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Observer

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RO 100 fine for **not wearing mask in public**

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Acting tough on violators of decisions taken by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) increased the fine for not wearing masks in public places.

The fine for not wearing masks in public places has been increased from RO 20 to RO 100 as per the decision mentioned in the official gazette on Sunday.

The fine will be for not wearing masks in public places (all commercial and industrial activities, workplace in public and private, in transportation and other places, the ROP said.

The Supreme Committee had decided to toughen the penalties against the violators of the decisions issued by the Committee by moving

on to deal sternly with the violators to ensure the safety of individuals and the society in general. This may include publishing the names and pictures of the violators in the media.

Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, on Sunday issued Resolution 194/2020 that amended some provisions of Resolution 151/2020 regarding regulations dealing with violators of the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health announced that 10 people died of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking the total deaths to 318.

The ministry also announced 1,157 new cases, including 933 Omanis and 224 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases in Oman to 66,666.



HM greets Kuwait Emir and Colombian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the success of his surgical operation.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to Shaikh Sabah. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant Shaikh Sabah permanent health, wellbeing and a long life to achieve further aspirations of progress and prosperity for the brotherly Kuwaiti people under his wise leadership.

His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Ivan Duque Marquez of the Republic of Colombia, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Marquez and the Colombian friendly people.

— ONA

COLOURFUL DEPICTION OF OMANI ICONS

“The beauty I saw around me in Oman sparked my creativity. In fact, the quaint buildings and landmarks of the Sultanate were my biggest inspiration for the creation of my series on ‘Arabian Cities and Villages,” says Rebeca Nigrinis, an industrial engineer by training. Her art conveys a seamless blend of her colourful Colombian origins and the strikingly inimitable influences of Oman where she has been living for the past eight years.

DETAILS ON **P20**



OMAN

State Council approves proposals



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The State Council approved today the two proposals submitted by the Economic Committee on “Challenges of the National Manpower in the Private Sector” and “Promoting Entrepreneurship and Local Added Value”.

It also approved the proposal submitted by the team to study “Bank Loans and Insurances”, along with forming technical drafting committees to incorporate the members’ views on these proposals.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthy, head of the Economic Committee, in his statement explained that the study aims to create a national policy and training plan that is included in the state’s five-year plan. This is done with a view of achieving the economic growth targets through planning, activating and measuring the returns of that system and addressing the problems of training governance, management system and institutional performance, in line with the criteria proposed in the

