total break in case of Israel annexation

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has warned that Israeli annexations in the occupied West Bank would spell the end of all security coordination, as international opposition to the plans grows.

US Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden on Tuesday became the latest high-profile figure to oppose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to apply Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements and the strategic Jordan Valley, which makes up around 30 per cent of the West Bank.

Palestinians say any annexation would put an end to their hopes of an independent state alongside Israel, the so-called two-state solution.

In a speech late on Tuesday, Abbas said the annexation plans showed Israel was no longer abiding by peace accords between the two.

As such, he said, the Palestinian government was "absolved, as of today, of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones".

Abbas did not go into detail about the implications of such a step, but it is his strongest card in a very weak hand as he seeks to pressure Israel to hold back. Mahmoud Aloul, Vice-President of Abbas's Fatah party, said that implementation of the decisions would be finalised in the coming days but "as of last night all communications with the Israeli side, including security cooperation, were stopped". — AFP

Talking to the walls — please, don’t answer back!

After more than 60 days on lockdown, the routine becomes heavy. The level of self-motivation diminishes. Listening to friends’ anxieties, fears, and initiatives in finding happiness in technology, take me into an imaginary trip of observations.

To start, going to the supermarket, something that I never really enjoyed much has become the high point of my outings. Experiencing the change of visual displays of vegetables and fruits became fascinating. There is a lot of creativity. Another relaxing way to enjoy the precious minutes spent in the supermarket is to check the origins of fruits and vegetables: Morocco, Greece, France and Oman.

The diversification of fruits and vegetables grown in Oman is a revelation. Okra, lemon, eggplant, cucumber, broccoli, tomato, and watermelon, the list is not short. There are also the flowers



SONIA AMBROSIO

soniambrosio@gmail.com

locally grown but not available on supermarkets — occasionally, a farm from the Batinah region sells flowers at reasonable prices in Muscat. Wheat cultivation made the news recently. Many other stories on fruits, vegetables, flowers, honey, dates, locally produced are a myriad of achievements. Horticulture is part of a food security plan when setting as a strategy rather than a hobby. With such a focus on eating healthy and using local produce, I can envisage a whole range of entrepreneurship. Not everybody is fit for a Ph.D. degree or an intellectual career — some persons can exceed in different areas, including manual work — why not look into the strength within society and capitalise

in that, I consider.

It takes me to the lately Go Home sort of invitation to expatriates. Foreigners replacing foreigners, perhaps. An unfortunate message that says you are no longer welcome. In any case, many of them are the persons shopping for others in supermarkets, washing cars, or delivering the food to those with higher income — those who stay home obeying the lockdown instructions. It is a touchy topic, not for now.

The lockdown invites us to look into society with different eyes. Missing social interactions and a routine can trigger emotions. Masks have fallen with this pandemic. One can feel mentally and physically trapped in this titanic psychological experi-

ence. Unavoidably, death is at the top of this bizarre situation. Score, that what it is: how many died, how many infected, how many recovered. Just numbers, but they have names. They were mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends. Each victim has a story to tell.

Despite the go-round retrospection, I fall back into the pale worries of an ordinary existence: the fast growth of white hair is bothering me. Then, I see those men talking in front of the television cameras, sitting in meetings, and looking so neat: how they keep the beard so nicely trimmed, I wonder. I hope the walls will not answer back to me. I have managed the ‘do it yourself’ root colour that ended up in disaster. Nails, once beautifully manicured, are now rough and ugly. Happily, I realise that am still keeping myself cheerful and sane — though sometimes, I question the contact-tracing applications, and the use of health data and its privacy.

Asia sees gains in virus lockdowns

Emergency workers usually busy attending accidents on Thailand’s roads mill around ambulances parked at a service station — fewer crashes and crimes a welcome outcome for several Asian countries during coronavirus lockdowns.

As Asia starts to assess the damage caused by the pandemic, some countries are realising there have been unforeseen benefits.

Vietnam’s nationwide iso-



lation has seen a drop in crime, Hong Kong has hailed an early end to its annual

flu season — and now, Thailand is seeing a much-needed win in road safety.

“Accidents have gone down quite a lot,” said Banjerd Premjit, chief of the Por Tek Tung emergency medical team operating just outside Bangkok.

In Pathum Thani province, where his team of three ambulances normally rush to about 15 grisly crashes a night, accidents have dropped by half.

He credited Thailand’s virus-fuelled measures, including a ban on alcohol sales and a nighttime curfew.

— AFP

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

FEATURES

Omani Halwa: A symbol of hospitality and tradition during Eid

GEORGINA BENISON

Omani Halwa is especially popular during the Eid al Fitr festival which follows the Holy month of Ramadhan, and this year is no exception. Shelves will be packed with locally made sweetmeats from various family dynasties throughout the Sultanate, yet each family guards its secret recipe proudly. The Al Hosni family is no exception. Their Halwa Empire can be traced back to 1950s Zanzibar and its founder, Ali bin Suleiman Al Hosni. His Halwa was so popular on the island that their home was called, “The Halwa Home”. In the 1970s His Majesty Sultan Qaboos gave a call to all Omanis residing abroad to return to Oman and work in their own country. With his expertise in Halwa making, Ali bin Suleiman soon started a small shop in Seeb with just one boiler, later inherited by his son Salim. The family believes that Omani halwa is a symbol of Omani culture and heritage and it needs to

be preserved carefully. “We maintain the authentic Omani flavour of this key element of Omani hospitality, while adding excitement with new variations that will ensure that these desserts remain a popular treat for generations to come” explained Ali’s grandson, Murshid al Hosni. He wants to keep the business within his family, handing it down from generation to generation and safeguarding the secrets of the profession. In 2014 Murshid launched the first shop under the new ‘Al Hosni Omani Sweets’ brand in Al Khod, now their flagship outlet. In 2015, he established the second shop in Sohar. Their delicacy is sold in beautifully carved wooden bowls in presentation gift boxes which delight Omanis and tourists alike. He stresses the importance of the quality of ingredients which go into their halwa, such as cardamom, rosewater from Jabal Akhdar, saffron from Iran, Omani honey and other nuts and spices. He is very careful and choosy with his selection of the produce. Murshid has since introduced many varieties, catering to different customers and their preferenc-

es. A low-sugar recipe made of milk, dates, figs, honey and nuts is proving popular among his health-conscious customers. On a normal day, they make between 70 and 100 kilograms of four to five types of halwa without compromising their high quality through bulk production. He is protective about the distinctive Al-Hosni Halwa recipe which is the Black Halwa, served in a yellow bowl, made with saffron and natural dark cane sugar from Dakhliya farms. Apart from that they have created Honey halwa, Camel Milk Halwa, Olive Oil Halwa, walnut-studded or sesame (Turkish-style tahini halwa) and their speciality ‘Al Kabash’ halwa, made up from local sources and used for the treatment of arthritis. Murshid is always seeking ways to develop his product further. In the olden days, they used Al Bustan wood during the cooking and stirring process. Currently, various machines have been

