

MUSCAT DAILY

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39°C/27°C

ALI AL HABSI REFLECTS ON HIS CAREER
GO TO PAGE 12 SPORTS



Bereaved sister exhorts every homeowner to install fire alarms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A fire on the night of August 3 ended the life of a shining star in Oman's legal firmament. The fire in Sahar Askalan's home went undetected until it was too late. This is yet another wake-up call for the need to make installation of fire and smoke alarms a legal requirement in every home to stop needless loss of life.

Sahar was reputed to be the first Omani woman to open her own legal practice - Sahar Askalan Legal Advocacy & Consultancy (SAlegal) - in the sultanate. Qualified to practice before courts in Oman and the United Kingdom, she worked with top tier international law firms in London, Paris and Abu Dhabi for 18 years before heading home. She strove to raise the standard of legal practice in Oman.

Continued on Page 3

A sister's fervent appeal

We lost my beloved sister, Sahar Askalan... young and in the glory of her life and her giving. She flooded our hearts with her vitality, her ambition and her smile. She suddenly passed away due to smoke inhalation while she

was asleep. Smoke that creeps into our lungs while we are asleep without our awareness and even if we become aware of it, it's often too late. With a shattered heart, and tears of pain and sadness, I was frantically looking

for fire alarms, where are they? Why didn't an alarm go off to save my sister?

My heart ached more when I learnt that many houses lack these life-saving devices.

Continued on Page 3



The fire on the night of August 3 that claimed the life of Sahar Askalan



Sahar Askalan

Dhofar Cattle Feed reports financial fraud of RO245,000

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Cattle Feed has reported a financial fraud of RO245,000, committed by some employees of the company, to the Muscat Securities Market (MSM).

In a disclosure to MSM, the company said, "We would like to inform you that on reviewing the expired and damaged finished products of the company, we found that these were particularly high. On a detailed scrutiny, we found some employees of the company have committed fraud amounting to approximately RO245,000.

'The company has revamped its systems and processes and brought additional measures of internal control. We are in the process of filing the case in the court with the help of our independent consultant legal accountant and the company's lawyer.'

According to the company, the amount defrauded in the guise of expired dairy products has already been accounted for. 'There will not be any further impact on the company's income statement,' it said.



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Badr Al Samaa Hospital, PB 330, PC 321, Al Tariff,
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COVID-19
UPDATE

WHERE WE STAND
(AUGUST 30, 2020)

Oman Total: **85,544**
(Omanis: 52,841 Expats: 32,703)
Recovered: **80,459** Deaths: **677**

OMAN GOVERNORATES

Governorates	Total	New
Muscat	42,490	163
South Batinah	9,784	53
Dakhliyah	5,515	55
South Sharqiyah	2,788	41
North Batinah	14,846	154
Dhahirah	1,865	11
North Sharqiyah	2,313	19
Dhofar	3,249	32
Musandam	75	3
Buraimi	955	1
Al Wusta	1,664	7

MUSCAT

Wilayats	Total	New
Muttrah	8,963	21
Seeb	15,974	60
Bausher	10,828	38
Amerat	3,417	7
Muscat	2,204	29
Quriyat	1,104	8

539 new
COVID-19
cases, 27
deaths
reported

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday confirmed 539 new cases of the COVID-19, taking the total to 85,544. The number of deaths reported on Sunday was 27.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 80,459 while the number of deaths has reached 677 from 650 on Thursday,' an MoH statement said.

As of Sunday, a total of 402 patients were admitted in health institutions while 156 patients were in ICU.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the room as instructed.

It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus.

MoH advises all citizens and residents to keep on washing hands with water and soap, avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth, and eyes and following healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

Decks cleared for new
University of Technology

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An executive action plan for the merger of Higher Technical College, technical colleges, colleges of applied sciences and Rustaq College of Education, to form University of Technology and Applied Sciences was agreed to and signed on Sunday.

The agreement was signed during a coordination meeting held by Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

The two sides discussed a plan for Blended Learning Project, which was one of the outcomes of the education lab held in October 2019.

The lab culminated in the issuance of Royal Decree No 81/2020, which stipulated the merging of Higher Technical College, technical colleges, colleges of applied sciences and Rustaq College of Education, bringing them under one government university - University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

The meeting, held at the



The two sides discussed a plan for Blended Learning Project, which was one of the outcomes of the education lab held in October 2019

premises of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit in Al Khuwayr, was attended by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, head of the unit, and Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubai'ee, vice chancellor of the university.

The meeting was also attended by the unit's team tasked

with the education sector, the labour market and employment.

The meeting looked into all responsibilities and missions of the university project's committees, appointment of the project's management team and a review of the merger project's

indicators.

It also discussed means of addressing challenges in accordance with work system proceedings.

Dr Jabri and Dr Rubai'ee signed the executive plan of the merger which will ensure smooth running in line with clear-cut indicators of performance to be followed up by the unit in its approach to facilitating all challenges that might emerge during the implementation stage.

REGIONAL WEATHER

ABU DHABI

Max 44°C Min 29°C



DUBAI

Max 41°C Min 30°C



MANAMA

Max 38°C Min 30°C



DOHA

Max 38°C Min 30°C



KUWAIT CITY

Max 43°C Min 30°C



RIYADH

Max 41°C Min 26°C



Urgent blood donation call in Sohar

Our correspondent
Muscat

The Blood Bank in Sohar Hospital has called on people to donate blood urgently.

In a statement, the Department of Blood Banks Services

said, 'Due to the shortage of blood donors during the past few days, the Blood Bank at Sohar Hospital appeals to people to donate.'

Donors can book an appointment by sending WhatsApp message to 79900799.

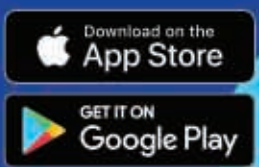


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Arabian leopard spotted in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The critically endangered Arabian leopard has made a rare appearance in the Governorate of Dhofar, according to the Office for Conservation of Environment (OCE) in the Diwan of Royal Court.

The last of the leopards, whose total number in the wild is expected to be less than 200, survive in the mountains of Dhofar and the adjoining areas in Yemen.

OCE has released photos of an Arabian leopard and stated that the animal came out to enjoy the magic of nature and the atmosphere of khareef in Dhofar. 'This was because of the extensive protection and conservation efforts of the authorities in Oman,' it said.

Leopards are active mostly at night and the pattern of rosettes on the body is unique in each individual. Called 'qadhr' locally in the Dhofar Mountains, camera-trap studies continue to confirm the presence of leopards in Jebel Samhan in Dhofar. Between 1997 and 2000, over 200 photographs of 17 leopards were ob-



The last of the leopards survive in the mountains of Dhofar and the adjoining areas in Yemen (Supplied photos)

tained by Andrew Spalton, an adviser for environmental affairs working in Oman.

Another set of camera-trappings confirmed the presence of

nine to 11 leopards in Jebel Qara and Qamar that run west from Samhan to the Oman-Yemen border. A number of these leopards were fitted with GPS collars

and tracked over the years. According to studies conducted in Oman, an estimated 44 to 58 Arabian leopards are left in the country. This is the world's

biggest population of these elusive cats. Only 200 of these animals are thought to be left in the wild in the Arabian Peninsula. Meanwhile, OCE added that it



recently celebrated World Photography Day. 'With the cooperation of a group of wildlife photographers, we set up a photography workshop for wildlife

observers in the Ras al Shajar and Wadi Sareen nature reserves. The workshop aimed at monitoring, documenting and preserving wildlife.'

MoSD sets up charity for families, students; many hail the move

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najar, Minister of Social Development (MoSD), on Sunday issued a Ministerial Decision for the formation of Al Nama Charitable Institution based on the Civil Associations Law issued by Royal Decree No 14/2000.

The institution aims to help needy families and individuals under debt as well as support needy students to complete their university education. It will also contribute to building social housing and maintaining homes for needy families and providing humanitarian aid in case of emergencies due to climatic conditions. In addition, it will help in achieving the necessary contribution in any other charitable activity.

Hailing the decision, Marhoun al Saidi, a private sector employee, said, "Establishing such institutions achieves social solidarity among members of society. We need such institutions for the needy families and students who want to complete



Marhoun al Saidi

their education and provide them with suitable housing. We wish for more of these initiatives that create cooperation and solidarity among members of society."

Nasser al Hosni, a businessman, said charitable institutions are very important for society.

"These institutions are official channels for collecting money and giving it to those who deserve it. We, as individuals of society, must participate and donate to such institutions to support them in fulfilling



Ali Hamad al Shiyadi

their mission."

Ali Hamad al Shiyadi, a teacher, said, "It is one of the best decisions of the Ministry of Social Development. It will help the needy families, those affected by climate conditions, as well as help and support needy students to complete their university studies."

He added, "I welcome and support such decisions because charitable societies show their role in achieving solidarity, cooperation and love between the members of the society."



Minister visits South, North Sharqiyah governorates

Muscat - H E Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, visited the headquarters of the General Directorate of Social Development for the governorates of South and North Sharqiyah.

The minister also visited Departments of Social Development in the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and

Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. She was briefed on the system of social programmes conducted by these institutions.

The minister also visited Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children in the wilayat of Sur. She was briefed on the programmes run by the centre.

ONA

Shrimp fishing season begins tomorrow

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The three-month shrimp fishing season in the sultanate will start on Tuesday, September 1. The season is particularly important for three governorates - South Sharqiyah, Dhofar and Al Wusta.

The season which starts in September concludes in November every year. There are 12 shrimp species in the sultanate, but only four species are caught using traditional nets, including white Indian shrimps, white shrimps, tiger prawns and dotted shrimps.

Shrimp fisheries are found in the waters of the sultanate in Masirah Island, Mahout, the coastal areas of Al Wusta and along the coastal strip in South Sharqiyah governorate.



The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Water Resources said that shrimps are one of the most important resources in the sultanate due to their nutritional value and increased demand in local and international markets.

The ministry pointed out that the total production of shrimps from traditional fishing in the sultanate in 2019 accounted for about 863 tonnes, with a total estimated value of RO2.9mn. Exported accounted for 320 tonnes.

MAFWR, Port of Duqm sign MoU

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Port of Duqm Company (PDC) to approve and facilitate fish exports and imports through the commercial port of Duqm in the Governorate of Al Wusta.

The MoU was signed by Eng Yaqoob bin Khalfan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Fisheries in MAFWR, and Reggy Vermeulen, CEO of PDC. The memorandum is extendable for a period of two years.

It is noteworthy that the sultanate exported 205,000 tonnes of fish in 2019, with a total value of RO104mn. Fish exports accounted for 35 per cent of the total fish production of the sultanate in 2019. Omani fish is exported to about 57 countries around the world, topped by East



Asian countries (41 per cent), followed by the GCC countries (35 per cent). Sardines consti-

tute the largest proportion of fish exports (52 per cent). ONA

Bereaved sister exhorts homeowners...

Continued from Page 1

Sahar lived alone in a villa in Fahud Street, Qurm. According to her bereaved sister Hanan Askalan, Sahar worked late and dozed off on a couch in the first-floor office room in her house on the night of August 3. "The fire broke out late at night, but we really do not know when," she said.

Hanan believes a short circuit in one of the air-conditioning units on the ground floor caused a confined fire. "Unfortunately, that area had Sahar's gym equipment which resulted in a massive amount of black smoke. She inhaled a lot of smoke while sleeping causing her suffocation," Hanan said.

The family was alerted of the situation only next morning when a neighbour noticed smoke in the kitchen exhaust vent during Fajr prayers. "They informed the police who called us after going to her house," Hanan said recalling the tragic turn of events.

While more clarity on the actual timeline and sequence is expected after the investigation report is made available, the undeniable fact is that this tragedy could have been averted. "If there were smoke detectors in the living area, my sister would be alive today," Hanan said, making a fervent appeal to all to install safety equipment in their homes to prevent the loss of near and dear

ones' lives in fires.

The guidelines issued by the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances (PACDA) on the prevention of fire includes smoke detectors as a must in homes, besides ensuring the maintenance of these devices. But guidelines that are not legally enforced are seldom followed.

Describing her sister as someone who was fun to be with, Hanan said, "We teased, chatted, laughed and argued. Her laughter filled the house when she came home. At the same time, you made sure you left the area if she was not in a good mood or angry! Bless her. Mum had a magic effect on her in whatever mood she was in, while Father - God bless his soul - was her pillar of strength."

Sahar hated being told what to do, Hanan added. She worked hard to qualify as a lawyer and establish SAlegal. "Very loyal to her team who shared the journey with her, Sahar never took 'no' for an answer; she made it happen. She had amazing determination. She is very righteous with an amazing heart," Hanan said of her sister, referring to Sahar in the present tense every now and then as she struggles to come to terms with the loss.

(For a list of fire safety services and equipment providers in Oman, read the article on <https://muscatdaily.com>)

A sister's fervent appeal

Continued from Page 1

It is with this painful experience, these lines were written to protect every mother, father, sister or brother from this tragedy. With that I make this plea to every citizen, to every Municipality and Civil Defence to pursue the following without any delay:

1. New houses must have fire and smoke detectors as a mandatory specification to be enforced before giving building completion licence or certificate.
2. Civil Defence mandates installation of fire and smoke detectors in all residential buildings to be tested before certification issuance.
3. Home owners are given short grace period to install such devices in every house they own.
4. Coordinate with consumer protection agency to monitor and

exercise price control on such devices.

These devices are battery operated and wireless. Devices that can also detect carbon monoxide are preferable as this gas is lethal.

I appeal to everyone not to wait and take the initiative to install such devices in your homes today, not tomorrow. A simple device like this could have saved Sahar - God bless her soul. It is bestowed on us to take all precautions to protect our loved ones and only then pray and ask God to bless us with safety.

Let us make our condolences for the loss of our sweetheart a magic to save the souls of others. We belong to God and to Him we shall return, and may God's mercy be upon you, my dear sister.

- Hanan Askalan

Desperate, destitute and duped!

Blue-collar Bangladeshi workers struggling without jobs lose the little they have to tricksters

Our Correspondent
Muscat

“I want to go home. I want to return to my country and family,” cried Aslam, a blue-collar worker from Bangladesh.

Aslam is one among hundreds of such desperate workers who are facing difficult times having lost their jobs and means of income during the coronavirus pandemic.

“I used to work as a labourer for a construction company in Ghala. The company stopped all work in April and we have been out of work ever since,” Aslam said.

“To add to the woes, I have been denied my pending salaries. I am finding it extremely tough to survive and I want to return to home.”

He said his sponsor, who is in Sur, is not available over the phone and it is difficult for him to go there in search of him.



(Photograph for illustrative purpose only)

“I am ready to pay for all the formalities for my exit but first I need to find the sponsor,” he said.

This indeed is the plight of a large number of blue-collar workers and others who have come to the sultanate on ‘open

visas’. They usually work at construction sites or as part-timers at restaurants or as domestic helps.

Although such people share accommodation which cost them around RO20-30 per month, in the current circum-

stances they find it difficult to even pay that amount. For some finding food alone is a struggle now.

Some have lost the meagre amount of money they had to unscrupulous people who promised them safe passage home.