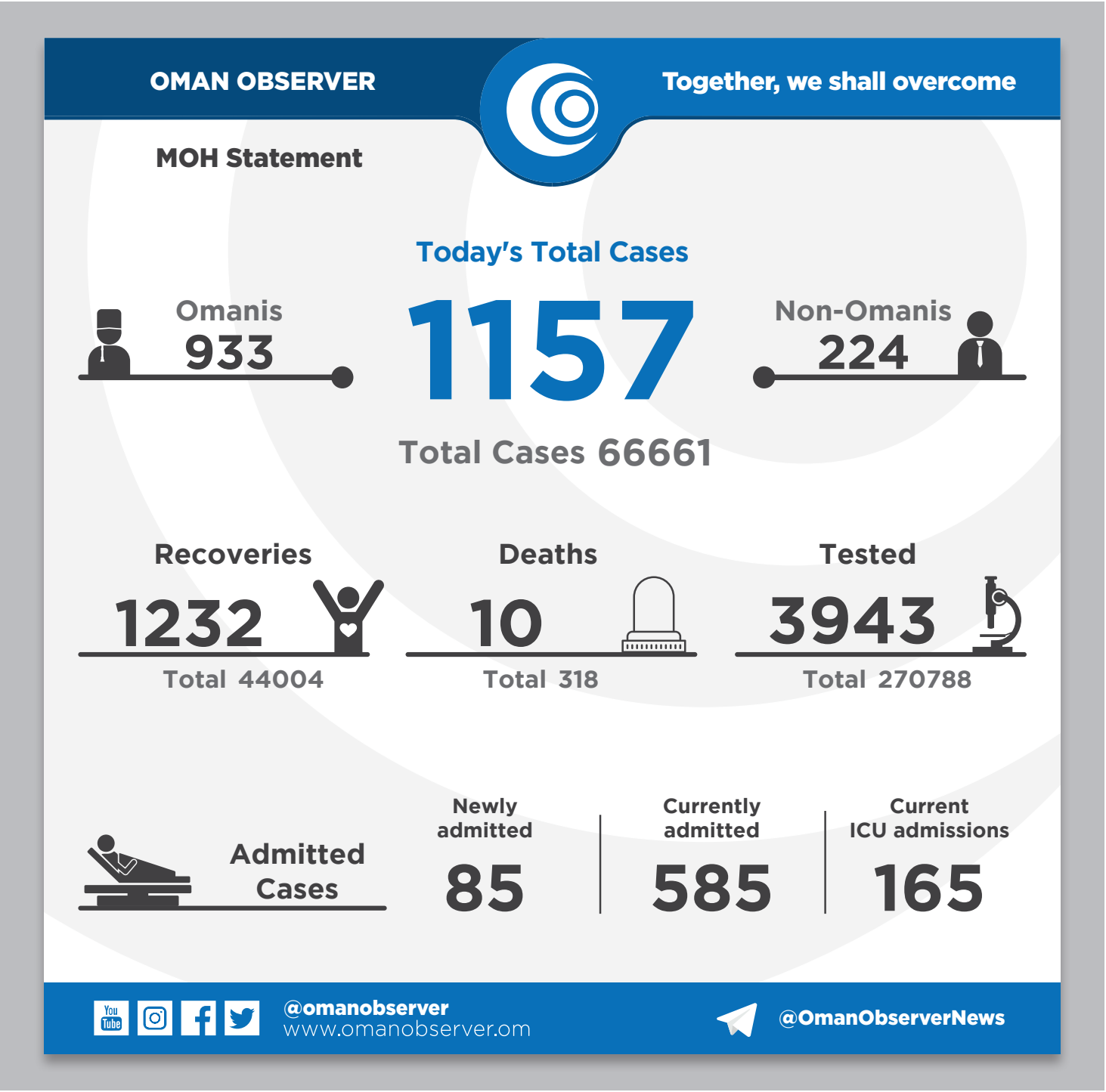
study. “The new challenges arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic, and the consequent bankruptcy of a large number of commercial institutions and loss of jobs for many workers, underscores the need to boost the market, and support the economy from plunging into deep recession,” he said.

The Economic Committee head highlighted the efforts of the Council in this regard, noting that the study focussed on “challenges of developing the private sector and labour market policies.”

The first annual sitting for the

7th period was presided over by Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council.

The Council reviewed reports submitted by Shaikh Ali bin Nasser al Mahrooqi and Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani on the third session of the Arab Parliament and its standing committees, in addition to reviewing a study submitted by the Council’s Information and Research Center on “the Environmental Impacts of Development Projects in the Sultanate - Sociological Treatment for Environment”.



Shura to discuss draft tax laws

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'Shura will hold sessions from July 20 to 23 to discuss value added tax and an amendment of the income tax law.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'Shura said in a statement that the opinion of the State Council will also be presented on the articles bearing differences between the two councils regarding the personal data protection law.

He said: “Majlis Ash'Shura will discuss the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee about the agreement on the Sultanate's joining

to the Geneva Act under the title (Appellations of origin and geographical indications), in addition to a number of issues related to reports of the permanent working committees namely “Youth and Human Resources”, “Health and Environmental”, “Economic and Financial” and “Media and Culture”.

Shaikh al Nadabi indicated that Shura will review, during these sessions, a number of ministerial responses on the supervisory tools that were previously submitted by members of the majlis during the current sitting.

— ONA



Omran acquires 100% stake in Muttrah waterfront project

MUSCAT: Muttrah Tourism Development Company announced that partners agreed to restructure stakes at the seafront project of Sultan Qaboos Port.

A statement issued by the company explained that, in view of the restructure, UAE-based Port Investment Ltd (PIL) will transfer its 70 per cent stake to Omran Group, which owns 30 per cent of the company's shares, thereby enabling Omran to take over the shares according to the value stated in the previous agreement.