developed, adding the flavours and spices while stirring the halwa to speed the process up, yet keeping the quality intact. Currently Al Hosni halwa has 7 branches with around 15 staff each. The branches at Al-Khoud, Al-Azaiba, Sohar, As-Seeb, As-Suwaik and Salalah serve their loyal clientele, and he recently opened the largest branch in Fanja by raising funds from an SME Development Fund (Inma). Murshid said that the lack of awareness about Halwa quality amongst different communities in Oman is an area he wants to focus on. He is aided nowadays by his young entrepreneurial cousin, Haitham al Hosni, and so the family tradition goes on expanding, bringing delight to all sectors of Omani society who are lucky enough to sample the genuine taste of Omani halwa this holiday.





Style-conscious Africans turn compulsory masks into fashion accessories

LAGOS : Nigerian fashion designer Sefiya Diejomaoh likes to wear bright, bold clothes to match her personality. She believes a global pandemic should not get in the way of her sense of style.

The mask she wears, which has become compulsory attire as Nigeria tries to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, is the centrepiece of her ensemble. Gold-coloured and studded with sparkling diamante jewels, it matches her floor-length dress.

"When you come out in a stylish mask or with an accessory such as this, it doesn't seem as though we're fighting a war. It seems more fun," said Diejomaoh, as she dresses at her home in Lagos to meet a client.

Many African countries have made it compulsory to wear masks in public to prevent the spread of the sometimes fatal COVID-19 respiratory disease.

Fashion lovers in the continent's biggest cities are combining style and safety by donning colourful masks, sometimes coordinating the fabric with their outfits.

The push to make masks stylish has taken off in other parts of the world. In places

like Lebanon, businesses have switched from the production of furniture and clothing to striking masks.

In Africa, the trend is proving a boon to local tailors and designers who are making the masks.

Fashion designer Sophie Zinga, based in Senegal's capital, Dakar, said she decided to create masks from organic cotton after realizing that some form of protective clothing measures could be needed for the next two years.

"We are going to have to adapt and live with this virus," she said.

"As a fashion designer I think we are going to have to integrate each outfit with fashion masks," added Zinga, who created a digital platform, fashionfightscovid19.com, for the masks.

Far from Dakar, in South Africa's commercial hub of Johannesburg, upmarket leather accessories store Inga Atelier is creating masks.

In a country that has imposed some of Africa's most stringent lockdown measures and has been left reeling from the economic impact, the company's creative director said the move



made sense.

"My business has been heavily affected in such a sense that the retail is on lockdown," said Inga Gubeka. "There was a big shortage, we realised, of masks that can be usable every day without having to throw it away."

Her company's masks combine leather with multi-coloured fabrics including traditional South African Ndebele prints.

Back in Nigeria's Lagos, as she adjusted her glimmering gold mask before setting out into sub-Saharan Africa's most populous city of 20 million people, Diejomaoh said a small piece of fabric had become a way to express herself.

"People going around in surgical masks is depressing," she said. "I have to maintain status quo and who I am despite the situation."

— Reuters

BUSINESS

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TOLL SYSTEM ENVISAGED FOR OMAN’S FIRST TRUCK ROAD PROJECT



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A proposed new carriageway connecting Thamrait with Salalah in Dhofar Governorate – and earmarked primarily for heavy trucks and commercial vehicles – is envisaged as a toll road project to be procured based on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Overseeing the procurement process is the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PAPP), which was established pursuant to the promulgation of Royal Decree 54/2019 to manage and administer the Tawazun Oman Programme (Offset), Privatisation Law and Public-Private Partnership Law.

Earlier this week, the Authority invited qualified consultants to prequalify for a competitive tender leading to the award of a Transaction Advisory Services contract covering the procurement of

PPP INITIATIVE: MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT TOGETHER WITH ASYAD GROUP HAD EARLIER EXPLORED THE FEASIBILITY OF A TOLL-BASED SYSTEM FOR THE PROPOSED TRUCK ROAD FROM THAMRAIT TO SALALAH PORT.

the landmark project.

The proposed Salalah – Thamrait Truck Road envisions the construction of an efficient, all-weather alternative to the current 85-km carriageway that, as part of the arterial Adam – Salalah, currently serves as the only lifeline connecting the north of Oman with Dhofar Governorate.

However, as the dual carriageway twists and turns through the Dhofar Mountains, its sharp bends and steep gradients have made it prone to accidents and also contributed to frequent traffic snarls. Furthermore, an upsurge in mining, quarrying and farming activity in the Thamrait area in recent years has resulted in sharp increase in the number of heavy trucks and commercial vehicles headed to Salalah city and its transshipment hub.