Shahnaz, a Bangladeshi woman, is such an unfortunate soul.

Having lost her job and faced with a family emergency, she was desperate to get back to her country as soon as possible.

She has been duped by a middleman who was supposed to help her go back home.

“I lost RO150 and he is again asking me for RO100. I approached the embassy but they are unable to assist me,” Shahnaz said, trying hard to hold back her tears.

She said she wanted to be by the side of her ailing sister in Jamalpur.

“I have exhausted all my savings and now I’m with some friends who are providing me food and shelter.”

Alam Mansoor, a 40 year old Bangladeshi who worked as a restaurant help, is another person who has been tricked.

He said, “I am sick and tired of such fake assurances. I lost RO65 to a person from my home country. I got to know him from a common friend in Hamriya. He is said to have helped others with processing papers. But he duped me.

“His is unreachable over the phone now.”

He said he survived about two months with just one meal a day before some friends heard of his sad situation and came to his rescue.

The Bangladesh Social Club in Oman has been working relentlessly to assist such people in distress, said a social worker of the community.

“We are helping stranded people go back home and have assisted almost 4,000 people,” said Mohammad Yaseen Chowdhary, a senior social worker of the Bangladeshi community.

They are sent to Dhaka through arrangements with airlines such as SalamAir, US-Bangla, Biman and Oman Air.

“We refer them to the embassy and it takes up the individual cases, assisting people as per their need and emergency,” Chowdhary added.

278 doctors enrol in OMSB programme

Muscat - Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) organised an online welcoming ceremony as part of the orientation day for 134 newly enrolled doctors in the residency training programmes for the 2020/21 academic year and 144 doctors in the General Foundation Programme.

The orientation programme started with an introductory video presentation of OMSB, followed by a welcoming speech by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, executive president of OMSB.

Dr Hood bin Abdullah al Abri, vice president for Academic Affairs, also gave a presentation. It included an overview of graduate studies and the differences and similarities between university education in medical colleges and advanced education in medical specialties, as well as preparing doctors for advanced medical



education by introducing them to the basics and methods used in advanced medical training. It motivated doctors to strive and excel in residency training programmes.

The programme concluded with a discussion answering the queries of doctors joining the board and the training programmes.

The induction programme

comprised several lectures and workshops aiming at giving a comprehensive idea of the training in the board and the assessment and evaluating methods of doctors during their training programmes.

A short film was screened offering general recommendations to doctors, and an introductory presentation was given about the Medical Simulation and Skills

Development Centre.

Among the other topics discussed were the board’s programme for scientific research methodology, the scholarship system for advanced training abroad, as well as training doctors on using the electronic library and introducing its most important sources and related information databases.

ONA



Governors take oath of office

Muscat - Governors and chairmen of Municipal Councils in the governorates affiliated to the Ministry of Interior took the oath of office before H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, on Sunday.

The oath taking comes as per Article 10 of the Municipal Councils Law.

The officials who took oath were Dr Yahya bin Badr bin Malik al Ma’awali, Governor of South Sharqiyah; Sheikh Saif bin Hamyar bin Mohammed al Shihi, Governor of North Batinah; Issa bin Hamad bin Mohammed al Azri, Governor of South Batinah; Sheikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah; Sheikh Me’athad bin Mo-

ammed bin Abdullah al Ya’aqoubi, Governor of Al Wusta; Najeeb bin Ali bin Ahmed al Rowas, Governor of Dhahirah; Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed bin Mishari al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah and Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed bin Saud al Busaidi, Governor of Buraimi.

ONA

Two years to transfer land ownership

Muscat - Anyone who loses or withdraws Omani nationality will have two years to transfer the ownership of his land to an Omani citizen, starting from November 19.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced this on Sunday.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.31am
Sunrise	5.48am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.40pm
Maghrib	6.31pm
Isha	7.43pm

Topfruit

NO ADDED SUGAR

ORANGE

100% JUICE

APPLE

100% JUICE

FRUIT COCKTAIL

100% JUICE

MANGO MIXED

100% JUICE

RED BERRIES MIX

100% JUICE

NOW ON WHATSAPP

Share your comment in not more than 50 words along with your full name, profession and front facing photo before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp

Send us on WhatsApp
71509370



INCHING BACK TO NORMAL

Are you happy with almost all businesses now reopening or are you worried that it might result in a new wave of COVID-19 infections?

Ahmed al Farsi
Government employee

I'm happy about the reopening. I feel life is back to what it was before. In my opinion, we need shops to be open; we know how the economy was down a few months ago because of the lockdown as a result of COVID-19. We just have to live with the virus. Be careful of it and keep yourself safe from the transmission of the infection. Also, I urge the media to stop the intimidation and raise awareness on COVID-19.



Govind Arjan Sampath
Corporate communications professional

I am greatly relieved that most establishments, especially newspapers and barbershops, are open after the nearly five-month hiatus. I am not worried as the infections are definitely showing a downward trend. The authorities have clearly outlined the safety measures to be implemented and followed, and are also ensuring compliance by all.



Husaam Sameer
Bank employee

The reopening of businesses is a good step by the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19; the closure impacted many businesses negatively, especially SMEs. However, I feel the reopening may increase the number of COVID-19 infections and a new wave may start. Dining in restaurants is the easiest way for this to happen.



Thasleem Khan
CEO

Yes, I am happy that businesses have opened up. But we still need to be cautious, maintain social distancing and hygienic conditions to avoid any further spread of infections. The government has done an excellent job of controlling spread, but hereafter it is our responsibility to control this pandemic by avoiding group meetings and social gatherings.



Fareed Hamoud al Musallami
Bank employee

Considering the fact that a huge number of people in society have been financially affected by the closure of some activities and shops, I am happy that business is back. Life is gradually going back to normal but we have to adapt to the changes. Everyone must strictly follow the preventive measures set by the Supreme Committee to prevent the spread of infections.



Lovel Balakrishnan
Private sector employee

It is a matter of great happiness that businesses have slowly but surely opened up. All these months, it was a hard time for all of us. I am optimistic that things will pick up fast and we will do very well in our future endeavours. I don't think there will be any second wave of infections as our bodies will gain natural immunity. Besides, there should be a vaccination to fight the virus soon.



Nasser al Hosni
General manger

Of course, I am very happy with the gradual return of economic activities such as barbershops and restaurants. I am not worried as infections are definitely showing a downward trend. But we must follow guidelines such as physical distancing and wearing mask.



Yahya al Hassani
Government employee

The reopening of economic activities is a good step because many people lost a lot of money. We thank God for the natural return of life, but we must take all precautionary measures.



Hammoud al Hadrami
Director of public relations

I am very happy that most economic activities have opened up, but we should adhere to social distancing norms and maintain hygienic conditions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The government has done hard work to control its spread. We should help it by following the prescribed procedures of the Ministry of Health and the decisions of the Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19.



Abdul Hadi Mustafa
Teacher

I thank God that most establishments, especially barber-shops, restaurants and cafes, are now open after nearly five months. But we need to be cautious, observe social distancing and maintain hygienic conditions to avoid any further spread of the virus. It's our responsibility to control this pandemic by avoiding social gatherings.



Honey production rises by 38%: NCSI



Muscat - The production of honey in the sultanate increased by 38 per cent by the end of 2019, recording production of 615,752kg compared to 443,477kg in 2018.

According to the statistical yearbook of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the highest production of honey in 2019 was recorded in the governorates of North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah combined, accounting for 202,259kg.

These were followed by the governorates of North Batinah and South Batinah combined with production of 185,391kg.

The Governorate of Dhahirah produced 83,702kg of honey.

The NCSI statistical yearbook also pointed out that the production of honey in the Governorate of Dhofar was 59,246kg, while production in the governorates of Dakhliyah and Al Wusta was 56,279kg and 14,946kg, respectively.

The production of honey in the Governorate of Buraimi was 6,959kg as per the NCSI.

The governorates of Muscat and Musandam produced 5,788kg and 1,182kg of honey respectively.

ONA



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

With schools either closed or providing education online, are you worried that children are missing out on the school atmosphere and learning social skills?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue

ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company would like to announce to all the issuance of the new approved version-3 of Grid Code by the Authority for Public Services Regulation. The effective date of the new version.3 will be on 20 September 2020.

The new version.3 can be downloaded from the Company website: www.omangrid.com



Oman Electricity Transmission Company A.O.C.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
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إعلان

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Huawei P40 Pro, Watch GT 2 win at EISA Awards

Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) received two awards from the Expert Imaging and Sound Association (EISA), a group comprising 55 of the world's most respected consumer electronics magazines.

Huawei's P40 Pro was named 'EISA Smartphone Camera 2020-2021' by the association, alongside the Huawei Watch GT 2, which won the accolade of 'Best SmartWatch 2020-2021'. The EISA called the Huawei P40 Pro "a true champion in its class," praising the phone's camera capabilities, display technology and luxurious design. The awards also praised the Huawei Watch GT 2, for its smart design and host of fitness features, calling it "a modern classic is born".

The EISA recognised the "luxurious designed" Huawei P40 Pro as the perfect companion for those who use their smartphone for taking stunning photos on a daily basis, believing the phone marked yet another impressive milestone in mobile photography. This award was won as a result of the unmatched



photography capabilities of the Huawei P40 Pro, from the primary 50-megapixel Ultra Vision Camera with phase detection auto-focus and optical image stabilisation and its 12-megapixel periscope telephoto lens, allowing for 5x optical zoom, to the incredible 40-megapixel Ultra-Wide Cine Camera for advanced video capture.

Added to this are the Huawei P40 Pro's ToF 3D depth Camera and AI Photography enhancement, giving users a premium technology experience which

EISA has said "pushes smartphone camera technology forward".

Looking to the winner of this year's EISA 'Best SmartWatch' the Huawei Watch GT 2, EISA has praised the device as it "melds the talents of modern smartWatches" for its design, AMOLED display, and physical control. With up to two week battery life and host of fitness features, the Huawei Watch GT 2 can analyse 15 professional workout modes, and record 85 customised workout types.

Bank Muscat launches BM Remit app in 5 languages

Bank Muscat, the flagship financial services provider in the sultanate, in step with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to a better customer experience, has launched a new BM Remit app to enable customers to remit funds quickly and securely to their families. The new app will particularly benefit those who have to physically visit a branch or a money exchange for making remittances as they are not tech-savvy or comfortable using mobile banking apps available until now.

BM Remit, which can be downloaded from Google Play or Huawei AppGallery, has language options like Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Tamil and English, to cater to the bank's wide range of customers, including those from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The app boasts of a simple user interface for easy navigation and will make Speed Transfers available 24/7 for a



large segment of customers in their respective native languages. BM Remit also has some other commonly-used features including mobile top-ups and account enquiries like available balance, mini statement, etc.

Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, AGM - Cards & eBanking, Bank Muscat, said, "The bank has launched this completely new lightweight app

for the benefit of customers who want only a few features to cover simple banking and fund transfer needs. Customers from the sub-continent will particularly appreciate the ease of use of the new remittance app. It can be easily downloaded from Google Play or Huawei AppGallery and installed on mobile phones in just a few seconds. Importantly, it allows customers to make speed transfers 24/7 to their families in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan easily, securely and at their convenience."

Customers will particularly appreciate the fact that the bank offers the best exchange rates in the country and charges only RO1.5 for Speed Transfers. This is much lower than the charges available elsewhere and allows the bank's customers to get the best deal possible. The lightweight app simplifies banking and making remittances for those who do not need the full features of Bank Muscat's Omni

channel Internet and Mobile Banking, which was launched earlier in 2019. Customers will particularly enjoy the promotional offer whereby Speed Transfers to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will be available free of charge till September 15, 2020.

Bank Muscat has always been at the forefront of offering innovative banking services and products that meet the requirements of the most extensive banking family in the sultanate.

The bank complements the efforts of the Government of Oman in realising the objectives of e-governance. This shift towards digital banking has proven to be of great help during the current phase of social distancing. Customers can get in touch with the bank's Contact Centre by phone on 24795555 or go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/bankingchannels/Pages/default.aspx> for more details on digital banking options.

ELCO manufactures condensate stabiliser unit



ELCO International Engineering Co LLC (ELCO) has manufactured high quality condensate stabiliser skid, a completely made in Oman product. Enerflex Middle East LLC has selected ELCO to manufacture pressure vessels and condensate stabilisation skid for their ongoing Sadad North EDF - a phase 1 project awarded by PDO.

ELCO is specialising in engi-

neering, manufacturing and commissioning of turnkey projects in Oman with over 45 years of experience. ELCO has a long history of co-operation with numerous public and private companies and has successfully executed many large-scale projects for companies including Shell, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Oman Refineries and Petrochemical Company (Orpic), Petrofac,

Galfar, Strabag, Sohar Aluminium.

Abdullah al Ajmi, manager of Human Resource and Administration, ELCO said, "We are proud to announce the completion of manufacturing condensate stabilisation skid which has a 'Made in Oman' tag. The initial plan was to integrate the vessels and piping on the site. However, a construction execution strategy change was made after the award and Enerflex project management team approached us to build a complete skid package at ELCO's workshop where pressure vessels were being fabricated. We were given the responsibility to complete integration of vessels into skid including structure, piping, isometrics, complete with integration of skid including Instrumentation and Electrical."



Renault Duster's 'Urban' and 'Sports' make a statement

Renault Duster, the aspirational SUV recently launched 'Urban' and 'Sports' editions loaded with superior SUV capabilities and enhanced features have been designed to make a statement.

Reflecting Renault's inherent characteristics of strength and SUV capability the Duster's 'Urban' and 'Sports' variants feature a powerful engine, an attractive modern design, a comfortable and spacious cabin, in addition to strength, functionality and safety to meet the aspirations of buyers.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "We are pleased to launch the new Renault Duster's 'Urban' and 'Sports' editions to our valued customers in Oman. We are confident that the Duster variants will resonate well with discerning Oman customers due to its brand-new exterior styling, markedly assertive look and fuel efficiency. Equipped with multiple outstanding features and technology enhancements, it is certain to set new benchmarks in Oman."

The additional features of Renault Duster's 'Urban' edition, which is a 4x2 model include a door sill, boot sill, 16" alloy wheels and side steps. Renault Duster's 4x4 model 'Sports' edition boasts of wing extension, door moulding, side bar and 16" alloy wheels along with feature of three modes selection.

Renault SUVs are characterised by powerful engines, 1.6 lt 2WD and 2.0lt 4WD for off-road enthusiasts. It also has an advanced automatic transmission with outstanding performance and significant fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions to keep pace with the current trends and needs.

Renault Duster has an individually self-assured look and features a brand-new exterior styling with a more full-bodied look and boosted by a wide chrome-finish grill which extends to the headlights at the car's front corners. With a front skid plate and Renault's signature C-shaped lighting with LED daytime running lights, Renault Duster further reinforces the SUV's personality as a sturdy, yet a smart city vehicle.

Unstoppable SUV

One of Renault's celebrated models characterised by strength, functionality and safety, the new Renault Duster adds more splendour and elegance with its distinctive features. The sports utility vehicle offers a refreshing take on 4WD driving experience, equipped with the same off-road capability and affordability to beat the best in the market.