After the share transfer, the ownership of Muttrah Tourism Development Company will be 100 per cent-trans-

ferred to Omran company. Accordingly, the ownership of all the assets of the project, including land allocated to the project, development maps and executed works will be transferred to Omran's investment portfolio.

Omran will then take over the development of the project on behalf of Oman's government.

The statement added that, despite the restructure which terminates the existing partnership, the quest for further opportunities will continue between Omran and PIL in a variety of projects in the Sultanate, and this will bring about new tourism investments and jobs for Omanis. — **ONA**

Low pressure brings heavy rains in Dhofar

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The low-pressure system in the Arabian Sea brought heavy rains in eastern parts of the Dhofar Governorate. Most of the coastal and desert areas received moderate to heavy rains on Sunday.

Salalah city also witnessed heavy rain in the wee hours on Sunday. The rain has completely subsided now. Some low-lying areas were waterlogged due to rains.

Mirbat recorded heavy rain and rescue operations had to be carried out on Sunday to protect a stranded person in the city.

The Road to Tawi Atair has been blocked due to the accumulation of stones on a long patch of the road. The authorities are working to clear the road.

A resident, however, said it would take two to three days to clear the road for traffic movement.

Water supply has also been disrupted in most parts of the Mirbat city due to damage to water supply pipelines. Work is on to restore water supply.

According to a source in the Salalah Met Office, the current disturbance that started on Friday continued till Sunday with rain and thundershowers in some areas.

Most of the desert areas received moderate to heavy rains with strong winds mostly in the desert areas

IN BRIEF

Bids open for PCR kits

MUSCAT: Oman Airports has invited bids for the supply, installation, and operation of PCR testing kits. "Oman Airport invites qualified local and international companies to submit proposals for the supply, installation, and operation of PCR testing solutions at all the locations identified by the Ministry of Health and at Muscat International, Salalah, and regional Airports," the company said. The deadline for the tender is July 30.

2 held for fraud in S Al Batinah

MUSCAT: The South Al Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested a man and two women (two Arabs and a European national), on charges of fraud and sorcery, Royal Oman Police said on Twitter. The citizen who brought the fraudsters on tourist visas and rented out his house to them, was also arrested. ROP cautions against dealing with imposters and fraudsters and calls upon the members of the public to report such suspected crimes at the nearest police station.

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OIA restructures boards, names new chairmen

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the restructuring of boards of directors of 15 government firms.

A statement said Oman Investment Authority appointed 79 people to represent the OIA as heads and members of boards in the firms under its supervision.

The statement also announced the appointment of new chairmen for firms affiliated to OIA, noting that the rest of members will continue in their positions to ensure efficient management and ideal

governance. The boards of directors will operate in line with proper governance procedures and a national agenda to be supervised by the OIA, according to the statement.

Following are the names of new chairmen:

Mohammed bin Ali al Barwani — chairman, Oman Air

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Saadi — chairman, Oman Aviation Group

Mohammed al Busaidi — chairman, Omran

Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy — chairman, Asyad Group

Eng Ahmed bin Saleh al Jahdhami — chairman, Port of Duqm

Bader Saud al Kharusi — chairman, Oman Mineral Development Company

Saif Ali al Hinai — chairman, Al Mouj Muscat

Said Salim Said al Shanfari — chairman, Oman Sail Company

Salam Said al Shaqsi — chairman, Oman Housing Bank

Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan — chairman, Oman Development Bank

Qais bin Zahir al Hosani — chairman, Oman Tourism College.

Pregnant women must take extra care against COVID-19

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: There is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get coronavirus than other people. But because of the changes women go through during pregnancy, they may be more likely to get infected. They should take precautions and attend periodic consultations, said the Ministry of Health in a statement on Sunday.

There are 70 pregnant COVID-19 patients admitted in various hospitals in the Sultanate. Nine among them are in the ICU, according to Dr Moza Abdullah al Suliamani, Director of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, at the Royal Hospital.

Dr Moza said that most pregnant COVID-19 patients have mild symptoms. Mothers have recovered and no neonatal deaths were recorded till now. "Most COVID-19 admissions at the Royal Hospital were high-risk and they got infected from the husband or one of the family members."