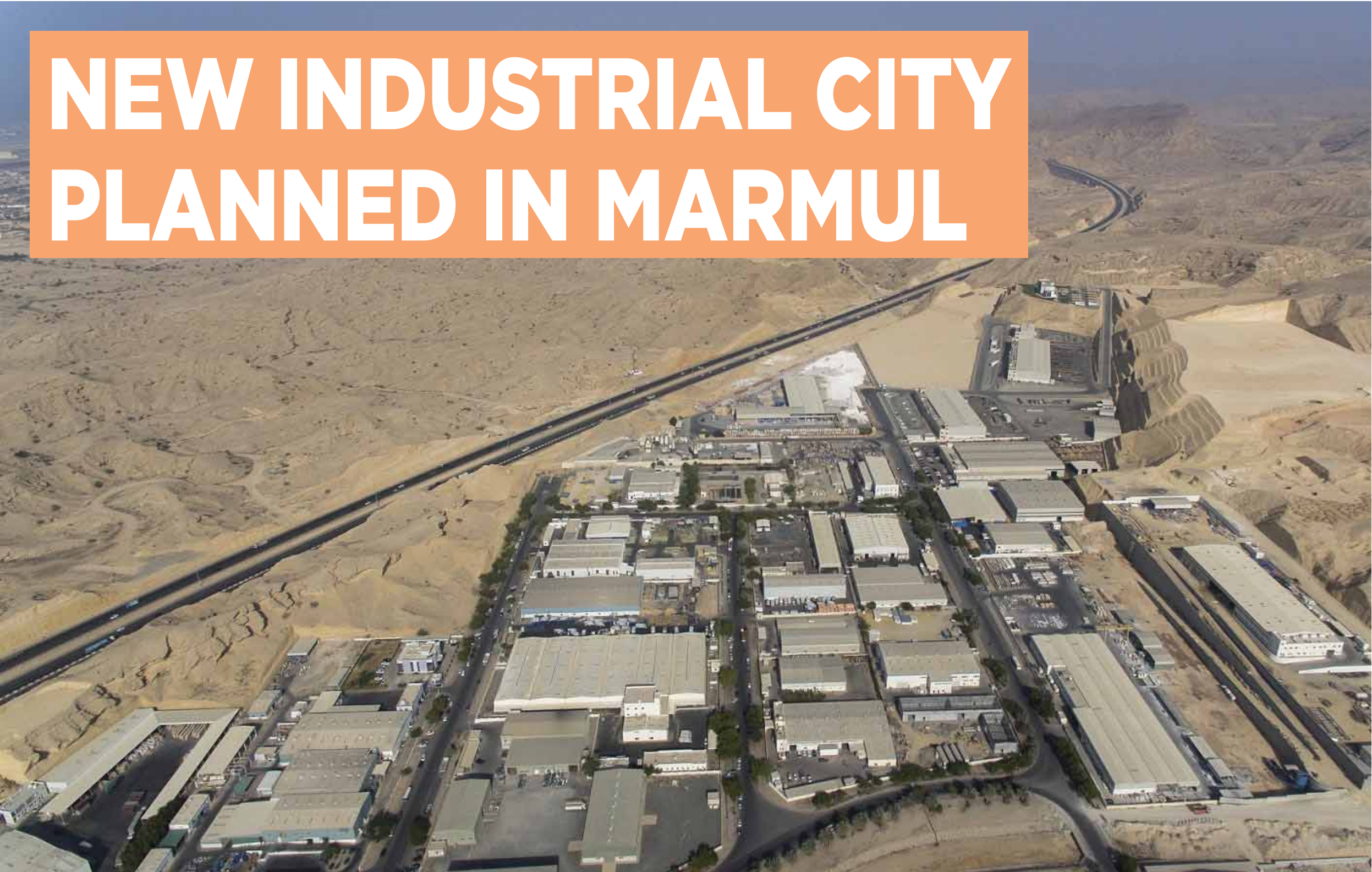
“These economic activities represent a very important milestone of the local economy, due to connections to the Salalah Port, also considering the commercial connections to Yemen and the economic growth of Salalah Port trading activity,” stressed the PAPP said in a background note for interested bidders.

“For the aforementioned reasons, it is important to assume an adequate development and planning of road connections, minimising the travel time duration (especially for the trucks) crossing the Dhofar mountains. The geometric features of the current roads (National Road 31) don't allow an adequate truck flow, due to the high gradients of the road and some small radius curves, determining very low speed of the vehicles,

causing high travel time,” it stated.

Significantly, the Ministry of Transport together with Asyad Group – the Sultanate's transport and logistics development holding company – had explored the feasibility of a toll-based system for the proposed new truck road from Thamrait area to Salalah Port area. The study centred on the potential for a dual carriageway (two lanes on either side) with a design speed of 110 km/hour.

According to the Authority, the selected consultant's mandate will cover Technical, Financial and Legal advisory services encompassing PPP Feasibility Studies, Procurement Support, Negotiation Support, and Post-Contract Award Support (optional). Bidders should have experience in the procurement of toll roads and PPP ventures of a capex value of over \$500 million. The deadline for submission of qualifications is June 18, 2020.



NEW INDUSTRIAL CITY PLANNED IN MARMUL

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signed a memorandum of cooperation on Wednesday with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to establish an industrial city within the industrial and logistics complex in Marmul.

Under the agreement, Madayn will support the financing, development, operation and marketing of the industrial city located in the south within PDO's concession area, which is 800 km from Muscat. The agreement was inked by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of Madayn, and Raoul Restucci, Managing Director of PDO.

Hilal al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, stated that this pact is in line with Madayn's medium and long-term expansion plans for establishing industrial cities in partnership with the private sector to help achieve comprehensive and sustainable economic in the Sultanate.

"This cooperation also comes in line with Madayn's adopted PPP approach in the field of constructing,

THE INDUSTRIAL CITY IN MARMUL IS EXPECTED TO FOCUS MAINLY IN ATTRACTING INVESTMENTS IN THE OIL AND GAS SECTOR.

managing and operating industrial and economic areas," Al Hasani said, adding: "The industrial city in Marmul is expected to focus mainly in attracting investments in the oil and gas sector."

In accordance with Royal Decree 32/2015, Madayn has the role of developing and operating industrial cities in the Sultanate, attracting industrial investments and providing continued support through regionally and globally competitive strategies."

Raoul Restucci, Managing Director of PDO, said: "We look forward to cooperating with Madayn in this strategic project. The goal of the industrial and logistics complex in Marmul is to accelerate the development of local manufacturing capabilities while expanding supply chains, which shall support our activities in the southern concession area."

Bringing these vital operations closer to our fields will play a role in reducing response time and costs, providing efficiency gains and help improving safety performance."

Invitation to Attend the
Extraordinary General
Meeting and Annual
General Meeting

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Enjoy the Internet

The Board of Directors of the Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company SAOG (the "Company") invites all shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Monday, 1 June 2020 at 5 pm via the electronic platform to conduct general meetings, which you can access through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company website (www.mcd.gov.om). In case the required quorum is not met for these meetings, a second Extraordinary General Meeting and/or Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 3 June 2020 at 5 pm via the above mentioned electronic platform. The meetings shall discuss the following agenda items:

First: Agenda of the Extraordinary General Meeting:

1. Consideration and approval of amending the Company's Articles of Association according to the requirements of the Commercial Companies Law issued by Royal Decree No. 18/2019.

Second: Agenda of the Annual General Meeting:

1. Consideration and approval of the Board of Directors' Report regarding the Company's activities and financial position during the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
2. Consideration and approval of the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
3. Consideration and approval of the independent evaluation of the Board Members' performance for the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
4. Consideration and approval of the Auditor's Report regarding the audited financial statements for the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
5. Informing the shareholders about the cash dividends that were distributed to shareholders on 24th March 2020 at a value of 40 Baiza per share.
6. Approval of sitting fees paid to the Directors of the Board and Committees for the financial year ended on 31st December 2019 and determination of the fees payable for the next financial year ending on 31st December 2020.
7. Consideration and approval of remuneration of RO 148,100 payable to the Directors in respect of the financial year ended on 31st December 2019.
8. Informing the shareholders about Related-Party Transactions entered into by the Company during 2019.
9. Informing the shareholders of the amount spent on Corporate Social Responsibility for the year ended on 31st December 2019.
10. Consideration and approval of a donation budget of RO 200,000 to be spent on Corporate Social Responsibility for the next financial year ending on 31st December 2020.
11. Election of a new Board of Directors for the Company.
12. Anyone who wishes to nominate himself/herself to membership of the Board of Directors of the Company must complete the application form and submit it to the Company at the following email address (Majid.Al-Marzooqi@ooredoo.om) at least five days prior to the date set for the Annual General Meeting and no later than the end of the working day Wednesday 26 May 2020. Candidates must satisfy all conditions for membership of the Board of Directors.
13. Appointment of external auditors for the Company for the financial year ending on 31st December 2020 and approval of their proposed fees.