Attractive design

Step into the all-terrain world of Duster and discover attractive design, enhanced grille and light-

ing signature. The SUV's exterior has been given a more robust look thanks to the addition of a wide chrome-finish grille which extends to the head lights positioned at the car's front corners. A front skid plate reinforces the Duster's adventurer credentials and ensures that the vehicle never loses its smart looks.

Finished with Renault's signature C-shaped lighting with LED daytime running lights the Duster is a modern SUV with a rugged personality.

Every road is open with Duster

All-new Duster means a new front end as well as modern and powerful lines. It features robust and all-terrain styling with high ground clearance, chrome grille surround and Hill Descent Control.

A simple lighting detail makes all the difference. All-new Duster stands out with its new "C" shape front LED lighting signature. It's a finely crafted lighting signature that is a key part of all new Duster's identity.

Comfortable on any terrain, all new Duster features roof bars that meet the highest standards in terms of solidity. On excursions with friends, bulky leisure equipment like surfboards or skis can be transported in complete safety.

All-new Duster has a brand new, comfortable, ergonomic and high-quality interior. For the

driver's well-being on board, the all new Duster interior has been reinvented with new adjustable seats and a new ergonomic dashboard and central console.

The highly modular layout of the seats allows you to arrange the cabin to suit your needs. Carry everything you need for a weekend getaway. The 1/3 -2/3 foldable bench seat and numerous storage options make all kinds of adventures a reality.

The ergonomics of the all-new Duster dashboard has been redesigned. It makes life easier with new adjustment systems for the driver's seat and steering wheel.

Desirable attributes

All-new Duster offers you a range of smart and generous storage areas. Under the passenger seat, a sliding compartment keeps your essentials within arm's reach.

Other storage areas are included in the doors and behind the front seat backs.

The Duster's roominess, affordability and off-road capabilities have long been recognised as the model's strengths and the all new models continues to carry these desirable attributes.

For more local information, you can visit the following website: www.renault.com.om or call the Toll Free number on 80050011.

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BMW X3 offered at attractive price

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, has unveiled an attractive starting price on one the most sought out models from the BMW X family - the BMW X3.

To guarantee that car-buyers can purchase the dynamic Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV) at an attractive price, AJIA will now be selling a brand-new BMW X3 at a starting price of RO18,250. The price will also include a host of benefits.

Made to go beyond, the BMW X3 brings all-terrain BMW performance in a SAV for those who hear adventure's call.

The vehicle combines rugged looks and impressive presence with design elements like the sculpted kidney grille and optional Icon Adaptive LED Headlights.

Finely tuned engines, agile handling, and a near-perfect 50/50 weight distribution, the BMW X3 delivers spirited performance and lively dynamics to every drive, a signature of BMW engineering.

The vehicle comes with exclusive services and smart apps; therefore, customers can call up and send e-mail or surf the Internet via Wi-Fi.

The BMW X3 establishes a class of its own in terms of connectivity and comfort. The innovative operating concept creates a perfect unit of driver and vehicle at every moment.

At the same time ultra-modern driver assistance systems define a new supreme level in safety and reduced strain for the driver.



During these uncertain times, AJIA will be accepting trade-in offers and be presenting clients with the option of an exclusive 'at home' car delivery service.

Salim Sabbagh, acting chief executive officer of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, "AJIA has launched an exclusive price on BMW X3 with the customer in mind. To adapt to these challenging times, we want to make sure that AJIA are delivering products and services that are truly valued.

"The BMW X3 has always been a firm favourite and we have no doubt that this will be well received by our loyal customers."

For more information on AJIA's services and offers, please visit bmw-oman.com or call 80050008.

BankDhofar plan ensures safe future

Aiming to ensure peace of mind for its customers, BankDhofar provides the chance for customers to secure their future and fulfil their retirement dream through Long Term Deposit Account. With the retirement plan, customers may benefit from the best competitive interest rate in the sultanate of up to 4.7 per cent.

Commenting on the long term deposit plan for retirement, Dr Tariq Taha, chief retail banking officer noted, "At BankDhofar, we make sure that our products, services and solutions are designed to exceed our customers' expectations, not only in their daily banking experience but we cater for their future as well. With the Long Term Deposit Account, customers may save a monthly amount for a specific period and get an increased amount rate after the deposit period."



With the Long Term Deposit Account, customers may save a monthly amount for specific deposit period and enjoy additional credit facilities. For the retirement plan, customers may save a minimum monthly amount of RO25 for up to ten years, and benefit from the additional amount on their savings at an interest rate of up to 4.7 per cent.

Mazoon Dairy expands with new products in SIG carton packs

Mazoon Dairy, the largest integrated dairy company in the Sultanate of Oman, and SIG Combibloc Obeikan, one of the world's leading systems and solutions providers for aseptic packaging and filling machines for food and beverages, have announced the launch of a full range of liquid dairy products in various combiblocSlimline and combiblocMini carton packs from SIG.

This latest step marks another significant step closer to Mazoon Dairy's goal in establishing the Sultanate as a self-sufficient dairy producer and a hub for food manufacturing. Mazoon Dairy takes advantage of the SIG's flexible filling technology for different product categories including white milk, flavoured milk and juice.

These products will be available in four different volumes (150ml, 200ml, 250ml and 1,000ml) and various varieties: chocolate, banana and strawberry in the segment of



flavoured milk as well as orange, mango, guava, pomegranate, mixed berry and cocktail in the juice segment. This unique flexibility provided by SIG will give Mazoon product differentiation across its beverage categories to accommodate families as well as single users.

Dr Arjun Subramanian, CEO Mazoon Dairy, said, "This launch represents another milestone in our journey of growth. It brings us closer to our bigger goal of fulfilling our national vision for economic development by establishing a self-sufficient economy. Today we are offering the Omani and other regional markets a wider range of products that appeal to every age category, using the highest standards and best practices in the industry. This could not have been possible without the support of our partner, SIG Combibloc Obeikan."

Abdelghany Eladib, chief operating officer SIG Combibloc Obeikan, said, "Oman currently imports 70 per cent of its dairy products and Mazoon Dairy is determined to reduce this to 10 per cent. We are honoured to play a role in supporting the sultanate and Mazoon Dairy's mission in boosting local self-sufficiency and meeting rising demand.

"This also falls in line with our strategic expansion into the Sultanate of Oman. By providing the latest product innovations and efficient flexibility solutions, we look forward to continuing our partnership with Mazoon Dairy in their journey towards growth."

CCED joins Muscat University to drive digital transformation

CC Energy Development (CCED) and partners, Mitsui E&P Middle East and Tethys Oil Oman, signed an agreement with Muscat University to deliver a series of online seminars on digital transformation.

Bringing together leading technology experts, lecturers and key stakeholders in the industry and academia, the seminars will address digitalisation in the sultanate's energy sector aiming to broaden understanding and help embed a Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) toolkit

in business operations. The initiative, which will run over a period of six months, is launched in cooperation with Gulf Intelligence as a part of CCED's efforts to champion knowledge-transfer in the energy industry.

"These learning opportunities are vital for addressing knowledge gaps in the sector and supporting the industry's capacity for change and adaptability," said Walter Simpson, CCED managing director. "We have seen first-hand how applying innovative, digitalised solutions to business operations and across supply chain networks can greatly impact efficiency and cost-saving levels, so I am delighted that we can support this capacity-building initiative for the energy sector in Oman. These seminars will help build a skilled talent pool within the industry and facilitate the use of technology to deliver a more sustainable and effective economy for the country."

The Muscat University seminars align with a wider industry movement to tackle environmental sustainability and optimise key resources, including time,

funds, and national talent pools. They will address a range of subjects: the execution of transformation programs to align with frontline operational maturity; first mover advantages of adopting Block Chain technologies; The Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

CCED has made a point of adopting technological solutions to maintain their long-term, low-cost operating model and supports local upskilling opportunities in training and education.



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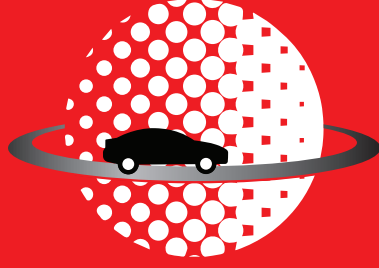


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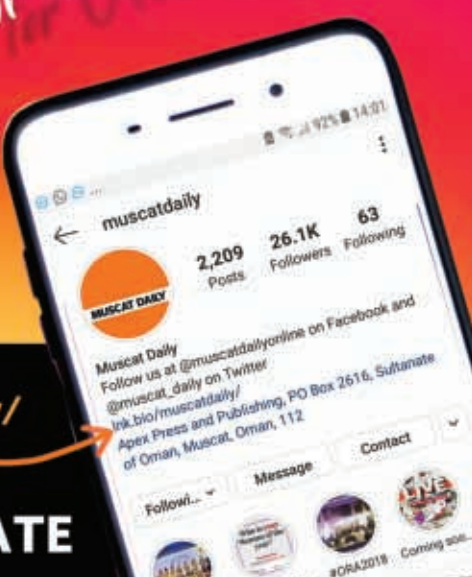
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QUICK RUN

Bamba gives Lille win over Reims

Jonathan Bamba continued to rediscover his scoring touch as he gave Lille a 1-0 victory at Reims in French League on Sunday. The winger, who scored only one goal in 26 league appearances last season, hit his second in two games of the new campaign in the 32nd minute of a dour game. Earlier on Saturday, Rennes teenager Eduardo Camavinga celebrated his first France call-up with a terrific solo goal in Saturday's 2-1 victory at home to Montpellier.

Other results: Saturday: Strasbourg 0 Nice 2; **Friday:** Lyon 4 Dijon 1.

Maitland-Niles, Coady called up

Arsenal midfielder Ainsley Maitland-Niles and Wolves defender Conor Coady received their first England call-ups on Saturday. England manager Gareth Southgate named his squad for September's Nations League matches against Iceland and Denmark on Tuesday. But Southgate was forced to withdraw Manchester United's Harry Maguire from the group hours later following the defender's guilty verdict in a Greek court case. England face Iceland in Reykjavik on September 5 before playing Denmark in Copenhagen three days later.

Leeds sign Rodrigo from Valencia

Leeds announced on Saturday they had signed Spain international Rodrigo from Valencia for a club-record fee. The forward has penned a four-year deal at Elland Road, reportedly costing the English Premier League newcomers around US\$40mn. The 29 year old said he was looking forward to working with Marcelo Bielsa, whom he described as one of the best coaches in football. Later on Saturday Leeds announced that Freiburg defender Robin Koch had completed a move to Elland Road.

Rangers equal clean-sheet record

Rangers eased to a 2-0 win over ten-man Hamilton on Saturday, recording a sixth consecutive clean sheet in the Scottish Premiership to equal 114 years old record. Steven Gerrard's side missed a host of chances after early goals from Ianis Hagi and James Tavernier. The run of six clean sheets at the start of a top-flight campaign matches the feat of Celtic in 1906.

Other results: Saturday: Kilmarnock 4 Dundee United 0, Livingston 1 Ross County 0, St Johnstone 1 St Mirren 0.

Sevilla sign Oscar from Real Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder Oscar Rodríguez has joined Sevilla on a five-year contract, the clubs announced on Sunday. Oscar came through Madrid's youth system but never made an appearance for the first team and has spent the past two years at Leganes, scoring 13 goals and making six assists. The Spaniard was one of Leganes' key players last term, even as the club were relegated from the top flight. Sevilla have paid Madrid around US\$17.9mn to sign Oscar, according to reports in the Spanish press.

Agencies

ON COLLISION COURSE

Nadal, Federer call for 'unity' as Djokovic hails launch of new players' association



Djokovic wins title

WESTERN & SOUTHERN OPEN
New York, US - Top-ranked Novak Djokovic rallied to defeat Canada's Milos Raonic 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in Saturday's ATP Western & Southern Open final, remaining unbeaten this year only two days before his first US Open match.

The 33 year old Serbian star won his 80th career title, improving to 23-0 in 2020 and 11-0 all-time against Raonic, while capturing his 35th ATP Masters Series crown, matching Rafael Nadal's all-time record.

"It was not easy, definitely, especially the last three, four days," Djokovic said.

"Has been challenging mentally and emotionally for me to stay sane and be able to compete on the highest level and win this title."

Djokovic credited physiotherapy for getting him able to play after a grueling three-hour

marathon semifinal victory on Friday over Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut.

"Was a bit slow at the beginning, but I thought I did well, considering the form that Milos is in," Djokovic said.

"He's serving rockets on the court and it's really hard to return."

"You need all the freshness mentally and all the focus you can possibly have. So I did struggle with that, I must say."

Djokovic launches his quest for a fourth US Open title and 18th career Grand Slam crown against Bosnia and Herzegovina's 107th-ranked Damir Dzumhur on Monday night at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The victory gives Djokovic a double career sweep of all nine ATP Masters Series titles while Raonic has gone winless in 63 Masters Series starts.

AFP

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic shrugged off concerns of Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer and announced the formation of a new men's pro tennis players' association that promises to put him on a collision course with his two elite rivals.

Nadal and Federer called for 'unity, not separation' after reports their longtime rival was spearheading a breakaway union of tennis professionals.

But after a meeting among players at the conclusion of the Western & Southern Open in New York - where Nadal and Federer were absent - Djokovic said the new group was launched.

"After today's successful meeting, we are excited to announce the beginning of the Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA)," he wrote on Instagram, posting a picture

of several dozen players gathered on a tennis court at Flushing Meadows, where the US Open starts on Monday.

"The first player only association in tennis since 1972," he wrote. Djokovic has acknowledged that the group was a work in progress.

"We don't have all the answers right now. We are just trying to get a sense of how many players do really want to join this initiative. Then we will take it from there," he said.

He said there was no minimum or maximum target membership, but that he was focusing on reaching out to the top 500 players in singles and top-200 in doubles. "We're hoping we can get majority of those players. We have to start somewhere," he said.

He said the new organisation and the ATP 'can co-exist, and

They think that ATP cannot co-exist with the association [PTPA]. I have to respectfully disagree. Legally we are 100% safe and we are allowed to form the player association

NOVAK DJOKOVIC



should co-exist at the beginning'. "Now, where that's going to take us, time will tell."

World No 2 Nadal pleaded with Djokovic to rethink a breakaway. "The world is living a difficult and complicated situation. I personally believe these are times to be calm and work all of us together in the same direction. It is time for unity, not for separation," said the 19-time major winner.

"These are moments where big things can be achieved as long as the world of tennis is united.

"We all, players, tournaments and governing bodies have to work together. We have a bigger problem and separation and disunion is definitely not the solution."

Federer, a 20-time Slam winner, quickly added his support to Nadal. "I agree @RafaelNadal," tweeted Federer. "These are uncertain and challenging times, but I believe it's critical for us to stand united as players, and as a sport, to pave the best way forward."

Djokovic said he accepted the position of his 'Big Three' rivals

Matsuyama and Johnson share lead



Hideki Matsuyama

PGA BMW CHAMPIONSHIP

Washington, US - Japan's Hideki Matsuyama opened with an eagle and matched Dustin Johnson in shooting a one-under 69 to share the lead after Saturday's third round of the US PGA's BMW Championship.