Dr Al Suliamani said the department faces some challenges like non-reporting of coronavirus infection



THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TILL DATE THAT A PREGNANT WOMAN WITH THE DISEASE CAN PASS THE CORONAVIRUS TO HER FOETUS OR BABY DURING PREGNANCY OR DELIVERY. THE VIRUS HAS NOT BEEN FOUND IN SAMPLES OF AMNIOTIC FLUID OR BREAST MILK, ACCORDING TO THE WHO

by pregnant women, which is highly risky for the staff and patient's families.

There is no evidence till date that a pregnant woman with the disease can pass the coronavirus to her foetus or baby during pregnancy or delivery. The virus has not been found in samples of amniotic fluid or breast milk, according to the WHO.

The Ministry of Health stressed the importance of adhering to preventive measures to reduce the

chances of virus exposure and infection. It has advised pregnant women to continue regular follow up in the health institutions where all protection means are provided.

The pregnant women should seek checkups at the nearest health institution for fever, cough, sore throat, or diarrhoea. They should also eat nutritious food and minimise stress.

Because the health of pregnant women is a priority, several measures have

been taken to facilitate and speed up the checkup of pregnant women to primary healthcare institutions.

Pregnant women should take the same precautions, if not extra, to avoid COVID-19 infection as other people. They must use face masks, wash hands frequently, maintain social distancing, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, and cover face when coughing or sneezing with tissue and dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Global maritime firms to drop anchor

MUSCAT: The Sultanate seeks to improve business and investment activities in its seaports as a measure to attract operators of international shipping lines and maximise benefits from the prominent geographical position as an eastern gateway for the Arabian Peninsula.

Oman boasts a variety of deep water ports that enable global operators of shipping lines to easily carry out major cargo operations.

Oman Shipping Company, an arm of Asyad Group, works to realise Asyad's initiative to revolutionise Omani seaports and achieve its performance targets as part of an overall revamp of the logistics service sector. The initiative continues to make headway since its inception in 2019 through the establishment of the commercial arm of Oman



Container Line and maritime services offered to GCC states and India.

Oman Container Line seeks to increase the number of transported containers and accordingly, managed to achieve 7 per cent additional performance along Indian Express Line during the first half of this year, despite challenges posed by coronavirus (Covid-19).

In this context, Ziyad bin Abdullah al Harbi, Strategic Planning & Research, Oman Shipping Company, said that the company's initiative achieved high performance indicators and that the pandemic did not affect the firm very seriously,

since operational infrastructure for Oman Container Line had already been established prior to the onset of COVID-19 way back in 2019. The first direct shipping route to Indian ports was operated by December 2019 as part of the inauguration of Express India Service Line.

This was in addition to expansion in commercial operations of container shipping along all other routes operated by the company, said Ziyad, noting that this step contributed to enhancing Asyad Group's preparedness to deal with the pandemic, while at the same time opening up direct shipping lines that, in turn, reinforced direct import and export, supported the national economy and provided the basic needs of the Sultanate – and this truth stood stark clear in the midst of the crisis.

— ONA

Cleaner's joy and pain of bidding adieu to Muscat



KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: He is happy to be going back home after serving several years in the Sultanate. At the same time, he is sad for permanent departure from his second home Oman, even though he worked as an expatriate civic worker for 20 years in Muscat Municipality.

Ramdas, 56, admits the country gave him everything he wanted in life. He built a house, educated children to their wish, daughters got married and son joined a company back in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh recently. He had developed some special bonds with the people and the area he served.

"Reaching back home may be a pleasurable experience for many. But for me, Oman has been my home away from home for the last 26 years and it fed me all these years," an emotional Das told the Observer.

His typical day begins at 4 am when he wakes up and gets ready for the bus from the municipality that comes to pick the staff and distributes at different parts of the city. He would begin his duty with a foldable claw grabber in one hand and a green storage bag in the other hand. His walk would continue for two to three hours before he takes a short break. However, exactly after 8 hours of duty, he would be brought back along with others back to the camp.

"Years passed so fast. I had worked in another area of Ruwi for six years before I began my 20 years relationship with Al Falaj area in Ruwi. All my supervisors were very kind and generous. They helped me whenever I had an emergency," said a contended Das.

"One thing I have noticed in Ramdas is the punctuality. We know its 7'o clock if we spot him in front of my house and that has been the practice for many years. I keep seeing him since my school days," says Ahmed al Hosni, a resident of Ruwi.