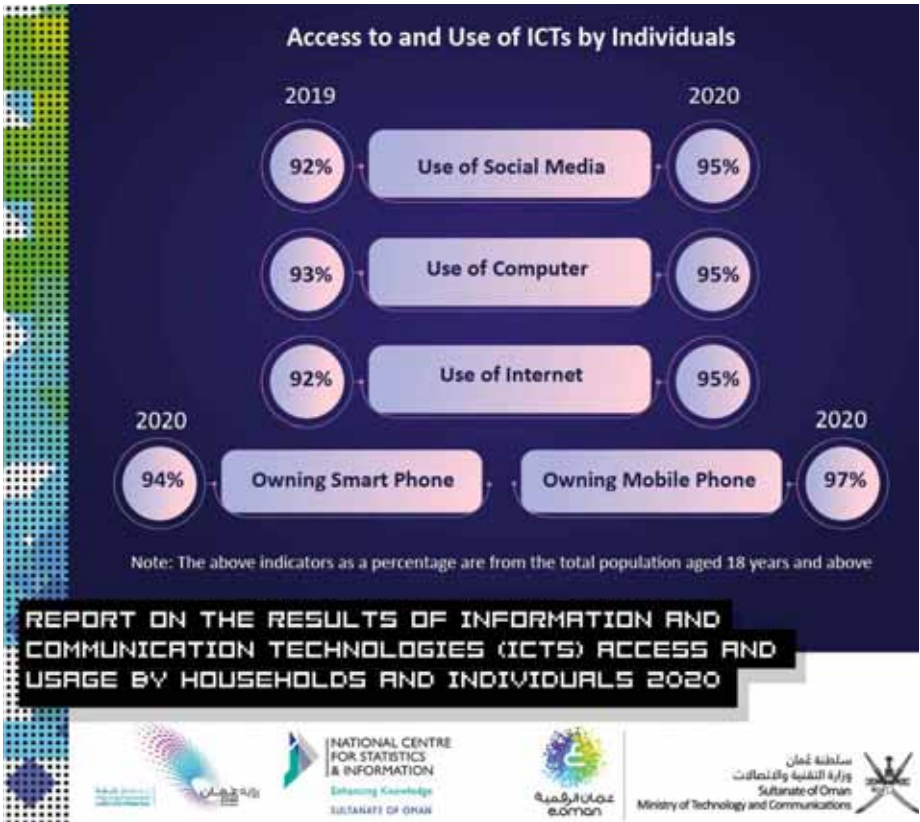
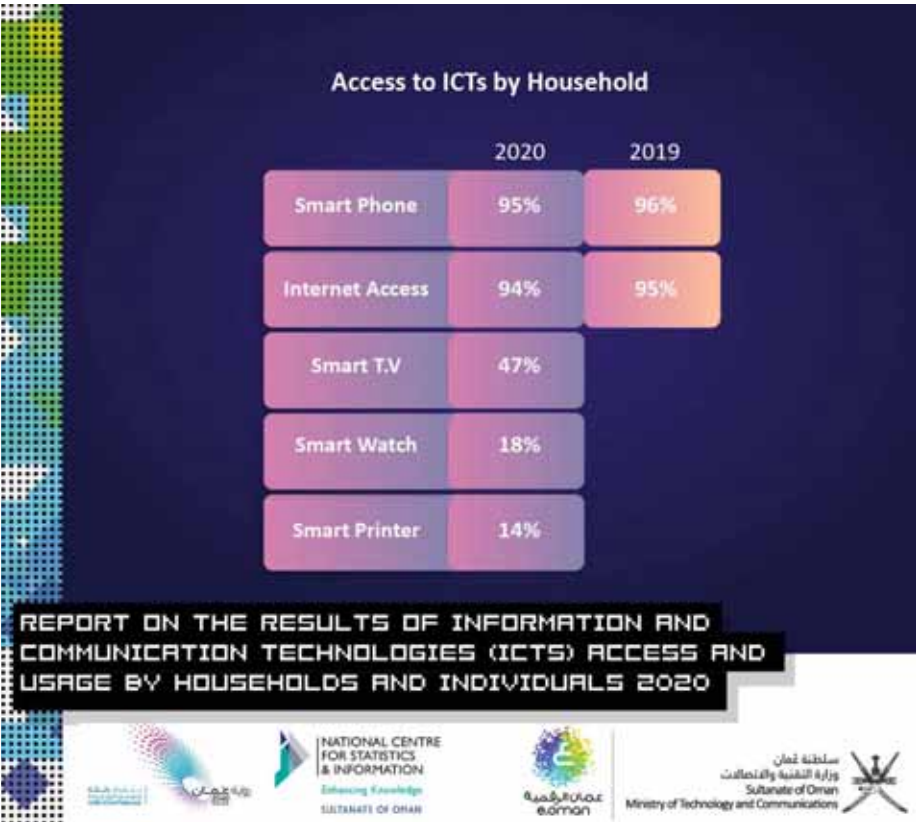
In accordance with the Articles of Association of the Company and the guidelines of conducting general meetings using new electronic means issued by the Capital Market Authority, please note the following:

- a) Only a juristic person shall authorize a natural person to attend the general meetings and vote on the resolutions virtually on its behalf, provided that this natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- b) Voting on agenda items starts no more than 3 days prior to the meeting date until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting. In case of a change in the number of shares of a shareholder, the shareholder's vote will be cancelled, and he/she will have to vote again on the day of the meeting.

For further information, please contact Ahmed Al Khuzairi on +968 95108731.

BUSINESS

95 PER CENT OF HOUSEHOLDS OWN SMARTPHONES, 94 PER CENT HAVE INTERNET ACCESS



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) and the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) announced the results of Measuring the Access to and Use of ICT by Households and Individuals 2020 survey.

The survey was conducted by the NCSI Call Center through telephone interviews on a sample of 2,612 individuals 18 years and above, and the sample represented all governorates of the Sultanate, as the Omanis comprised 44 per cent and expats 56 per cent.