Johnson, coming off a 30-under par score and an 11-shot victory a week ago at the Northern Trust, shared a two-stroke edge with Matsuyama at one-under 209 through 54 holes at Olympia Fields in suburban Chicago.

It was the highest score to lead in the event since 1974. Not since the 1995 Tour Championship has par or higher won a title outside the majors, but it could be in the cards on this former US Open layout.

The tournament is the second of three tour playoff events, with the top-30 on season points after Sunday's final round advancing to next week's Tour Championship at East Lake in Atlanta.

Matsuyama has not won in more than three years, since the 2017 WGC Bridgestone Invitational.

Australia's Adam Scott, Canadian Mackenzie Hughes and Chile's Joaquin Niemann shared third on 211.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy and Spain's Jon Rahm were on 212 along with two-time

Masters champion Bubba Watson, Americans Brendon Todd and Kevin Kisner and Colombia's Sebastian Munoz.

McIlroy revealed that his wife, Erica, is due to give birth to their first child, a baby daughter, within days.

"We're about to be parents very soon, so we're obviously super excited," the Northern Ireland star said.

"It's a private matter, but we're really excited and can't wait for her to get here."

His caddie has a beeper and McIlroy has plans to skip the Tour Championship if he gets the call.

"I'm going to play in many more Tour Championships and it's only going to be the birth of your first child once," McIlroy said. "That trumps anything else."

Rahm matched the week's low round with a 66 despite a one-shot penalty for picking up his ball without marking it on the fifth green.

Tiger Woods fired a 72 to share 55th on 220, well back of the third-place effort he needs to reach next week's season finale.

The 15-time major champion found water off the 17th tee on his way to a triple-bogey seven and a third over-par round to start for the first time since 2010.

AFP



Dustin Johnson



A file photo of John Burridge (right) with Ali al Habsi in England

‘Oman should capitalise on Habsi’s success story’

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

John ‘Budgie’ Burridge, the former Oman goalkeeper coach and the man credited to spot Ali al Habsi’s exceptional talent, believes that the sultanate should capitalise on his protege’s success story.

In his remarks to *Muscat Daily*, after Habsi announced his retirement, Budgie said: Ali’s success at the highest level is a reality. Oman is blessed to have skillful players and I strongly believe that it should capitalise on Habsi’s exceptional journey to the top.”

Ali was destined to go down in football folklore of Oman and the region. I am happy that I could play a key role in his stellar career

JOHN BURRIDGE

The former English Premier League player, who was first impressed by Habsi’s jumping ability and reflexes, said it was ‘his perseverance’ that stood out for all these years.

“Habsi is a gifted goalie and his dedication has been extraordinary. I was a bit disappointed when he decided to call

time on his career as I felt that he still had couple more years to give,” the Englishman said.

Recalling the Gulf Cup final against Saudi Arabia in 2009 in Muscat, Budgie said, “Saudi players were nervous to face Ali as they knew that one of the English Premier League stars was up against them. Ali had an

imposing presence under the bar. I remember Ali did not concede a goal in the tournament as Oman won the Gulf Cup for the first time.”

Budgie, who played for top clubs including Manchester City, Aston Villa, Blackpool, Crystal Palace in his hey days, said, “Ali was destined to go down in football folklore of Oman and the region. He was an exceptional talent and I am happy that I could play a key role in his stellar career. I am still confident of nurturing young Omani goalkeepers who could become future stars.”

@ashokmuscat

DOMINANT HAMILTON TRIUMPHS IN BELGIUM

BELGIAN GRAND PRIX

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Lewis Hamilton stretched his lead in the drivers’ world championship and closed to within two wins of Michael Schumacher’s Formula One record of 91 on Sunday with a majestic, if ultimately tense, Belgian Grand Prix victory.

The series leader and six-time champion registered his 89th career win with another flawless drive to take his fourth Belgian triumph, finishing 8.448 seconds clear of his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

It was Hamilton’s fifth win in seven races this year and extended his record run of points-scoring races to 40.

Max Verstappen came third for Red Bull, seven seconds further adrift, to claim his sixth podium finish in succession.

Hamilton, who had to nurse his car home on worn tyres, has 157 points in the title race, 47 clear of Verstappen. The ‘black arrows’ lead the constructors’ championship with 264 points, well ahead of Red Bull on 158.

“It wasn’t the easiest of races,” said Hamilton. “It was a bit of a struggle, but nonetheless I think it was ok in the end.”

At the British Grand Prix at the start of August, Hamilton had clung on to win after one of his



tyres disintegrated. “I was concerned that we’d have a scenario like Silverstone, but the tyre seemed to have quite a bit of rubber left on it at the finish.”

Bottas admitted he could not match his teammate’s pace. “The start was a good opportunity, but Lewis played it really well and I just couldn’t catch him. In the same car, with Lewis driving a flawless race, it was really difficult.”

Verstappen said he had a dull afternoon. “It was pretty boring, not very interesting and not much to do,” he said. “I ran out of tyre at the end so I was just

stretching it out and saving the tyres.”

Daniel Ricciardo produced the fastest lap on his final lap as he claimed fourth ahead of his Renault teammate Esteban Ocon, and Alex Albon, in the second Red Bull.

Lando Norris was seventh in the sole McLaren.

Pierre Gasly finished eighth for Alpha Tauri ahead of the Racing Points of Lance Stroll and Sergio Perez. On a troubled weekend, last year’s winner Charles Leclerc was 14th, one place behind outgoing Ferrari teammate Sebastian Vettel.

Drama and ceremony

On a cool dry day in the Ardennes, the race was preceded by drama and ceremony with Carlos Sainz’s McLaren suffering an exhaust failure that ruled him out and then a minute’s silence, in memory of French F2 racer Anthoine Hubert, and the now-familiar drivers’ anti-racism demonstration before the national anthem.

Hamilton made a smooth start from his record 93rd pole position ahead of Bottas while Verstappen fought to defend

RESULTS [TOP TEN]

1	Hamilton	(1hr24min:08.761s)
2	Bottas	(+8.448s)
3	Verstappen	(+15.455)
4	Ricciardo	(+18.877)
5	Ocon	(+40.650)
6	Albon	(+42.712)
7	Norris	(+43.774)
8	Gasly	(+47.371)
9	Stroll	(52.603)
10	Perez	(+53.179)

DRIVER’S STANDINGS [TOP FIVE]

1.	Hamilton	(157 points)
2.	Verstappen	(110)
3.	Bottas	(107)
4.	Albon	(48)
5.	Leclerc	(45)

third position against Ricciardo.

Bottas chased Hamilton in vain, the champion controlling his advantage with imperious speed in the early laps as they pulled clear of the rest.

The safety car came out on lap 11 after a collision involving Alfa Romeo’s Antonio Giovinazzi and George Russell of Williams. The Italian spun into the barriers in front of the Briton whose car was hit by an errant rear wheel as he took evasive action.

The damaged cars left debris strewn across the circuit, but the drivers walked away unhurt.

Agencies

Morgan leads England to win over Pakistan

SECOND T20I

Manchester, UK - England captain Eoin Morgan led from the front as the hosts beat Pakistan by five wickets to win the second Twenty20 international at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Morgan came in on a hat-trick after leg-spinner Shadab Khan had reduced the home side, who were chasing a stiff victory target of 196, to 66 for two. But the Irishman and fellow left-hander David Malan (54 not out) took the game away from tourists with a third-wicket stand of 112.

Victory, achieved with five balls to spare, saw the 50-over world champions go 1-0 up in a three-match series following Friday’s rain-marred no result in Manchester.

Jonny Bairstow and Tom Banton made a sound start to England’s chase. But a partnership of 66 ended when

Bairstow, on 44, miscued a sweep off leg-spinner Shadab Khan to short fine leg. Next ball, with the batsmen having crossed, Banton - fresh from making 71, his maiden fifty at this level, was lbw for 20 after missing a sweep.

Earlier, Pakistan’s 195 for four featured fine fifties from Mohammad Hafeez (69) and skipper Babar Azam (56).

Leg-spinner Adil Rashid briefly checked Pakistan’s progress with two for 32 from his maximum four overs. But England’s attack lacked penetration, with Tom Curran conceding 46 runs - including 23 off one over.

Brief scores: Pakistan 195-4 (Azam 56, Hafeez 69) lost to England 199-5 in 19.1 overs (Morgan 66, Malan 54; Shadab Khan 3-34)

Agencies



England’s skipper Eoin Morgan plays a shot during the second T20I



Julian Alaphilippe celebrates after winning stage two on Sunday

Frenchman Alaphilippe clinches stage two

TOUR DE FRANCE

Nice, France - Frenchman Julian Alaphilippe won Saturday’s second stage of the Tour de France and took control of the race leader’s yellow jersey, which he held for 14 days in last year’s race. No Frenchman has won the Tour de France since 1985.

The Deceuninck-Quick Step rider pipped Marc Hirschi to the finish after the pair formed part

of three-man breakaway group including Adam Yates that held off the chasing pack at the end of a 186km stage that featured two category one climbs in the Nice backcountry.

Dark horse Dani Martinez, of Colombia, lost time after cracking in the last climb of the day shortly after crashing in a descent.

Agencies

Messi fails to attend Barca pre-season coronavirus test

Barcelona, Spain - Lionel Messi missed a coronavirus test at Barcelona’s training ground on Sunday morning, club sources have confirmed, raising the possibility he will now boycott pre-season to force a transfer.

But Spanish League (La Liga) have given a boost to Barca’s hopes of keeping Messi by announcing that the release clause in his contract, set at US\$833mn, still applies.

Messi and his lawyers believe a separate clause means he should be allowed to leave for free this summer.

Without passing a coronavirus test, Messi will be unable to join teammates for Ronald Koeman’s first training session on Monday, with the start of the new La Liga season less than two weeks away.

Messi was due for testing at 10.15am on Sunday but according to sources at Barcelona, he failed to show up at the Ciutat Esportiva.

The club’s captain and greatest ever player could now be

punished with a fine and even a reduction in salary if the strike continues.

Suarez, Vidal present

Luis Suarez - his best friend and strike partner - and Arturo Vidal were among those seen arriving for tests, despite both players being told they should find new teams as part of a planned clear-out this summer.

The meet-up was a chance for Messi to make his first public appearance since the burofax stating his intention to leave arrived in the offices of Camp Nou on Tuesday evening.

Instead, his absence offers a clear indication of his determination to secure a move and how ugly this dispute could now become.

Taking part in the team’s pre-season programme could damage his legal case if his departure ends up being settled in court. Barcelona insist a clause included in Messi’s contract that allowed him to go for free this summer had to be activated by



June 10 and the only way the 33 year old will be allowed to depart now is via the payment of US\$833mn. La Liga, who were always likely to take the side of the club, agree that Messi’s release clause is still valid.

“The contract is currently in force and has a ‘termination clause’ applicable if Lionel Andres Messi decides to activate the early unilateral termination of

the contract,” La Liga said in a statement.

“In compliance with the regulations and procedure in these cases, La Liga will not de-register the player from the (Spanish football) federation unless they have previously paid the amount of said clause.”

Yet Messi’s lawyers believe the clause that allows him to leave for free refers not to a spe-

cific date but to ten days after the end of the season.

Given last season was extended into August due to the pandemic, with the Champions League final only played last weekend, they maintain Messi’s request to leave came within the agreed period.

His absence on Sunday suggests he is prepared to do whatever it takes to quit the club he joined as 13 year old boy, and where most expected him to continue all the way through to retirement. Manchester City remain favourites to sign the 33 year old, whose basic salary alone is around US\$71mn.

If Barcelona and Messi decide to avoid a lengthy legal process, a compromise selling price of around US\$119mn could be within reach for City, while eliminating their less wealthy rivals.

Messi has reportedly spoken to City coach Pep Guardiola already but others remain in the running, including PSG, Inter Milan and Juventus.

AFP

MUSCAT DAILY EXCLUSIVE

'A NIGHT TO REMEMBER'

Oman's finest footballer of all-time, Ali al Habsi, reflects on his career and recollects a cold night in 2007 when he was exceptional against German giants Bayern Munich. Habsi recently called time on his career after 22 glorious years, which saw him win trophies and laurels for different clubs and the sultanate



A file photo, dated November 8, 2007, of Ali al Habsi playing for Bolton Wanderers against Bayern Munich in an UEFA Cup game in Munich, Germany

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Two days after Ali al Habsi had called it time on his playing career on August 21, German giants Bayern Munich claimed a deserving Champions League title for the sixth time after a 1-0 win against Paris Saint-Germain in Lisbon, Portugal. One may wonder what is the relation between Bayern's Champions League title and Oman's greatest footballer, Habsi's retirement.

Well, one needs to travel back to November 8, 2007 to Allianz Arena in Munich to connect the link between Habsi and recently-crowned European kings.

Habsi, the first goalkeeper from the Gulf region to play in the English Premier League (EPL), had come up with one his best saves in his 22 years of playing career against the very German giants.

It was a cold night in the Bavarian capital and Habsi remembers it as it was just the other night. Playing only his second match with the EPL club, Bolton Wanderers, Habsi was outstanding between the sticks to make the world sit up and notice this gentle giant from Mudhaibi.

In his first exclusive interview to an English newspaper since announcing his retirement, Habsi, with a glint in his eyes and a smile on his face, said: "Yes, I can never forget that night. To be included in the starting XI and playing against Bayern Munich in front of 66,000 fans at the Allianz Arena, it was special. And then, the save against Franck Ribéry, it was one of the best saves.

"When I returned to Bolton, the English media was all praise about the save and even compared it to the save made by legendary Gordon Banks in the 1970 World Cup against Pele. It was such a proud moment to be even associated with one of the greatest goalkeepers."

Habsi did say that he has made 'plenty of memorable saves' during his career spanning more than two decades and it was very difficult to pick a few.

However, he did mention the save he made during Oman's victorious 2009 Gulf

Cup campaign when he not only kept a clean sheet during the tournament in Muscat but made a crucial save off Yasser al Qahatani in the last minute of the extra-time during the final against Saudi Arabia.

"It was a save that helped us lift the Gulf Cup and is close to my heart, recollected Habsi.

'Big Man' Budgie

Habsi's success story is incomplete without John Burridge. The journeyman, who has to his credit more than 770 games in English football, is credited to moulding the career of the Mudhaibi boy.

'Budgie' as he is popularly known, spotted Habsi as a 16 year old boy during a domestic match when he saved a penalty.

Habsi said, "I remember him coming up to me after the match and congratulating me with a handshake and introducing himself as national team goalkeeper coach. Frankly, I had no idea who he was.

"But it was John Burridge [Habsi still likes to address him with his full name] who made me believe that I could make it big, go to play in Europe and sign up in English Premier League. For me, it was like a joke, as back then, a boy from Mudhaibi could only think of watching a Premier League game on a TV set, not playing."

Habsi said, "The training with him was very hard and he really meant business. We were training twice a day, weekends or not, we were on the ground, logging it out.