"We have a lot to learn from Das. Virtues like commitment, perseverance, accepting life with no complaints, dedication and giving 100 per cent to an assigned task, are some of the qualities that I have noticed in him," Ahmed, a management executive added.

Ramdas is awaiting his turn on one of the repatriation flights to India before saying goodbye to the country that has 'fed' him and his family for 26 years.

Oman Observer

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Ministry of Oil and Gas

Auction Announcement

Ministry of Oil and Gas would like to announce an open invitation to the public to participate in a sealed auction described in the table below.

Auction No	Material Type (Description)	Location	Visit Date	Bid Closing Date	Bank Guarantee amount
1/2020	Used movables and furniture	General Office building of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Ministries District AL Khuwair	From 26/7/2020 To 27/7/2020	28/7/2020 at 10:00 am	OMR 200

In accordance with the following terms & conditions:

1- Bidders shall be required to submit the Bank Guarantee prior to have the access for online bidding, where the date of online auction will be on 27/7/2020 to 28/7/2020 10:00 am. This is a refundable amount and shall be returned to the non-successful bidders after bid evaluation.

2- Items offered for sale can be viewed as stated in the above table from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and "As it is-where it is" basis.

3- Interested Bidders shall be required to register and submit their offer on this link https://mazad.om/owner/32

4- Items descriptions / quantity will be shown in the E-auction platform.

5- The successful bidder shall pay 3% of the awarded amount to Mazad.om as an "Auction Fees".

6- The successful bidder shall pay full bid amount within three (3) working days from the date of notification of award. In the event that awarded bidder fails to pay the outstanding amounts within the specified period, the bidder shall be disqualified and the guarantee provided as part of the bid will be forfeited

7- The successful bidder is responsible to follow the Ministry of Oil and Gas instruction & HSE procedure and to provide all the necessary arrangement for loading and transporting Vehicles.

8- The successful bidder shall collect the vehicles within a maximum period of five (5) dayes working days Failing to do so will result in paying penalty charges of 50 OMR for each day of delay beyond the above period.

9- The Ministry of Oil and Gas with Mazad Oman Company reserves the right to take any action it seems appropriate without giving any reason.

For more information regards to the online bidding registration, please contact info@mazad.om or Mobile number +968 91900950

OMAN

THREE PROJECTS QUALIFY FOR FALLING WALLS LAB CONTEST

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Out of the 13 participants, three projects were selected to compete in the finals of Falling Walls Lab Competition.

The Research Council (TRC) last week awarded the best project to Razan al Kalbani for preparing an environmentally friendly chemical compound to be used as a high-quality shield in X-ray attenuation. The chemical compound is characterised by its flexibility and ease of formation.

The second best project of Dr Hanan al Lawati was on reducing complications risk of cardiovascular drugs using nanoparticles without compromising the efficacy. The third best project of Samah al Sarhani was on using fish waste in the pharma, food and lubricant industry.

Depending on the seats that will be allocated for participants from Oman by the Falling Walls Foundation, one or two projects will attend the virtual Falling Walls Lab global contest, which will be held on November 8 in Berlin.

The 13 finalists of the Falling Walls Lab Competition presented



their research projects and business models, varying across different disciplines, in a duration of three minutes each.

Delivering the opening remarks, Dr Saif al Hiddabi, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning and Business Development at TRC, said, "Organising this competition falls within the efforts put by The Research Council for developing new methods for scientific communication and establishing long-term, firm and sustainable connections."

Dr Saif al Hiddabi conveyed his sincere thanks to Oman LNG for its support to this competition and their

belief in the importance of its goals and the importance of partnership between industry, research and academia sectors.

Due to the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, all the contesters presented their projects online, before the competition jury, which comprised Dr Mohamed al Mughairi, Petroleum Service Commercialisation Manager at the PDO; Dr Farah al Barwani, Research and Development Manager at Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah); Hilal al Shibli, General Manager at Makers Oman; Abdullah al Balushi, Team leader at Oman

Animal & Plant Genetic Resources Center (OAPGRC); Dr Abdullah al Muniri, Director of Medical Field at Oman Medical Specialty Board; and Dr Adhra al Mawali, Director of Studies and Research Center at the Ministry Of Health.