The most important indicators of access to information and communication

THE RESULTS OF THE 2020 SURVEY INDICATED THAT THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY INDIVIDUALS TO REACH 95 PER CENT COMPARED TO 92 PER CENT IN 2019.

technologies by the household sector are household possession to smartphones, which reached 95 per cent, in addition to household access to the Internet, which reached 94 per cent, while household possession to computers (including smartphones) reached 96 per cent.

All these indicators wit-

nessed a slight decrease by 1 per cent compared to the results of 2019.

This year, the survey included measuring new indicators that were not included in the previous survey in 2019, namely: the possession of smart TV 47 per cent, smart watches 18 per cent, smart cameras 14 per cent and smart printers 14 per cent.

The results of the survey show that the percentage of individuals owning mobile phones reached 97 per cent, and the percentage of people owning smartphones was 94 per cent.

With regard to the use of information and communication technologies by indi-

viduals during the three months prior to conducting the survey, some indicators witnessed an increase compared to the results of the survey conducted in 2019, as this year, the percentage of individuals using the Internet increased to 95 per cent of the total population compared to 92 per cent in 2019. In addition, the percentage of individuals using computers (including smartphone) increased to 95 per cent in 2020 compared to 93 per cent in 2019.

The results of the 2020 survey indicated that there has been a noticeable increase in the use of social media by individuals to reach 95 per cent compared to 92 per cent in 2019.

The results of the survey also concluded that the percentage of Internet use among females was 97 per cent compared to 94 per cent among males.

As for the age groups, the total age group of 18-54 years exceed the rate of Internet use by 90 per cent, while the percentage of use by the age group 55 years and above is only 80 per cent; however, the percentage of use among Omanis and expats is 95 per cent equally.

Utico taps banks for \$500 million Sukuk

MUSCAT: Utico, the Middle East's leading full service utility, announced on Wednesday that it is working with financial institutions and banks to raise a benchmark sized Islamic bond and tap the capital markets.

Oman's Majis Industrial Services (MIS), which is wholly owned by Oman Investment Fund (OIF), owns 32 per cent of Utico.

In a statement, Richard Menezes, CEO of Utico said that the company has sounded out to several financial institutions including Citi for the Sukuk issuance.

"The response has been positive.



We intend to move quickly and ensure that we complete the process in next 3-4 months," Menezes said. "These are times when the governments are doing a lot for the people, even when the oil prices are down, ensuring common good and we feel that with further capitalisation, Utico too will be able to contrib-

ute more to the UAE and the region," he said.

Utico has the lowest Debt to Equity gearing of 0.5 in the industry while its largest competitor in the region is leveraged about 8 or 9 times, compared to the industry average of 3 times.

Menezes said raising money to increase debt is not Utico's core focus but to ensure sustainability, improve its services and restructure itself to position for new opportunities like Dubai's Hassyan project and some other opportunities in Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Bank Muscat AGM approves 35 per cent cash dividend

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat held its Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) and an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the Bank's shareholders using the electronic platform developed by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC) on May 19, 2020. Both the meetings were presided over by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani **(pictured)**, Chairman of the Bank's Board of Directors.

At the EGM, the shareholders of the Bank approved the renewal of the Meethaq Sukuk Programme amounting to RO 500 million. The EGM also authorised the Board of Directors of the Bank or those delegated by the Board to establish and approve Meethaq Sukuk Programmes.

The EGM also approved the amendment of the Bank's Articles of Association in light of the new Commercial Companies Law (No 18/2019).

At the AGM, shareholders



The Board of Directors of the Bank welcomed and supported the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority to strengthen the financial sector in the Sultanate..

SHAIKH KHALID BIN MUSTAHAIL AL MASHANI,
BOD CHAIRMAN

of the Bank ratified the payout of 40 per cent dividend for 2019. Continuing its strong dividend payment track record, the Bank paid out 35 per cent cash dividend for the financial year that ended on December 31, 2019. In addition, shareholders also received 5 per cent dividend in the form of bonus shares.

Thus shareholders received cash dividend of RO 0.035 per ordinary share of RO 0.100 each aggregating to RO 108.317 million on the Bank's existing share capital.

In addition, shareholders also received bonus shares in the proportion of 1 share for every 20 ordinary shares aggregating to 154,739,168 shares of RO 0.100 each amounting to RO 15.474 million.

During the meeting, the bank also notified the assembly of its RO 1 million donation to the Ministry of Health as part of its efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus disease

(COVID-19) in Oman. Shareholders also approved the appointment of the Shari'a Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Bank's Islamic banking window, as well as the appointment of the bank's statutory auditors and the external independent Shari'a auditors for Meethaq.

Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani said that the Board of Directors of the Bank welcomed and supported the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority to strengthen the financial sector in the Sultanate.

He expressed his happiness with the strong financial results achieved by the Bank in 2019, despite the challenges and intense competition in the banking sector. The bank posted a net profit of RO 185.55 million for the year 2019 compared to RO 179.63 million reported during the same period in 2018, an increase of 3.3 per cent.

Strong response to Omantel's Ramadhan offers

MUSCAT: Omantel's Ramadhan offers have been well received by customers due to the unique benefits provided to them such as the free calls for Baqati and Hayyak customers.

Omantel has provided its customers with unprecedented offers especially customers of Baqati postpaid and Hayyak prepaid services.

Omantel also provided free delivery services for 'Makasib' loyalty programme members.

Ramadhan's first offer for Hayyak customers includes free local calls upon every recharge using the recharge vouchers or through the Omantel App.

Customers get free local calls for one day when they recharge with RO1 to RO 2.9 and 3 days in case of recharging with RO 3 to 3.9 and 5 days in case of recharging RO 5 to 9.9. Customers can get free local calls of up to 10 days when they recharge with RO 10 and more. The offer is valid until May 24, 2020.

The second offer allows unlimited local calls for 7 days for only RO 1. The



offer, which can be activated through the Omantel App is available to postpaid customers and Hayyak prepaid customers, until May 24, 2020.

Commenting on Ramadhan offers, Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Acting Vice President at Omantel's Consumer Business Unit said, "We are happy to

help the community members in applying social distancing which will help in combatting the spread of COVID-19. Under Ramadhan offers, we provided our customers with exciting offers that keep them in constant contact with their relatives and friends during Ramadhan."

BUSINESS

Rolls-Royce cuts 9,000 jobs as airlines turn off engines



Rolls Royce Trent XWB engines are seen on the assembly line at the Rolls Royce factory in Derby, central England, in this file photo. — AFP

LONDON: Rolls-Royce, the British maker of plane engines, said Wednesday it will cut at least 9,000 jobs and slash costs elsewhere, as the coronavirus hammers the aviation sector.

"This is not a crisis of our making. But it is the crisis that we face and we must deal with it," chief executive Warren East said in a statement announcing that Rolls would cut nearly one-fifth of its global workforce.