"John Burridge drilled into me the dreams of playing in the English Premier League and soon I realised he meant it. He took me to England, we went to Manchester City, United, Bolton and Sunderland. The issue of work permit denied me a chance to get a break in Premier League. Burridge then suggested me to play in Europe and Norway Lyn Oslo was where I signed up, becoming the first Omani to play in Europe in 2003."

"For me, John Burridge is more than a family. After God, it was he who made me reach what I have achieved in my football career. It was from him I learned self-belief and I can't

John Burridge drilled into me the dreams of playing in the English Premier League and soon I realised he meant it. For me he is more than a family

ALI AL HABSI

thank him enough," said Habsi.

Tough times

Habsi's switch to Norway was not an easy affair: from the scorching heat of Oman to freezing temperatures in Oslo, staying away from family, and a rigorous training regimen.

"It took time for me to make my debut but after few games in the opening season, I had a successful second season, winning the best goalie award and also playing in the Cup final," Habsi said.

"It was the belief and the dream to reach my goal that kept me going despite challenging conditions and in 2006, I moved to England. I owed to Bolton and despite having offers from other big clubs, I joined Bolton under 'Big Sam' Allardyce.

"With Jussi Jaaskelainen as the No 1 goalie at the club, I knew I would have to wait for long but my approach of learning while on the bench laid the bedrock of my future success," said Habsi.

"My English debut came in League Cup in September 2007 when I was picked for the game against Fulham. We won 2-1 and John Burridge was there to watch the game and congratulate me, a promise he had made with me long back."

Terrific ten

Following his excellent show against Bayern in November 2007, where Habsi displayed nerves of steel, the Omani got a chance to be in the starting XI of Bolton, as Jaaskelainen got injured. Bolton was fighting relegation with ten games left and Habsi believes that the 'opportunity' gave him the window to showcase his talent and skills.

Habsi kept clean sheets in six games and helped Bolton escape relegation, a run that he regards as one of his best campaigns.

Habsi moved to Wigan on loan in 2010 and shone bright as he won the player of the season

that paved his move to Wigan in 2011 on a permanent deal for a club record transfer fee for a goalkeeper.

Habsi fondly remembers his time with Wigan under Roberto Martinez as he played a crucial role in Wigan's historic FA Cup title win in 2013.

Though Habsi did not feature in the final XI in the title clash against Manchester City, he was instrumental in Wigan's semifinal win over Millwall.

"To be the first Arab and Asian (at that time, Australia was not included in the Asian Football Confederation) to lift the world's oldest trophy was a huge, huge moment for me and Oman," he said.

"I went on to play 101 EPL games for Wigan and then moved to Championship side Reading, where I won two successive 'Player of the Year' awards in 2016 and 2017," he added.

Habsi returned to Asia and joined Al Hilal, where he won two more trophies to adorn his overflowing cabinet. After two years with Saudi club, Habsi



went back to England, where he joined Championship side West Bromwich Albion but failed to play a game before being released earlier in June.

West Brom went on to be promoted to 2020-2021 Premier League but Habsi decided to call it a day.

Gulf Cup title

Among the other treasured memories, Habsi has it is the historic maiden Gulf Cup title for Oman in 2009 in front of thousands of fans at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

He said, "It was an amazing feeling, and for me, the biggest honour was to receive the winner's medal from His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik al Said (then, Minister of Heritage and Culture).

"Nothing can match the experience of giving happiness to

the country and Oman's maiden Gulf Cup title win in 2009 saw the whole country erupt in joy."

He added: "There has always been extra pressure while playing for Oman and I loved it. I knew that I had to give 200 per cent and believe me, playing for your country is the single most honour every footballer wishes and aspires while growing up. I am honoured to have played more than 100 games (135 in total) and also captain Oman."

Right time

Habsi said that it was the 'right time' to call time on his playing career. He said, "It is always a tough call after spending years on the pitch but we have to take a call. With my three daughters growing, my family needs me more than anytime now and I thought over and discussed with my family before taking a call.

"I know that I still can play for couple of years at the top but I decided to call it a day and be closer to family."

On the lows of his career, Habsi said only injury layoffs during the 2012-2013 that kept him away for seven months and the injury ahead of the 2019 Asian Cup in UAE were disap-

pointing moments.

No to coaching

About his future plans, Habsi ruled out a career in coaching though he did say that he would like to get the coaching licences in future.

"I will prefer to take up a job as an administrator, may be a board member in the Oman Football Association (OFA). It will give me more opportunities to serve the youth of Oman and give back to my country," he said.

HFA expansion

A project that is dear to Habsi has been his Habsi Football Academy (HFA), which started three years back. "I will now have more time to expand the activities of my academy and we will like to take it to different regions in the sultanate. We would scout for talented kids and may be facilitate their journey to Europe," he said.

On a question if Oman can have another Habsi, he replied: "Yes, why not. It is my dream to see another Habsi. I too came from a small village and achieved my dream. So one has to dream to make it big."

The legend, who has set a high benchmark for future Omani players, had a clearcut message for the youngsters. "There is no shortcut to hard work. One has to work very hard, follow your dreams as

they do come true. To succeed, one needs good support. I was lucky to get strong support from my family, coaches and friends. "One has to have self-belief to achieve their goals and keep pursuing till it is achieved," said.

@ashokmuscat
(Visit Muscat Daily youtube channel for the full interview)

See also Page 11





MUSK'S NET WORTH JUMPS

Elon Musk's net worth topped US\$100bn on Friday, according to the *Forbes* real-time billionaires list, as the shares of Tesla Inc see a more than five-fold surge in value this year

BUSINESS

Oman's real estate sector faces serious challenges

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hurt by COVID-19 pandemic and weak oil prices, Oman's overall economy and real estate sector will continue to face increasingly challenging conditions over the coming months, according to a leading global real estate consulting firm.

As a result of the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices, Savills expects to see increasingly challenging economic conditions and an acceleration of the exodus of the expatriate population.

Savills on Sunday released its latest market report for the sultanate. The report highlights the historic correlation between Oman's GDP trends and movement in oil prices, and an assessment of the impact of macroeconomic conditions on the real estate sector.

According to Savills, the market conditions in both the residential and office space rental sectors in Muscat were already in slowdown/recession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices will place both the residential and office space rental sectors in Muscat under further pressure over



(Muscat Daily)

the coming months, the consultancy said.

Savills said the total population of Oman grew from 3.6mn in 2012 to 4.6mn in 2016 and has levelled off since then. 'This growth was driven primarily by the expatriate population which grew from 1.5mn in 2012 to 2.1mn in 2016. Current evidence suggest that a net exodus of highly qualified expatriates started in 2016 due to economic conditions and increasing restrictions on expatriate employment.'

Ihsan Kharouf, head of Savills Oman, said, "Expatriates play a significant role in influencing demand for real estate. Market

conditions in both the residential and office space rental sectors in Muscat were already in slowdown/recession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of slow economic growth and negligible net population growth. The ongoing pandemic has further deteriorated the economic landscape. While the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the sector are currently unclear, it is evident that there will be increasing challenges over the coming months."

According to Kharouf, recent years have seen a gradual decline in achievable rental values in Muscat as a result of increasing supply relative to moderate

demand. Savills estimates that there is currently around 350,000sq m of better-quality office space for the rental market in Muscat with a further circa 100,000sq m of office space under construction between Qurum and Muscat Hills which is due to be completed in the coming 12 to 18 months.

In Savills' experience, the majority of recent demand has been focused on smaller, fully finished office units with around 90 per cent of demand coming from companies with an existing presence in Oman: Demand from new market entrants has been limited.

'The longer-term impacts of

the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices on the office rental market in Muscat will only become clear over the coming months but the sector is highly likely to experience downward pressure in terms of both demand and achievable rental values in the short term,' Savills said.

With rental values at historically low levels, however, Savills considers that landlords are increasingly likely to agree to incentives such as extended initial rent-free periods and/or assistance with office fit-outs for shell and core space rather than notable further drops in rental values.

Alizz Islamic Bank launches microsite to assist customers

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Murtadha Jawad

In order to smoothen the merger process for customers of Alizz Islamic Bank and Al Yusr Islamic Banking, the Islamic banking window of Oman Arab Bank (OAB), Alizz Islamic Bank has launched a microsite titled 'From Al Yusr to Alizz Islamic Bank' under the 'About Us' section of its corporate website.

The microsite was created as the ideal platform to respond to any customer inquiries about the merger process and has the relevant details a customer may need to know such as any important and necessary aspects of the process of the transfer and integration of accounts from Al Yusr Islamic Banking to Alizz Islamic Bank.

The online platform also has information on how to manage cheques and responds to inquiries about dates related to paying monthly instalments if applicable. It goes into detail on the particular mechanisms for the branch transformation and anything related to the services of debit cards along with their validity and expiration period as well as information on the communication channels through which it is possible to communicate with the bank directly.

Regarding the launch of this

microsite, Murtadha Jawad, AGM - head of marketing and corporate communications at Alizz Islamic Bank said, "As part of our integrated merger communications strategy, the microsite which we consider the anchor of this plan helps reduce the time needed to respond to all clients' inquiries and provides them with all the information regarding the transition from Al Yusr to Alizz. Since it's a fluid communication channel, we can make sure that updates are real-time because we believe that being as transparent as possible with customers and the community is a key success factor in any merger."

He said the microsite works as an orientation for new customers to get to know the bank's services as well as to keep them up-to-date with key dates and milestones as they integrate both entities into one.

UAE's Waha Capital launches income-focused Islamic fund

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi-based investment company Waha Capital has announced the launch of a new income-focused Islamic fund, adding to its three existing funds within its asset management business.

The new fund, to be called 'Waha Islamic Income Fund SP', will invest in Sharia'a-compliant assets across the Sukuk and equity markets, and will have a global outreach for investments. The fund is to be open-ended, and is expected to have a capacity in excess of US\$500mn.

Commenting on the new fund, Amr al Menhali, CEO of Waha Capital, said, "While our existing funds have some Sharia'a-compliant elements in them, there has been a steadily growing demand from our existing clients



Amr al Menhali

over the past couple of years for us to develop such a fully-fledged Islamic fund. We are confident that the new fund will be well received because it avoids investment in prohibited or controversial activities or assets and business sectors that

may be considered as particularly risky or potentially volatile. It will also only invest in entities that have relatively low gearing."

Menhali added, "Waha Capital intends to use its proven expertise to bridge a gap in what our clients are seeking from us, so as to offer them an actively managed, income producing Sharia'a-compliant solution with a global dimension. We are positioning this new fund as a focal point around which we can build a whole Sharia'a-compliant offering."

Waha Capital's investors represent a diversified mix of institutions from North America, Europe and the GCC. Waha Capital also invests in its own funds.

WAM

India's Reliance to acquire Future Group's retail empire for \$3.4bn

Mumbai, India - Indian conglomerate Reliance is acquiring the retail, wholesale and logistics businesses of the Future Group for US\$3.38bn, the oil-to-telecoms giant announced late Saturday, strengthening its presence in the country's hugely competitive e-commerce sector.

Reliance, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, has been locked in battle with US tech behemoth Amazon and Walmart-backed Flipkart for a share of India's lucrative online market, establishing its digital platform JioMart in May.

After spending years battling local mom-and-pop shops for customers, the online retailers are now trying to work hand-in-hand with the smaller stores that



Mukesh Ambani

dominate India's towns and hinterlands to bring them online.

Future Group owns some of the country's best-known supermarket brands such as Big Bazaar but its founder Kishore Biyani, once known as India's re-

tail king, has struggled in recent years, with the coronavirus pandemic dealing a heavy blow to his empire.

Ambani's daughter Isha, director of Reliance's retail subsidiary RRVL, said the deal would

give a big boost to India's retail sector and was 'a strong strategic fit' for her company.

"We hope to continue the growth momentum of the retail industry with our unique model of active collaboration with small merchants... as well as large consumer brands," she said.

"This will help Reliance retail to accelerate providing support to millions of small merchants in increasing their competitiveness and enhance their income during these challenging times," she added.

The acquisition will bolster Reliance's presence, adding another 1,800 stores to its retail portfolio, which already covers some 11,000 stores.

AFP

COVID-19 lockdowns give major boost to e-commerce

Paris, France - While large traditional retailers announce big layoffs because of the pandemic, sometimes shedding thousands of staff, coronavirus lockdowns have in contrast given e-commerce a major boost.

Recent data shows a shift to shopping online - according to Kantar consulting group, international e-commerce grew 41 per cent in only three months compared with 22 per cent growth for 2020 as a whole to date, as the pandemic 'transformed' retail habits.

The trend was brought into sharp relief on August 18, when British high street mainstay Marks & Spencer (M&S) announced it was culling 7,000 staff.

Hours later, in contrast, online behemoth Amazon said it was hiring 3,500 in the United States.

The M&S slimdown is only one part of the picture in the UK, with 2,500 more job losses announced at department store Debenhams, which in April entered administration for the second time in a year. Hundreds more jobs are also to be lost at other well known British high street chains. By contrast, Britain's largest supermarket chain Tesco placed a sizeable feather in its online cap by saying it was creating 16,000 permanent jobs to deal with strong growth in its online activities.

"It is very clear that the digitisation of commerce, [even] if in place for a long time, is accelerating enormously," said Herve Gilg, managing director and distribution specialist at Alvarez & Marsal corporate transformation services.



The benefits are being reaped by those companies which were already carrying out a sizeable chunk of their activities online.

That troupe is led by Amazon, which doubled its net profits in the second half of this virus-chal-

lenged year. Following was Germany's fashion and lifestyle e-commerce heavyweight Zalando, which saw its active customer base rise 20 percent in first half 2020 to 34mn.

US giant Walmart, although not an online 'pure player', has also shifted in that direction to benefit from the upswing in virtual commerce in the US and its second-quarter results soared past estimates on an e-sales jump of 97 per cent.

In France, the UK, Spain and China, the average market share of e-commerce went from 8.8 per cent of value (in 2019) to 12.4 per cent in second quarter 2020, said Kantar.

It added that in China, online shopping already amounts to 'a

quarter of expenditure on mass consumer products'.

The trend was already under way before COVID-19 began to batter the global economy.

But the brutal falloff in out-of-home spending has had 'a major knock-on effect for non-food commerce dependent on physical sale points', Gilg said.

The unprecedented development has 'made all retail actors understand or else confirm that it is indispensable to have an online presence and to be as competitive as possible there', said Stephane Charveriat, senior associate director with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

That has meant evolution, which 'requires significant means and investments', ob-

serves Charveriat. But that need comes at a time when company coffers are relatively bare and money placed aside for online purposes is cash which does not therefore flow to the physical business.

France's CDCF trade council asked the government in the summer for a 'tax credit or accelerated super-amortisation mechanism to support digital investment'.

Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire responded that 'several hundred million euros' would be made available in the form of subsidies and public investment bank support 'to help firms digitise' in a bid to compete with the likes of Amazon.

AFP

LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES
INTERVIEW SERIES

COVID-19 crisis presents opportunity to reinvent and build competencies

Featured today in this exclusive series of Business Leaders' Perspectives, **Aftab Patel**, chief executive officer of Al Omaniya Financial Services, shares the company's experience in dealing with the COVID-19 situation and discusses his outlook about Oman's business sectors.