"Our airline customers and airframe partners are having to adapt and so must we."

Unions said they expected most of the cuts to occur in the UK, while analysts said the knock-on effect for supply chains meant many more people working across the aerospace industry were set to lose their jobs.

Rolls said it expected

"the loss of at least 9,000 roles" from a global workforce of 52,000 and would also cut "expenditure across plant and property, capital and other indirect cost areas".

The measures is expected to hand the company annual savings of more than £1.3 billion (\$1.6 billion, 1.4 billion euros). The restructuring will cost Rolls about £800 million.

Rolls said the restructuring would predominantly affect its civil aerospace business.

"Our defence business, based in the UK and US, has been robust during the pandemic, with an unchanged outlook, and does not need to reduce headcount," it added.

Rolls has already spent the past two years cutting thousands of management roles following weak demand for its power systems used by the marine industry.

"The restructuring announced... (in) June 2018 will transition into this wider proposed reorganisation," Rolls said Wednesday.

"Focused predominantly on reducing the complexity of our support and management functions, the programme has substantially delivered on its objectives."

The new cull comes as global air travel remains virtually non-existent, even though governments have begun to ease their lockdowns.

With planes grounded worldwide, airlines are slashing thousands of jobs and Rolls has followed suit. "Being told that there is no longer a job for you is a terrible prospect," East added on Wednesday.

"But we must take difficult decisions to see our business through these unprecedented times." — AFP

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One of the keys to restarting travel is a robust process of checking passengers. Empty seats don't provide added security. But the economic impact would be absolutely catastrophic.

ALEXANDRE DE JUNIAC,
IATA HEAD

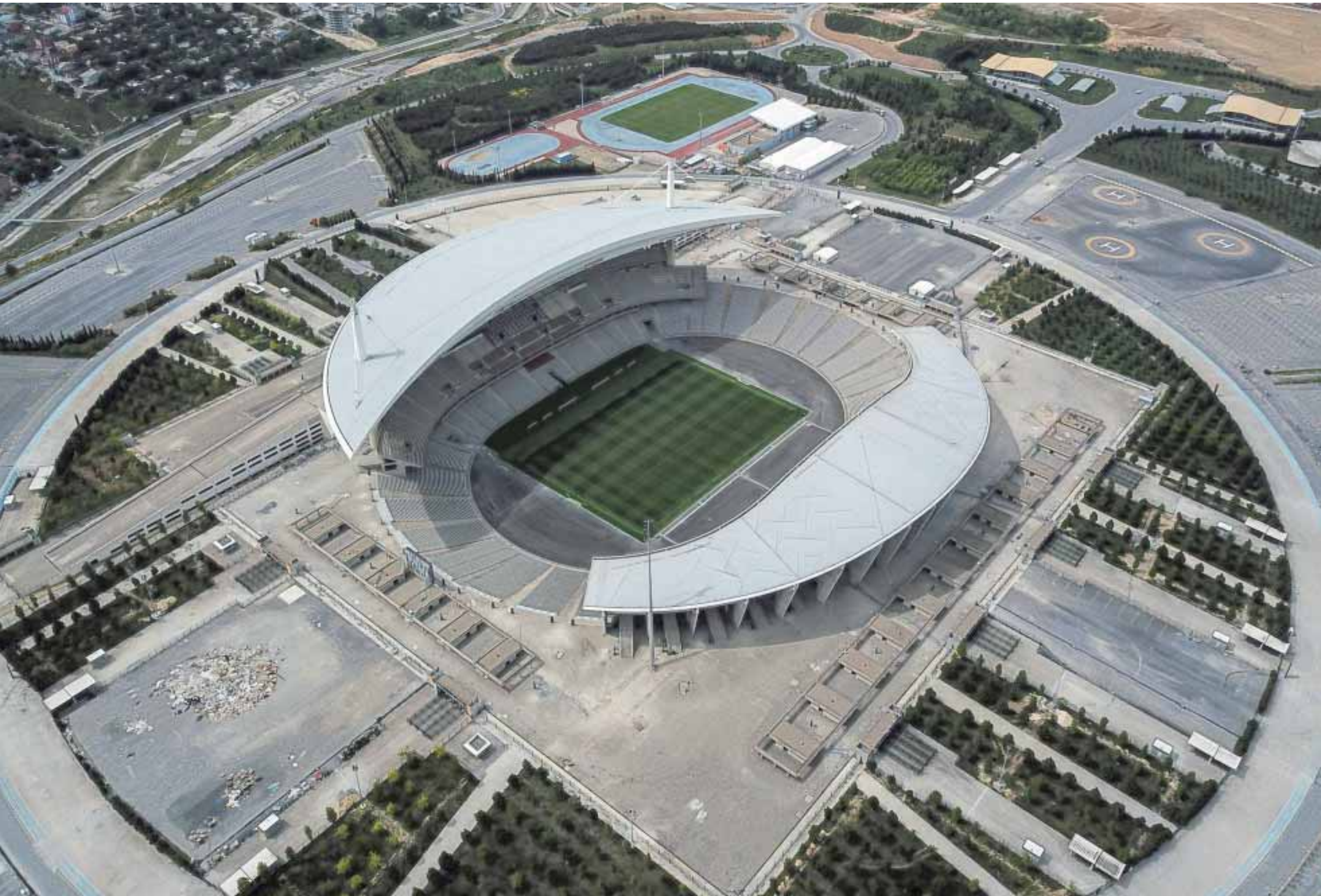
Aviation needs confidence to take off again

PARIS: The coronavirus pandemic has dealt airlines an unprecedented blow — to get back in business they will have to reinstall confidence in travelers and avoid a patchwork of restrictions, says the head of the industry's trade association.

As nations around the world snapped their borders shut and ordered people to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus, airline traffic was brought to a near-total halt.

"We've never seen anything like this," said Alexandre de Juniac (pictured), head of the International Air Transport Association which represents some 290 airlines.

Airlines have parked between 80 and 90 per cent of their aircraft, some 4.5 million flights have been cancelled and an estimated \$314 billion in revenues will be lost this year. — Reuters



UEFA CHIEF HOPES TO CONCLUDE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE BY AUG END

LISBON: Uefa president Aleksander Ceferin is aiming to finish this year's Champions League by the end of August as football in Europe slowly starts to bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our plan is to finish it between now and the end of August," Ceferin said in an interview with Portuguese sports daily Record, published on Wednesday.

"I think that will work. You never know what's going to happen but things seem to be calming down.

"Eighty per cent of European leagues are going to restart, I don't see why the Champions League and Europa League shouldn't take



Uefa president
Aleksander Ceferin

place."

That end date for Uefa's European tournaments was widely reported but never officially confirmed by the continent's football governing body.

Ceferin's desired

deadline gives clubs a chance to finish their domestic competitions — halted across Europe in mid-March — before the Champions League restarts in early August.

In an interview with British daily The Guardian, Ceferin added that he would be prepared to bet a million dollars on Euro 2020 being played next year following its postponement to 2021.

"Yes, I would," he told the newspaper "I don't know why it (the tournament) wouldn't be (played).

"I don't think that this virus will last forever. I think it will (change) sooner than many think.

"I don't like this apocalyptic view that we

have to wait for the second and third waves or even a fifth wave."

Ceferin said football would follow the recommendations of the authorities but he was optimistic that fans would return to the stands quicker than many observers think.

"I'm absolutely sure, personally, that good old football with fans will come back very soon," he said.

And Ceferin said he did not expect the game to be profoundly changed by the coronavirus.

"Football didn't change after the Second World War, or First World War, and it will not change because of a virus either," he said.

— AFP

SPORTS

NEUER
SIGNS
NEW
BAYERN
DEAL
UNTIL 2023



BERLIN: Germany goal-keeper Manuel Neuer has signed a new deal with Bayern Munich that ties him to the club until 2023, the Bundesliga champions said on Wednesday.

The announcement ends weeks of speculation over the Bayern captain's future, with widespread reports that talks between player and club had hit the rocks.

"During the weeks of the

shutdown for the coronavirus pandemic, I didn't want to make a decision because nobody knew if, when and how Bundesliga football would continue", Neuer said in a statement.

"I look to the future with great optimism. I feel very comfortable and at home in Bavaria".

Last month the Bild daily reported that Neuer and his agent Thomas Kroth were demanding a five-

year deal with a salary of 20 million euros (\$22 million) per season.

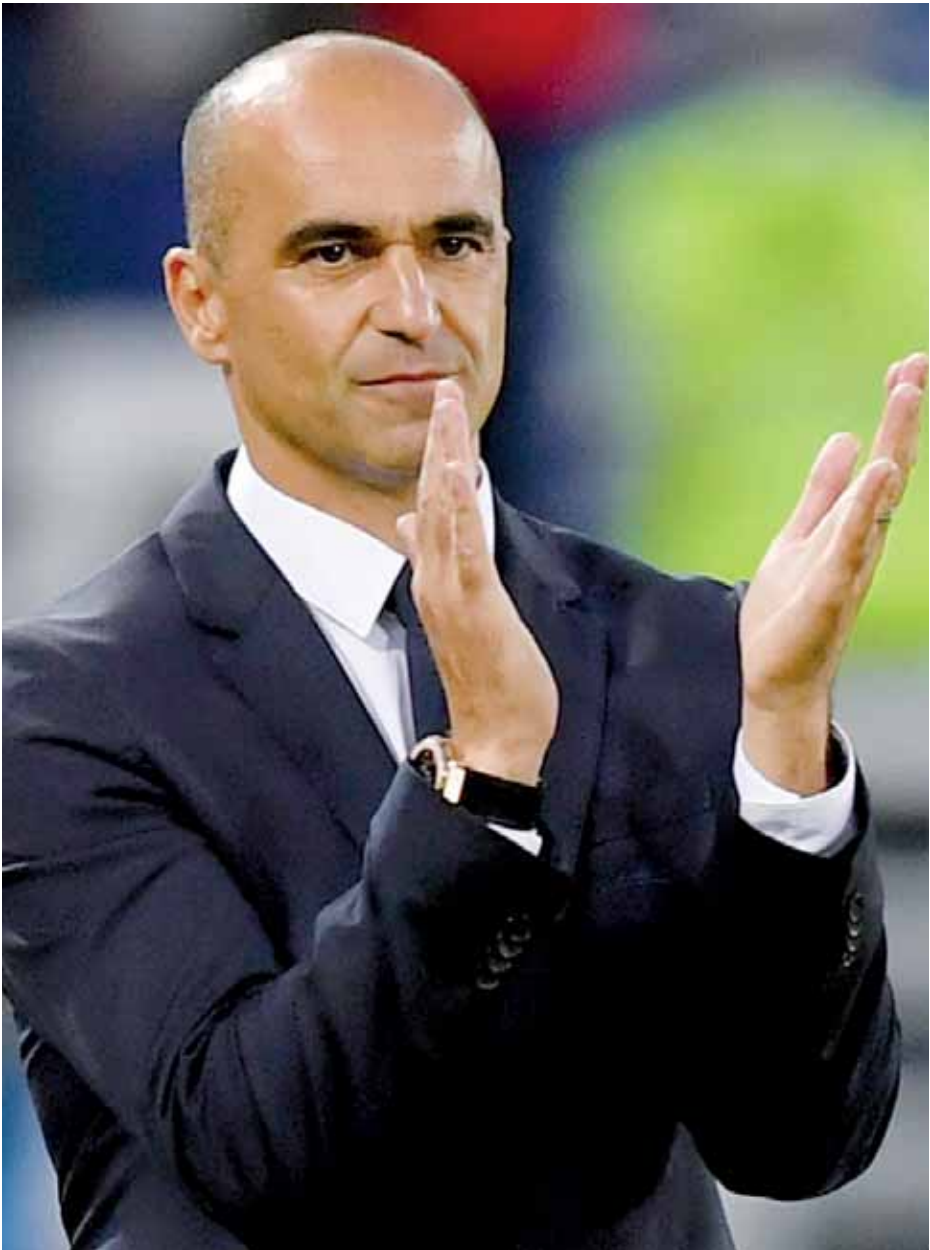
Neuer had revealed his irritation both at the status of the talks and that details were being leaked to the media.

A World Cup winner in 2014 with Germany, Neuer joined Bayern from Schalke in 2011 and has won almost everything with the Bavarian giants, with seven Bundesliga

titles, five German Cups and the 2013 Champions League to his name.

The 34-year-old is on course to win his eighth league crown with Bayern after a 2-0 win at Union Berlin on Sunday that maintained his team's four-point lead at the top of the table as the Bundesliga became the first major European league to return from the coronavirus shut-down.

— AFP



Martinez gets Belgium extension till Qatar WC

FRANKFURT: Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has had his contract renewed until the 2022 World Cup, the nation's football federation RBFA said on Wednesday.