What is your brief assessment of the position of your company in the face of COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the peak season of Ramadan when business in Oman faced a challenge like never before?

These are extremely challenging times, we are sailing through uncertain and uncharted waters. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to fore the most unexpected obstacles, hurdles and challenges. In spite of institutions having sophisticated risk management function manned by highly skilled personnel supported by sophisticated tools and technology could not anticipate or provide for contingencies that COVID-19 brought.

Ramadan is a very busy period for the businesses in Oman. The per capita spending almost doubles during this period. Businesses ramp up their offers, build inventory to cater to this demand. Automobile franchise are in the forefront offering exciting packages and attractive credit facility in conjunction with the financial institutions. However, Ramadan period went through lockdown and the vehicle sales took an all-time hit.

What plans/strategies did you adopt to maintain your operations during the lockdown period over the past 2-3 months? How beneficial did this prove to be?

The COVID-19 crisis threw up a very unique and unheard of challenges. We had to do tremendous amount of brainstorming and devise an out-of-the-box strategy to continue to provide unhindered and uninterrupted services to our customers. We focused more on remote working, working-from-home and revamped out IT applications so that we could operate with 30-40 per cent staff in our offices.

Work schedules were designed in a manner that key management personnel were always available on hand or on call to ensure smooth operations.

A much greater focus was given to safety. We created an integral team headed by a senior manager to oversee sanitisation and adherence to safety precaution in the offices. A very high priority was given to employee safety, health, well-being and counselling was undertaken wherever required.

Looking ahead, what are your immediate and short-term plans that you believe will help the company recalibrate and move forward with renewed purpose?

As enumerated earlier, we are not only sailing through uncharted and uncertain times, but we are sailing through a storm. The storm is not over and we are still ducking arrows. In the immediate present our strategy is to comprehensively protect every stakeholders which are the employees, the shareholders, the customers and play a positive role in the broader economy.

Having devised a short-term strategy to protect the stakeholders we will craft new and creative strategies, assess our damages, losses and injuries. Once the pandemic is over we will put in place a comprehensive new plan and reinvent ourselves to make us relevant in the new normal economic environment.

What immediate changes were required in your workplaces, with regard to physical infrastructure, employee welfare, work culture and business promotion, in view of new guidelines related to COVID-19 (social distancing, hygiene/sanitation, health and fitness)?

The company was in operation from all its branches and maintained all its essential services during the lockdown period and all the senior management team were available in person as well as over electronic platform to all the customers. All customer service requests were processed on time and the company also adhered to all the COVID 19 safety precautions and guidelines advocated by the government and the regulators.

We understood that physical work places (offices) were not as crucial and significant as thought earlier. Wearing a mask, social distancing, hygiene and sanitation within the work place will be a new normal. We also incorporated more physical barriers in work stations, secured and structured entry of visitors. In terms of business

promotion, digital marketing and social media started to play a more significant role.

What do you see as the most feasible solutions for mitigating losses experienced due to the lockdown (cost-cutting measures, downsizing staff, enhancing performance, increasing work hours, any other)? Do you consider these as short-term or long term measures?

Cost cutting, staff retrenchment and staff downsizing are not necessarily the tools to right sizing the organisation. Our focus therefore was to redefine the roles, redefine our products and services, redefine systems and processes to extract significant value and output in areas where we had greater control given the pandemic uncertainty.

We crafted a strategy to make the cake bigger. As a result of which we did not have to resort to retrenchment or downsizing. We also ensured that we had extremely robust cash flows, maintained strong liquidity and could provide uninterrupted services to our customers.

What are your primary concerns regarding building/maintaining your company's image, post-COVID-19, as well as improving performance to regain connections and trust with your consumers/clients?

Our products and services were available throughout this period and our staff was accessible. We had to ensure that our staff,

customers and visitors have a safe working/visiting environment. We ensured the customer felt secure while entering the office building, this was done by having sanitiser units strategically placed in all of the office building, waiting areas with social distancing norms followed, our representatives always wearing mask and gloves and guidelines for COVID-19 were put in all prominent places in the office building.

Did you have the option of working from home for your staff during the lockdown and to what extent was it helpful? Will you continue to offer that option as part of your new strategy?

Our IT department had set up home-office in the key managers and staff homes with laptops, printers and net connections on stand by for any exigencies. However, since most of the key managers attended office during the lockdown this option was not required. Since this option is on standby it can be made online in a very short time if required.

What lessons were learnt from this crisis that would help redefine your corporate goals as well as helping your company experience sustained growth in the years ahead?

The global COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed our experience. As a corporate entity, employers, employees, citizens and humans, our attitudes and behaviours and outlook are changing. This time period

has presented an opportunity to reinvent and to build capacities and competencies, to be more on digital platforms like B-to-C and B-to-B, more data driven, to have more variable cost structures, agile operations and creating more automation with enhanced security layers etc.

What additional challenges do you anticipate in 2020/2021 and would you now place greater emphasis on risk management so that you are not caught off guard again?

This is a period of unpredictability and possibly muted economic recovery would happen in phases which will create with new competitive opportunities and challenges. The idea of normal life would lead way to a 'New Normal' and there would be a new shift in thinking, changes in social behaviours and cultural norms. There would be new business practices too with more emphasis on digital platforms and lesser human interaction. So, the businesses have to redefine their business model to go more on digital platform and automation and have to build internal controls and risk management practices to safeguard and mitigate the associated risks and challenges. The company is already started the review and study to equip ourselves with strategies and necessary physical as well as digital infrastructure to align with the expected new normalcy.

In your opinion, how important it is for staff to undergo training to realign themselves with the company's policies/new strategies as well as to immerse themselves in a new work culture that the pandemic has dictated?

It is very important for the businesses and employers and employees to adapt themselves to the new environment and equip themselves to adapt to new technologies and new ways and practices. Those who could not do so voluntarily would be left behind as this has been the way of evolution and sooner than later everyone would adapt and realign to the new way of living.

How long do you envisage it will be, if at all, that your particular sector is performing at pre-COVID-19 levels?

It is very difficult to envisage at this junction the time-frame for the end of the pandemic. The current challenges what the sector is facing pre-COVID-19 was due to the lack of demand for capital goods and due to reduced budget spending on investment activities. The things can revive if the spending increases in infrastructural activities and more and more new industries are licensed and begin operating.

It will certainly take a considerable time to go back to the pre-pandemic levels. The micro and macro economic will both have to change for the economy to grow. The pre COVID situation itself was very challenging so the strategy would be to attain level of economic activity we saw in 2015-16.

What is the No1 positive aspect you would take from the last three months?

The country took immediate and proactive steps to contain the spread by closing the border, imposing strict lockdown measures in the hot zones, restricted workforce in essential departments etc. The governance and the remedial actions, education and creating awareness were really commendable.

Oman has suffered much lower casualties on account of COVID-19 than most of the other nations. The Supreme Committee under the wise guidance of His Majesty the Sultan, did a very commendable job in containing the pandemic.

In spite of the continued economic crises and oil prices, the country and its people showed resilience and stood up to the need of the hour by readapting themselves. This manoeuvrability over uncertainty will help to invest in the right direction to get the transformation required.

We certainly became a more caring and a more sensitive organisation and started understanding values what can be quantified beyond an income statement or a balance sheet. The mantra therefore is to readapt, recreate and reinvent and embrace the change or be left behind.



The idea of normal life would lead way to a 'New Normal' and there would be a new shift in thinking, changes in social behaviours and cultural norms. There would be new business practices too with more emphasis on digital platforms and lesser human interaction.

China's industrial profits rebound despite COVID-19

Beijing, China - Profits of China's major industrial firms maintained steady recovery in July despite uncertainties due to the grim and complex domestic and international environment, official data showed.

Last month, profits totaled 589.5bn yuan (about US\$85.56bn), increasing by 19.6 per cent year on year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The growth widened 8.1 per cent percentage points from that in June, said NBS senior statistician Zhu Hong.

In the first seven months of the year, the profits declined 8.1 per cent to 3.1tn yuan, narrowing 4.7 percentage points from that in the first six months.

With the implementation of policies and measures to coordinate epidemic prevention and control with economic and social development, the industrial sector continues to improve and firms' profits continue to see rapid recovery growth, Zhu said.

In July, profits grew in 32 of 41 industrial sectors surveyed, while 24 of them showed improvements compared with that in June, according to the NBS.

Key sectors such as automobile, electronics, and equipment manufacturing showed improved profit-making ability.

The auto industry's profit rose by 125.5 per cent year on year last month, expanding from a 16.9 per cent increase in June as sales and investment income picked up.

Profits of electronics industry grew 38.6 per cent from a year earlier thanks to the rising demand for upgraded products.

Besides, high-tech manufacturing continued to expand steadily, with profits rising 36.5



Chinese telecom giant ZTE sees revenue surge in H1

Shenzhen, China - Chinese telecom equipment maker ZTE saw surges in both operating revenue and net profit in the first half-year despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The company said in its earnings report filed to the Shenzhen Stock Exchange on Friday that it realised a net

profit of 1.86bn yuan (about US\$271mn) attributable to common shareholders in the first half of 2020, up 26.3 per cent year on year.

The company's operating revenue increased by 5.8 per cent year on year in the first six months to reach 47.2bn yuan.

The report showed that

ZTE continued to increase its investment in 5G research and development, reaching 6.64bn yuan in the first half, accounting for 14.1 per cent of its operating revenue. Meanwhile, ZTE earned 34.97bn yuan from network operators, up 7.7 per cent year on year.

Xinhua

cash crunch.

In a bid to propel the sustained improvement of industrial performance, Zhu called for expanding investment, giving full play to the advantages of the country's huge domestic market, and stabilising the supply chains and industrial chains.

The fiscal and financial support for enterprises should be combined with more streamlined administration and improved government services so that market vitality could be further unleashed, according to the State Council's executive meeting held recently.

With people's life and production returning to normal at a faster pace, profit growth of industrial enterprises is likely to pick up and maintain a trend of recovery, according to Yingda Securities.

Xinhua

profit growth, some enterprises still face uncertainties amid the grim and complex domestic and international environment, Zhu said, noting that the mining and raw materials sectors saw steep profit decline last month due to

tively reduced the burden on enterprises.

Meanwhile, the sharp rise in investment income also played an important role in boosting profit growth last month.

Despite overall accelerated

per cent from a year earlier.

Zhu gave credit to the country's relief policies implemented this year, including large-scale tax and fee cuts, as well as the decrease in electricity, land use and rental costs, which effec-

Spain's new basic income scheme at a dead-end

Madrid, Spain - Three months after Spain rushed to launch a minimum basic income scheme to fight a spike in poverty due to the coronavirus pandemic, the programme is at a dead-end because of an avalanche of applications.

The measure was a pledge made by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's leftwing coalition government, which took office in January, bringing together his Socialist party with far-left Podemos as the junior partner.

The scheme - approved in late May - aims to guarantee an income of €462 per month for an adult living alone, while for families, there would be an additional €139 per person, whether adult or child, up to a monthly maximum of €1,015 per home. It is expected to cost state coffers €3bn a year.

The government decided to bring forward the launch of the programme because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has



A woman selects fruit at a supermarket in Zaragoza, Spain (AFP)

hit Spain hard and devastated its economy, causing queues at food banks to swell.

Of the 750,000 applications which were filed since June 15 when the government started accepting requests, 143,000 - or 19 per cent - have been analysed and 80,000 were approved, according to a social security statement issued on August 20.

But Spain main civil servant's union, CSIF, paints a darker picture. "Nearly 99 per cent of requests have not been processed," a union spokesman,

Jose Manuel Molina, said. The Social Security Ministry has only recently analysed 6,000 applications while 74,000 households that already receive financial aid were awarded the basic income automatically, he added.

A spokeswoman for the ministry acknowledged that the rhythm 'was perhaps a bit slower than expected' but she said the government was working to 'automate many procedures' so processing times should become faster from now on.

AFP

UK car production drops 20.8% in July

London, UK - British car production continued to drop in July as factories struggled to ramp up output and global demand recovered slowly, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said.

Data showed that British car production fell 20.8 per cent in July compared with the same period one year earlier to 85,696 units, with manufacturing for domestic and overseas orders both decreasing.

'The month saw the ramp-up

of production continue, as global lockdown measures eased and nearly all factories reopened, however, social distancing measures and ongoing economic uncertainty still stifled output,' said the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

In the year to date, overall production declined by 39.7 per cent year-on-year due to the significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic, figures showed.

Xinhua

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NAV Date		AUG 27, 2020
NAV (OMR)		0.972
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)		1.283
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)		0.03
Unit Dividend paid since inception		28%
YTD Performance		(4.12)%
Performance since inception		33.56%

* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010

** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends

For more information please contact:

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A file photo shows people wearing face masks walking on a street in Munich, Germany (Xinhua)

Europe reports higher economic confidence

Istanbul, Turkey - Following a coronavirus-triggered slump, economic confidence continued to recover in the EU and eurozone in August on a monthly basis, the European Commission announced.

This month, the Economic Sentiment Indicator (ESI) climbed 5 points to 86.9 in the EU27 and 5.3 points to 87.7 in the eurozone, according to a press release by the commission.

The eurozone/euro area or the EA19 represents member states that use the single currency - euro - while the EU27 includes all member countries of the bloc.

'The ESI in both regions has so far recovered around 60 per cent of the combined losses of March and April,' the statement revealed.

'Also the Employment Expectations Indicator (EEI) improved for the fourth month in a row (by 2.9 points to 89.6 in the euro area and by 2.7 points to 89.5 in the EU),' it said.

The rapid increase stemmed

from confidence rise in business sectors - industry, services and retail trade - while construction sector posted a monthly decrease of 0.4 per cent.

Confidence in the industry, services and retail trade sectors rebounded by 3.5 per cent, nine per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively. Consumer confidence remained broadly stable with 0.3 per cent increase month-on-month.

Among the largest euro-area economies, France saw the largest recovery in the ESI with 9.3 per cent, followed by the Netherlands (7.1 per cent), Germany (5.9 per cent) and Italy (2.7 per cent).

'By contrast, the ESI suffered a setback in Spain (-2.5),' it added.

Turkey's economic confidence was also up sharply in June, 4.4 per cent to 85.9, according to official data the country released on Friday.

COVID-19 has taken over half a million lives and affected international economies deeply.

Anadolu Agency

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Hezbollah ‘open’ to French proposal for new Lebanon pact: Nasrallah

Beirut, Lebanon - Hezbollah chief Hasan Nasrallah on Sunday said that his Shiite movement is ‘open’ to a French proposal for a new political pact for Lebanon as long as there is national consensus.

“On his latest visit to Lebanon, we heard a call from the French president for a new political pact in Lebanon... today we are open to a constructive discussion in this regard,” Nasrallah said in a speech.

“But we have one condition: This discussion should be carried out... with the will and consent of the various Lebanese factions,” Nasrallah said.

Nasrallah did not elaborate on what kind of changes his movement was willing to consider but cited criticism from ‘official French sources’ over Lebanon’s ‘sect-based political system and its inability to solve Lebanon’s problems and respond to its needs’.

Lebanon recognises 18 official religious sects and its 128 parliamentary seats are divided equally between Muslims and Christians, an arrangement unique in the region.

However, governments born out of this system have been prone to deadlock and have failed to meet popular demands for better living conditions.

Macron, the first world leader to visit Lebanon after the devastating August 4 Beirut port blast, will return on Monday to press for reform and reconstruction.

On his earlier visit days after the blast, the French president said Lebanese leaders had a



Lebanese men watch the head of the country’s Shiite Muslim movement Hezbollah Hasan Nasrallah during a televised speech, at a coffee shop in the southern suburbs of the capital Beirut, on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, on Sunday (AFP)

We have one condition: This discussion should be carried out... with the will and consent of the various Lebanese factions

Hasan Nasrallah

Nasrallah said his movement would be ‘cooperative’ in the formation of a government capable of spearheading reform and reconstruction.

Many Lebanese have blamed the August 4 port blast on a ruling class seen as mired in nepotism and graft since the 1975-1990 civil war.

The explosion killed more than 180 people and laid entire districts to waste, reviving a protest movement that had

emerged in October to demand the wholesale removal of the political elite.

On Friday, Macron spoke of the ‘constraints of a confessional system’ in a country populated by Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shiites.

He said this, combined with ‘what can be mildly described as vested interests’ had prevented political renewal and made reforms almost impossible.

AFP

Rola Dashti

Half of Lebanese could face food shortages: UN

Beirut, Lebanon - More than half of Lebanon’s population risk facing a food crisis in the aftermath of a Beirut port blast that compounded the country’s many woes, a UN agency said on Sunday.

“More than half of the country’s population is at risk of failing to access their basic food needs by the year’s end,” the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) said.

“Immediate measures should be taken to prevent a food crisis,” ESCWA executive secretary Rola Dashti said.

Lebanon’s government, she said, must prioritise the rebuilding of silos at the Beirut port, the country’s largest grain storage.

Lebanon was mired in an economic collapse even before the cataclysmic blast on

August 4 at Beirut’s port, which killed 188 people, wounded thousands and destroyed swathes of the capital.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt, while the local currency has plummeted in value on the black market and poverty rates have soared, on top of a spike in the number of coronavirus cases.

‘The yearly average inflation rate is expected to be more than 50 per cent in 2020, compared with 2.9 per cent in 2019,’ ESCWA said in a statement.

Lebanon relies on imports for 85 per cent of its food needs and the annihilation of the silos at the Beirut port could worsen an already alarming situation, aid agencies and experts have said.

AFP

How a German and a Syrian experienced 2015 crisis

Berlin, Germany - German Gracia Schuette and Syrian Aeham Ahmad both had their lives changed forever by Angela Merkel’s decision in 2015 to leave Germany’s doors open to hundreds of thousands of refugees.

In August of that year, Schuette joined thousands of volunteers serving ladles of hot soup to exhausted migrant families arriving at Munich’s main train station.

Having been held in Hungary after travelling the length of Europe, trains overflowing with refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan had begun arriving at the station in a seemingly endless convoy.

Ahmad was a passenger on one of them. The Syrian pianist with Palestinian roots arrived in Munich on September 23.

A month earlier, he had left Yarmouk, a sprawling neighbourhood in the south of Damascus, after swathes of the area were occupied by the Islamic State (IS) group.

He left behind his wife and two boys, still too young to em-



This file photo shows Aeham Ahmad playing a piano on a street near destroyed buildings, in Yarmouk (AFP)

bark on such a perilous journey.

Now 32, Ahmad has built a career for himself that involves travelling all over Europe and as far afield as Japan to give concerts.

‘Gratitude’

Schuette (36) says the experience changed her attitude to life and taught her ‘gratitude and the awareness that despite everything that happens in Germany,

it is still a very safe country’.

Ahmad speaks to AFP from a train heading to the north of Germany, where he is due to give a concert.

He remembers his first days in

Germany as a time of great confusion. Like tens of thousands of other Syrians arriving in the country, he had only one word on his lips: ‘Alemania!’ - Germany.

“After I arrived in Munich, I was sent to several emergency reception centres and then to Wiesbaden” near Frankfurt, where he and his uncle were given a room in a hostel, he says in a mixture of English and German.

He remembers the ‘extreme kindness’ shown by volunteers like Schuette - ‘that community of people who said, ‘We have to help’.

For Schuette, it was important to feel that she was ‘not just a spectator’ watching events unfold but willing to ‘act decisively’ by helping to distribute basic necessities or set up camp beds.

Today, she works as an administrator for a kindergarten. But she has maintained her commitment to helping refugees - so much so that she has even taken three young people into her home, one of whom still lives with her.

Having been granted refugee status a year after his arrival in Germany, Ahmad was joined by his wife and children.

The family have since moved to Warburg, a town in north-western Germany, and seven months ago welcomed a new baby girl.

While still in Syria, Ahmad

Gracia Schuette helps refugees like Aeham Ahmad to find foothold in Germany

had made a name for himself on social media with videos of songs performed amid the ruins of his ravaged home country.

In Germany, he began to sing songs about homesickness, with the aim of raising awareness in his new country and the rest of Europe of ‘this stupid war’ that has devastated Syria for more

than nine years.

Today, he aspires to ‘bring cultures together, to create a dialogue between Eastern and Western music’.

Having given more than 720 concerts, he has at times felt exhausted. But ‘anything is better than living off state subsidies’ as he did during his first months in Germany, he believes.

If Schuette could go back and do it all again, she would.

“I don’t think I would be someone who just says, ‘It’s going to work out and everything’s going to be great’. You have to be realistic,” she said, pointing to the difficulties of integration.

“But there’s no doubt about it: I’d do it again.”

Ahmad, too, avoids painting a rose-tinted picture of his story. His generation, he says, will be scarred for life by the horrors of war and the difficulties of adapting to life in exile.

But there is pride in his voice as he reveals that his two sons already speak German ‘without the slightest accent’.

AFP

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One dead in Portland shooting after demonstrators clash

San Francisco, US - A person was shot dead on Saturday in Portland following clashes between Black Lives Matter protesters and supporters of US President Donald Trump, police said.

The Oregon city has been an epicenter of BLM protests since the police killing of unarmed black man George Floyd in Minnesota in late May, and according to local media a 'caravan of hundreds of cars' of Trump supporters also converged there on Saturday.

Portland Police tweeted a political rally was 'caravanning throughout downtown Portland', adding: 'There have been some instances of violence between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators. Officers have intervened and in some cases made arrests.'

OregonLive reported 'clashes' and 'tense moments' between the groups, although police did not say whether the shooting was related to the demonstrations.

The shooting occurred at around 8:45pm downtown, police said later in a statement, adding a homicide investigation was under way.

'Portland Police officers heard sounds of gunfire from the area of Southeast 3rd Avenue and Southwest Alder Street,' the statement said.

'They responded and located a victim with a gunshot wound to the chest.'

As the nationwide protests continue, President Trump planned to travel next week to the Midwestern city where African American Jacob Blake was shot multiple times in the back by a white policeman.

Trump will meet police in Kenosha, Wisconsin on Tuesday and 'survey damage from recent riots' triggered by Blake's shooting last weekend, White House spokesman Judd Deere said on Saturday.

Blake took at least half a dozen shots in front of his small children as he tried to get into a car, in an incident that has prompted an outpouring of anger over yet another shooting of a black man by police.

Deere did not say if Trump would meet the family of Blake (29), who was left paralysed



A woman is arrested outside of the Kenosha County Courthouse in defiance of the city-wide curfew as protests continue in the city following the shooting of Jacob Blake, in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Saturday (AFP)

from the waist down.

Protesters have taken to the streets in major cities nationwide this summer over the deaths of black people at the hands of police, including George Floyd in Minneapolis in May.

It is the most widespread civil unrest in the United States for decades.

Trump has characterised the mostly-peaceful activists as rioters as he pushes a law and order message while fighting an uphill battle for re-election in November.

Kenosha, about an hour's drive from Chicago, saw three nights of violence after the Blake shooting as protesters set fire to buildings and cars.

Major US sports leagues in-

cluding the NBA were forced to suspend play as African American and other players outraged by the shooting joined the latest national wave of anger over racial injustice and police misconduct.

On Friday tens of thousands of protesters thronged the US capital for a mass march marking the anniversary of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr's historic 'I have a dream' speech on August 28, 1963.

It was dubbed 'Get Your Knee Off Our Necks', in reference to Floyd, who suffocated beneath the knee of a white officer.

Often fighting back tears, relatives of Floyd, Blake and Breonna Taylor - a black 26 year old shot dead by police in her apart-

ment last March - took turns addressing the sea of people, who repeatedly called out the victims' names in response.

"Black America, I hold you accountable," said Blake's sister Letetra Widman. "You must stand, you must fight, but not with violence and chaos. With self love."

Like his father 57 years ago, Martin Luther King III stood on the Lincoln Memorial steps and urged Americans to keep fighting inequality - and to vote in November at all costs to defeat Trump.

"We are taking a step forward on America's rocky but righteous journey towards justice," King said. AFP

Israeli tanks hit Hamas after balloon attacks

Jerusalem - Israeli tanks hit Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, the army said, as Palestinian balloon attacks across the border continued despite international truce efforts.

An early-morning military statement said there had been airborne explosive and incendiary attacks into southern Israel on Saturday.

'In response to the ongoing events, a short while ago... tanks struck military posts belonging to the Hamas' in the southern Gaza Strip, the English-language statement said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israel has bombed Gaza almost daily since August 6, in response to the airborne incendiary devices and, less frequently, rockets launched across the border. The fire bombs - crude devices fitted to balloons, inflated condoms or plastic bags - have triggered more than 400 blazes in southern Israel, according to the fire brigade.

An Egyptian delegation has been shuttling between the two sides to try to broker a renewal of an informal truce under which Is-



A member of the Palestinian security forces loyal to Hamas monitors shoppers queuing for bread, in Gaza City, late on August 24 (AFP)

rael committed to ease its 13 year old blockade of Gaza in return for calm on the border.

It was joined this week by Qatar's Gaza envoy Mohammed el Emadi who delivered the latest tranche of US\$30mn in aid to the territory on Tuesday before holding talks with Israeli officials in Tel Aviv.

Sources close to the Qatari delegation said the Israelis had told Emadi they were willing to end a punitive ban on fuel deliveries for Gaza's power plant and ease their blockade if there was an end to the fire balloons.

Financial aid for the impover-

ished territory from gas-rich Qatar had been a major component of the truce, first agreed in November 2018 and renewed several times since.

But Israel had also said it would take other measures to alleviate unemployment of more than 50 per cent in the territory of some two million people.

Disagreements over their implementation have fuelled repeated flare-ups on the border.

These escalated into major conflicts in 2008, 2012 and 2014, and mediators have been striving to prevent a new war.

AFP

China fumes as Czech delegation visits Taiwan

Taipei, Taiwan - A Czech delegation arrived in Taipei on Sunday in the second high-profile foreign visit to Taiwan this month - a setback for China's campaign to keep the island isolated from the rest of the world.

The 90-member group, led by senate speaker Milos Vystrcil, landed two weeks after US health chief Alex Azar marshalled the highest-level mission to Taiwan by Washington since it switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979.

Vystrcil will deliver a speech in Taiwan's parliament and meet President Tsai Ing-wen during a five-day trip described by Taipei as standing up to 'the intimidation of authoritarian China'.

'Our nations share many core values and we look forward to furthering cooperation in all areas,' Tsai wrote on Twitter after the delegation landed.

Beijing views democratic Taiwan as its own territory - vowing to one day seize it by force if necessary - and bristles at any moves by foreign governments to recognise or conduct official exchanges with Taipei.



Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu greets Czech Senate President Milos Vystrcil (left) upon the latter's arrival at Taoyuan on Sunday (AFP)

It has described Vystrcil's visit as a 'despicable act'. "His insistence to go to Taiwan to carry out this so-called 'visit' deliberately wrecks the political foundation of China-Czech relations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on Thursday.

China has ramped up diplomatic, military and economic pressure on Taiwan since Tsai

came to power in 2016 as she views the island as a sovereign nation and not part of 'one China'.

Tsai won a landslide re-election in January and a growing number of countries are expanding ties with the island - especially those wary of China's increasingly muscular foreign policy.

AFP

Masks and tears: Shiites mark Ashura at Iraq shrines

Karbala, Iraq - Thousands of tearful Shiite pilgrims wearing gloves and masks flooded Iraq's holy city of Karbala on Sunday to mark Ashura, in one of the largest Muslim gatherings since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

Ashura, on the 10th day of the mourning month of Muharram, commemorates the killing of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussein at the Battle of Karbala in 680CE.

Typically, millions of Shiites from around the world flock to the golden-domed shrine where Hussein's remains are buried, to pray and cry, shoulder-to-shoulder. But with coronavirus numbers spiking across the globe, this year's commemoration is subdued.

"Honestly, this year is nothing like the millions-strong commemorations of other years," said Fadel Hakim, who was out early on Sunday in the streets

around the shrine, a blue medical mask cupping his chin.

"It stands out because there are so few people."

Small clusters of pilgrims gathered in the vast courtyards outside the main mosque, wearing the customary black mourning clothes along with less traditional masks and gloves.

Wading through the crowds were teams of shrine employees spraying disinfectant mist through long, thin hoses or distributing masks to any bare-faced visitor.

To be allowed into the shrine, people had their temperatures taken at grey gates resembling metal detectors.

Inside, signs on the carpet floor indicated the required distance between worshippers as they pray.

Nylon sheets prevented people from kissing the walls, a traditional sign of reverence.



Iranian and Iraqi Shiite Muslims mourn on the tenth day of the Muharram which marks the peak of Ashura, in the Iranian capital Tehran on Sunday (AFP)

But in the enclave where Imam Hussein is buried, pilgrims pressed their unmasked faces up against the ornate grille separat-

ing them from the mausoleum.

Many visitors were crying or sniffing, wiping their faces with bare hands - actions that could

help the virus spread.

In the afternoon, they will gather for a dramatic re-enactment of Hussein's death at the

hands of Caliph Yazid's forces.

It will include the famed 'Tuwairij run', where processions of worshippers will sprint towards the shrine.

Last year, a stampede broke out that left at least 31 people dead and more than 100 more wounded.

The run is expected to be much smaller this year, as authorities in Iraq, other Shiite-majority countries and the United Nations urged people to mark the holiday at home.

Neighbouring Iran, which usually sends tens of thousands of pilgrims to Karbala, is the hardest-hit Middle Eastern country with over 21,000 coronavirus deaths.

Tehran banned the usual Ashura marches, indoor ceremonies, musical performances and banquets, instead broadcasting the various religious rituals on state television.

Even Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, prayed alone, according to images published by his office, showing him wearing a mask in the vast, empty mosque at his residence.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, health authorities have reported a fall in new virus cases but security remained a top concern, as Ashura has often been tainted by mass violence targeting Shiites.