Former Everton manager Martinez, 46, took charge of the Red Devils after Euro 2016, replacing Marc Wilmots, and led them to third place at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Belgium are world ranking leaders since 2018 and have quali-

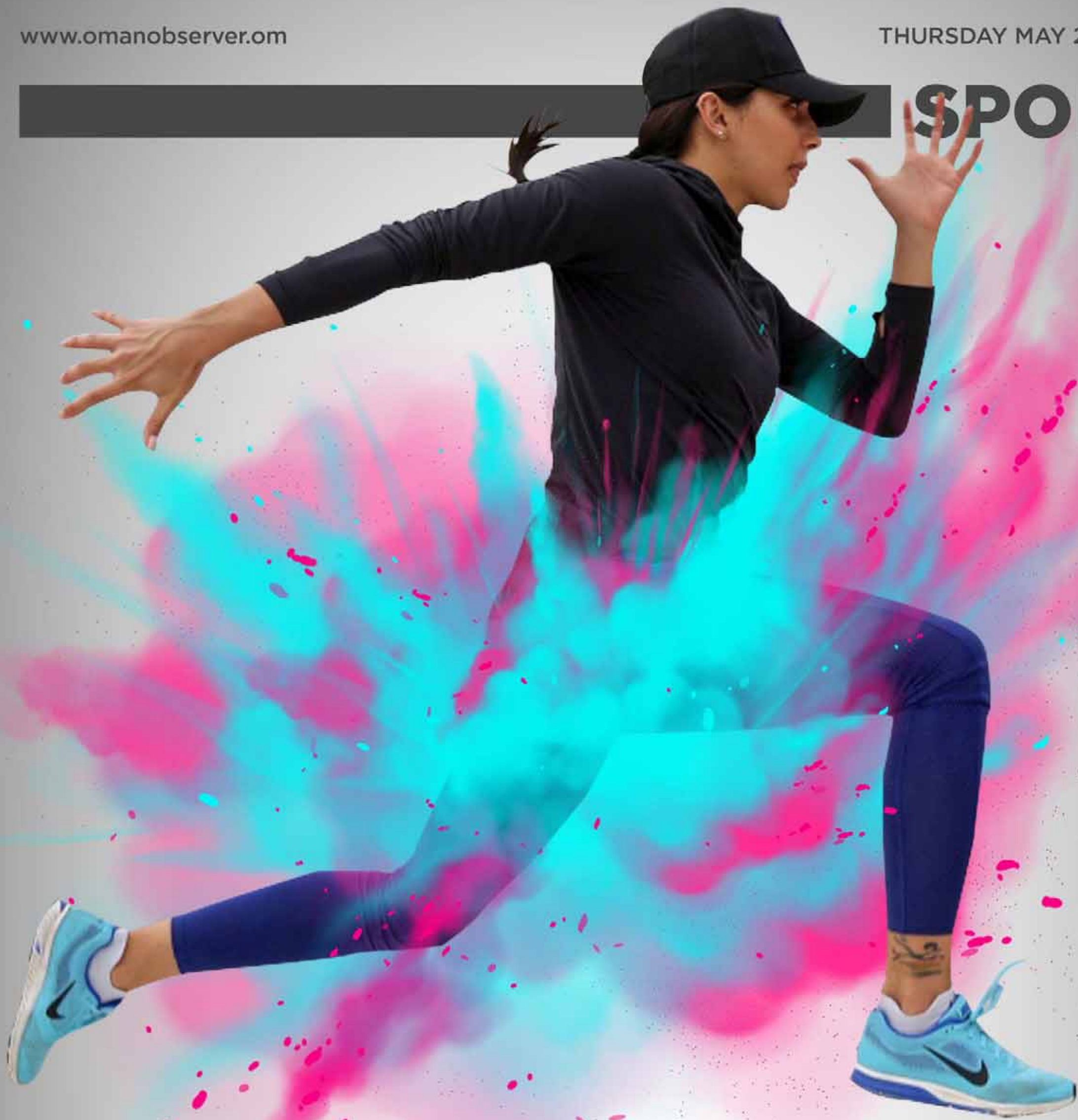
fied for Euro 2020, which has been postponed to next year because of the coronavirus pandemic, with a perfect record of 10 wins.

Martinez' contract was originally until Euro 2020 this year but now renewed until the World Cup in two years time in Qatar which ends in mid-December, with his deal as RBFA Technical Director also extended.

"Because of the EURO 2020 postponement

we could not possibly end our collaboration already now. The RBFA has an ambitious plan that I look forward to with great enthusiasm, both in the short and long term", Martinez said.

"The next two and a half years will be very intense for our national team, with the European Championship, Nations League, 2020 World Cup qualifying matches and the World Cup in Qatar itself". — dpa



IRAN'S STAR ATHLETE TAKES TO ROOFTOP TO TRAIN

TEHRAN: The coronavirus pandemic has forced the world's athletes to keep fit in confinement, and for top Iranian athlete Maryam Toosi, that has meant training on the rooftop of her apartment.

Toosi's exploits as a sprinter have made her a household name in the Islamic republic.

She holds Iran's records for 100, 200 and 400 metres and claimed two gold medals at the Asian Indoor Championships in 2012 and 2014.

But now the 31-year-old is confined to her home and has even taken to training on the roof of her apartment block in a bid to stay in shape.

"I train at home, in any space I can use, like the rooftop, inside the house or even in the alley next to the apartment," she said.

"There's a green space there, and I train there when no one is around," said Toosi, who has

159,000 followers on Instagram.

Her apartment is in Shahr Ara, a densely populated neighbourhood of the sprawling capital where there are few open areas. "We have to keep our strength up, because competition will start later and we eventually have to challenge."

The novel coronavirus has claimed the lives of nearly 7,200 people in Iran, making it the deadliest outbreak in the Middle East.

The government ordered the closure of sports facilities in mid-March as part of measures aimed at containing the virus.

It has forced athletes of all disciplines to practise in Tehran's public parks.

One group of boys has been forced to do football training in one such park, wedged between highways in the west of the capital.

— AFP

SPORTS

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James has said he's eager for the NBA season to resume, as long as the health of players and their families won't be endangered amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

James, speaking on the "WRTS: After Party" programme on the Uninterrupted multi-media platform, said he hoped the NBA season resumes sooner rather than later.

"Definitely not giving up on the season", said James, whose Lakers led the Western Conference when the NBA suspended play on March 11 after Utah Jazz centre Rudy Gobert tested positive for the coronavirus.

The virus brought global sport to a virtual standstill, but as lockdowns aimed at preventing its spread have begun to ease, sport has begun to re-emerge.

Germany's Bundesliga became the first top European football league to resume after a two-month hiatus at the weekend. In North America, the popu-

lar Nascar stock car series resumed without spectators on Sunday and golf stuck a toe in the water with a made-for-TV charity event featuring Rory McIlroy and Dustin Johnson.

The NBA, along with Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League and Major League Soccer are still formulating plans to return, while the NFL tries to stay on course for an on-schedule season opening in September.

"Not only myself and my teammates, the Lakers organisation, we want to play", James said. — AFP

LEBRON EAGER TO GET BACK TO ACTION