Many have opted for scaled-down family gatherings, but some processions leading up to Ashura saw thousands turn out, and larger crowds are expected on Sunday.

"It's not possible that anyone would be infected with the virus," said Israr Hussain Shah, a Shiite devotee in the Pakistani capital Islamabad. "Rather people come to heal and protect themselves, whether that's a virus of faith or a sickness," he said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Global virus cases cross 25mn

Brazil's curve has stabilised now, but at a very dangerous level - nearly 1,000 deaths per day: Barcellos

New Delhi, India - Global coronavirus infections soared past 25 million on Sunday, as countries around the world further tightened restrictions to try to stop the rampaging pandemic.

A million additional cases have been detected globally roughly every four days since mid-July, according to an AFP tally, with India on Sunday setting the record for the highest single-day rise in cases with 78,761.

The surge in India, home to 1.3bn people, came as the government further eased lockdown restrictions on the weekend to help ease pressure on the reeling economy.

Even nations such as New Zealand and South Korea, which had previously brought their outbreaks largely under control, are now battling new clusters of infections.

On the other side of the world, Latin America - the worst-hit region - was still struggling with its first wave, with Covid-19 deaths in Brazil crossing 120,000, second only to the United States.

Brazil's curve 'has stabilised now, but at a very dangerous level: Nearly 1,000 deaths and 40,000 cases per day', said Christovam Barcellos, a researcher at public health institute Fiocruz.



People take part in a protest against the increasing requirements in Swiss cantons to wear face masks in indoor public spaces; as well as against fears that a future vaccine could be made mandatory amid the Covid-19 outbreak, in Zurich on Saturday (AFP)

"And Brazil still isn't past the peak."

Nearly 843,000 people have died of Covid-19 globally, and with no vaccine or effective treatment available yet, govern-

ments have been forced to resort to some form of social distancing and lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus.

Masks will become mandatory from Monday on public

transport and flights in New Zealand, which went more than 100 days without local transmission before the current cluster emerged.

And tightened virus curbs

kicked in on Sunday in South Korea, which is also battling fresh clusters - including in the greater Seoul region, home to half the country's population.

Despite the grim numbers,

there has been steady opposition to lockdowns and social distancing measures in many parts of the world, often because of their crushing economic cost.

But resistance has also come from the extreme right and left of the political spectrum, as well as conspiracy theorists and anti-vaccine campaigners.

In Berlin on Saturday, around 18,000 people gathered to march against coronavirus restrictions - but police later stopped the rally because many were not respecting social distancing measures.

Protesters waved German flags and shouted slogans against Chancellor Angela

Tightened virus curbs kicked in on Sunday in South Korea, which is also battling fresh clusters

Merkel often used by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Similar protests were held in London and Zurich, where some carried signs supporting the far-right QAnon movement, which promotes bizarre theories about Satan-worshipping cabals and 'deep state' plots - without any credible evidence.

AFP



A health worker sanitises her hands after taking a swab sample for the Covid-19 test at a camp in a residential area, in Chennai on Sunday (AFP)

India records 78,761 cases in one day

New Delhi, India - India on Sunday set a coronavirus record when it reported 78,761 new infections in 24 hours - the world's highest single-day rise - even as it continued to open up the economy.

Home to 1.3bn people, India is already the world's third-most infected nation with more than 3.5mn cases, behind the US and Brazil. It has also reported more than 63,000 deaths, according to the official Health Ministry toll.

The US set the previous record on July 17 with 77,638 daily infections, according to an AFP tally.

According to a government report, India has crossed a crucial milestone on Sunday in the fight against COVID-19 as 'for the first time, a record number of more than 1.05mn COVID tests have been conducted in a single day'.

In his regular monthly radio address on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not comment on the milestone but called on Indians to observe health safety measures.

"It is important that every citizen is healthy and happy and we defeat coronavirus com-

pletely together," Modi said in Hindi.

"Corona(virus) can only be defeated when you remain safe, when you fulfil the resolve of keeping a safe distance of two yards and wearing masks."

Experts warn that while a ramp up in testing in recent months was encouraging, more needed to be done to capture the scale of the pandemic in the world's second-most populous nation.

According to state-run Press Information Bureau news agency, "With 10,55,027 tests conducted in the last 24 hours, India has further strengthened the national diagnostic capacity of testing more than 10 lakh (1mn) samples daily."

"The cumulative tests have crossed 41.4mn (41,461,636)," it added.

"The exponential jump in the testing capacity and cumulative tests has resulted in an upsurge in the Tests Per Million. They stand at 30,044 today."

The virus has badly hit megacities such as financial hub Mumbai and the capital New Delhi, but is now also surging in smaller cities and rural areas.

AFP+PIB

Germany condemns attempt to storm Reichstag

Berlin, Germany - The German government on Sunday slammed the 'unacceptable' behaviour of protesters during a mass rally against coronavirus restrictions in which hundreds were arrested and some attempted to storm the Reichstag parliament building.

The Reichstag is the 'symbolic centre of our democracy', Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Sunday's edition of the *Bild* newspaper.

"It is unacceptable to see extremists and trouble-makers use it for their own ends."

Police said about 38,000 people, double the number expected, had gathered in Berlin on Saturday to protest against restrictions imposed to curb the



A demonstrator is dragged away by riot policemen guarding the Reichstag building, in Berlin on Saturday (AFP)

spread of the coronavirus, such as the wearing of masks and social distancing.

Late on Saturday, several

hundred protesters broke through barriers and a police cordon to climb the steps leading to the entrance to the Reich-

stag. They were narrowly prevented from entering the building by police, who used pepper spray and arrested many.

The Reichstag, where German deputies meet, has a powerful symbolic role in the country. The building, with its famous dome, was burnt down by the Nazis in 1933 in an act aimed at destroying what remained of German democracy between the two world wars.

'Plurality of opinions' is a 'characteristic of the good functioning of society', said Seehofer. But 'freedom of assembly reaches its limits when public rules are trampled on'.

About 300 people were arrested in scuffles with police outside the Russian embassy not far from there in the city centre, where protesters pelted police with bottles.

AFP

London tourist guides forced to adapt

London, UK - "I don't know if you're aware, but we're living through a pandemic right now," says Joel Robinson with a smile as he introduces his Jack the Ripper tour in London's East End.

Robinson, a trained actor and history buff who works for the tourist company London With A Local, goes on to explain social distancing best practice to his nine clients.

Although he doesn't wear them himself, he advises the tourists to wear masks and gloves before they set off through the once-gloomy alleyways of Victorian-era London.

Down darkened side streets and past shiny new buildings, Robinson recounts the tale of the still unidentified serial killer of five women who stalked the streets of Whitechapel in 1888.

London's tourist guides are resuming their work slowly as lockdown restrictions are eased, and adapting to new health and



This file photo shows a sign asking visitors to wear a mask, and maintain social distancing guidelines, in the main Hintze Hall of the Natural History Museum before it re-opens to the public, in London on July 27 (AFP)

safety rules to curb the spread of the virus.

Numbers are currently limited but it's the background of the clients that has changed the most.

Where before Robinson and walking guides like him played mainly to foreign tourists, now customers are mainly British.

Dwindling numbers of over-

seas clients are largely down to quarantine measures imposed by the British government on foreign visitors.

"We have far more Britons than we had," said Olivia Calvert, one of Robinson's colleagues. "It's a huge shift. They're expecting something else, something different."

Among the home-grown

tourists traipsing around the Ripper's old haunts are Anne and Nick Garner, a couple in their fifties from near Manchester, in northwest England.

"We would have been abroad but we decided to come to London," said Anne Garner after her insight into the blood-thirsty past of the city's East End.

Getting creative

The 90-minute Jack the Ripper tour is one of London's most popular, alongside the Harry Potter tour and another visiting the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll hotspots of Soho.

"The British already know London's famous monuments, so they expect something else," said Calvert.

Antony Robbins is an independent guide affiliated to the Guild of Tourist Guides, the national professional association for Blue Badge Tourist Guides across the country. Lack of demand has meant he has had to abandon his walks from Westminster to Buckingham Palace.

This week, he led his first 'fooding' tour, taking a young woman and her mother to several restaurants and high-end patisseries in the British capital.

"We're changing the way we work because we have to," he said. "We need to be more creative."

AFP



While you may be tempted to rub your tired eyes for temporary relief, rubbing can actually irritate your eyes in the long run.



CARE FOR YOUR EYES, IF WORKING FROM HOME

If you have been working from home or attending online classes from home for the past few months, you may be in for many challenges concerning your health, especially with regard to your eyes. It all depends on how much time you have spent in front of screens. If you're feeling the effects of increased eye discomfort and/or eye dryness, you are not alone. The impact of those additional hours on your computer or tablet can take its toll on your eyes.

Here's how to relieve the discomfort and dryness your eyes are experiencing:

Take frequent breaks from screens
Take periodic breaks not just to look away from the screen or shut your eyes briefly to rest them, but to actually get up and walk around, looking at objects at different distances and directions to relieve eye strain. Set a timer on your phone or computer to remind yourself to take breaks every 15 to 20 minutes.

Blink frequently
Even more regularly, remind yourself to blink slowly and gently. Blinking throughout the day helps to keep your eyes moisturised. Close your eyes gently

a few times in a row, as often as you can, to help keep your eyes from getting too dried out as you stare at your computer screen.

Keep the air clean
Keep the atmosphere within your home clean and free from pollutants that could pose as irritants for your eye, including dust, pollen, excess glare from sunlight, etc. Consider using an indoor air filter in the room, especially if you suffer from any allergies.

Try artificial tears
Use lubricating eye drops to help relieve temporary

eye dryness, irritation and discomfort. You can use an over-the-counter 'artificial tears' products to help improve the symptoms of eye dryness. It also helps to relax the eyes and relieve strain.

Avoid rubbing
While you may be tempted to rub your tired eyes for temporary relief, rubbing can actually irritate your eyes in the long run. Instead of rubbing your eyes, when they feel itchy or discomfort, reach for artificial tears or eye drops to help provide relief from your symptoms. (BPT)

Yogic breathing

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn much attention to respiratory health. By following a proper breathing technique, you can enhance your respiratory health as well as keep diseases at bay. Try pranayama, a yogic technique of breathing, which can help support respiratory health, mental wellness, and the body's ability to protect itself. Pranayama is 'breath control'. It is said, when the rate of breathing increases or becomes irregular, the mind gets disturbed, too. Hence, yoga practitioners believe that your rate of breathing and your state of mind are inseparable. In controlling your breath, you can help strengthen the immune system and support the body's response to disease.

Technique 1: Long deep breathing
Long deep breathing uses the full capacity of the lungs by utilising the three parts of the lungs: abdominal or lower, chest or middle, clavicular or upper. Begin the inhale with an abdominal breath. Then add the chest breath and finish with a clavicular breath. All three are done in a smooth motion. Start the exhale by relaxing the clavicle, then slowly emptying the chest. Finally, pull in the abdomen to force out any remaining air.

Technique 2: Alternate nostril breathing
Sit in a comfortable position either on the floor or in a chair and maintain a straight spine. Using the thumb and index fingers of the right hand, make a 'U' and use the thumb to close off the right nostril and the index finger to close off the left nostril. Close the left nostril and inhale deeply through the right. At the end of the inhale, close the right nostril and exhale through the left. Now inhale through the left nostril fully and deeply, then close the left nostril and exhale through the right one. Continue alternate nostril breathing for 3-5 minutes. (BPT)



MAKE-UP WAKE-UP

Save money and streamline your make-up routine with the help of some crucial tips

Hubert Vaz

Ladies know best that buying make-up can be an expensive affair. And though each one loves to have the best, financial constraints can often make one settle for not always the best brand.

We are living in a time like no other, with the pandemic and social distancing affecting every aspect of our lives - from our daily lifestyles, budgets, diets - to our beauty regimens. We are all guilty of wanting the most luxe and notable cosmetics to put on our faces. But in the current economy, splurging on make-up may not be a practical option.

Studies show, that in challenging times women tend to treat themselves to personal care items as a way to feel better. As we look ahead to what the summer season has in store for us, there's no question that it's going to look different than years before - but 'different' doesn't mean you can't buy the make-up that you love.

Consider some affordable and accessible ways to fuel up your beauty look in the new normal.

Seek premium products

We are living in the age of low-effort beauty, now more than ever. Layering on multiple make-up products at once is not a great idea in the summer, especially if you're going to wear a mask. It can result in breakouts and clogged pores, say dermatologists. Hence, it is important to look for multi-benefit beauty products that help keep skin stay healthy and simplify your regimen - products with sunscreen and additional vitamins and antioxidants are great options.

Look for make-up dupes for value

Save money by finding specially formulated products that help you look good and feel better. Look for make-up dupes for value; dupes are a great way to feel out colours and formulas without having to let go of hard-earned dollars, while still getting effective, high-end products and benefits. Turns out most luxury brand make-up has the same ingredients in it and provides the same multi-benefits as the drugstore ones.

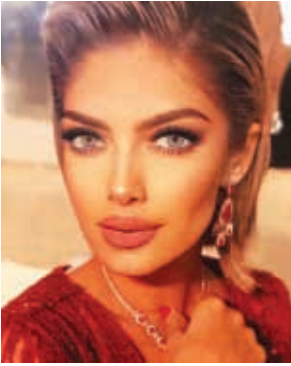
Use quality makeup brushes

Often, a perfect make-up job is more dependent on the usefulness of the tools than the amount spent on the products. Invest in well-made brushes, sponges and applicators that can be washed and used over and over. When you buy good quality tools, they help you achieve a more natural-looking makeup application and can even help you use less make-up.

But remember, failure to keep your tools clean leads to broken bristles that will show up on your skin. Cleaning makeup brushes has always been important, but during the pandemic, worries about avoiding exposure to germs and preventing cross-contamination are at an all-time high, so always clean your brushes.

Take advantage of frequent-shopper discounts

Once you find the stores that carry your favourite make-up brands, sign up for their rewards cards so you can accrue points toward future purchases and learn about special promotions. You can often rack up points picking up groceries, pharmaceuticals, and other items on offer, then use the discounts on your choice of cosmetics.



AREEJ AL BALUSHI

Fashionista
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What precautions do you take when selecting make-up items?

I make sure to research or reviews online from other influencers and make-up gurus before purchasing any make-up item. I can't stick to one brand, as an influencer, I receive so many packages of different brands. However, the top three brands which I trust would be KVD Vegan Beauty, Fenty Beauty and Huda Beauty.

I don't usually try testers as I like buying my make-up online. Watching reviews is more than enough for me to decide.

Are online purchases a safe way of buying make-up?

Yes. However, I always like to watch colour swatches online before choosing specific colours, though. I usually shop from only trusted websites/stores to avoid the risk of fake products which can be harmful for the skin. There are alternative affordable make-up brands which are better than using a duplicate product.

How important is it to consider one's skin tone/hair texture while buying beauty products?

It is very important to know your skin type, as people with oily skin should stick to matt finish primers/foundation, water-based make-up, and should stay away from foundation that contains oil, etc. People with dry skin should avoid mattifying products as it dries the skin more. Most brands make different types of primers and foundations, and there's one for every skin type.