The Falling Walls Lab competition, which is organised by TRC for the fifth consecutive year, in collaboration with Falling Walls Foundation in Germany, aims at boosting innovative ideas and business models among researchers and entrepreneurs across different fields. The competition also provides a platform for young researchers to meet scholars.

RO 92m for Al Amerat wastewater treatment

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Haya Water has been implementing a number of projects in Al Amerat at a total cost of RO 92 million while following the standards and specifications stipulated by the concerned authorities.

About the continuous services in the Company, Hussain bin Hassan AbdulHussain, Haya Water CEO, said: "Realising



the negative impact of the traditional wastewater

septic tanks and the leakage reaching groundwa-

ter, Haya Water has been implementing a number of projects in Al Amerat at a total cost of RO 92 million. The cost covers transportation, collection, treatment and the optimal use of the treated water by re-using it in irrigation and other purposes". AbdulHussain stated that Al Amerat Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) consists of the treatment unit with a capacity of 18,000 cubic metres per day in its first phase.



China’s capital Beijing to lower COVID-19 response

BEIJING: Beijing will lower the emergency response level of the coronavirus outbreak in the Chinese capital to Level III from level II starting on July 20, a municipal government official said on Sunday.

The city issued the second level response on June 16 after a cluster of new coronavirus cases was found to be linked to Xinfadi, a major wholesale food market in a southwestern district of Beijing.

Since June 11, Beijing has recorded a total of 335 cases linked to Xinfadi, but no new cases have been reported in the past two weeks.

“Overall, the risks of getting coronavirus infection in Beijing... and exporting to other regions are low, and the general situation of tackling the pandemic is under control,” said Liu Bei, vice secretary of the Beijing Municipal government, told a news conference.

After lowering the coronavirus response, Beijing will reopen parks, tourism sites, gyms, libraries and museums, but will cap the number



Overall, the risks of getting coronavirus infection in Beijing... and exporting to other regions are low, and the general situation of tackling the pandemic is under control.

LIU BEI,
VICE SECRETARY OF
THE BEIJING MUNICIPAL
GOVERNMENT

of visitors at 50 per cent of capacity.

Conferences with no more than 500 participants will be allowed, while exhibitions, sports matches and cinemas are also expected to reopen gradually, Liu said.

Meanwhile, the deadly coronavirus is spreading out of control in Hong Kong with a record 100 new cases confirmed, the finance hub's leader said on Sunday as she tightened social distancing measures to tackle the sudden surge in infections.

The finance hub was one of the first places to be struck by the virus when it emerged from central China.

But the city had impressive success in tackling the disease, all but ending local transmissions by late June.

However, in the last two weeks, infections have spiked once more and doctors fear the new outbreak is now spreading undetected in the densely packed territory of 7.5 million people. — **AFP**

IN BRIEF

BANGLADESHIS SHUN TESTING AFTER FAKE SCREENING SCANDAL

DHAKA: The number of people being tested for coronavirus in Bangladesh has fallen by almost half, officials said on Sunday, in the wake of a huge screening scandal. The number of tests carried out daily has fallen from about 18,000 in late June to just over 10,000 in the past two weeks, the health department said. The huge drop followed the arrest of more than a dozen people, including a Dhaka hospital owner, on charges they issued fake certificates to thousands of patients saying they were virus-free without testing them. “The panic among the people (over the virus) has gone,” health department spokeswoman Nasima Sultana said about the lower testing figures.

IRANIAN OFFICIALS PLAY DOWN FIGURE OF 25M INFECTED

TEHRAN: Iranian health officials sought on Sunday to play down the president's estimate that some 25 million people have been infected with the coronavirus, saying it was based on serological blood tests that measure exposure to the illness and that cannot be relied on to show the current state of disease. The 25-million figure put forward by President Rouhani on Saturday is nearly a third of the population and massively higher than the official number of COVID-19 cases. Official case numbers rose to 273,788 on Sunday, with 14,188 deaths, Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said.

DOZENS DETAINED AS GERMAN ‘CORONA PARTY’ ESCALATES

FRANKFURT: Thirty-nine people were detained after police were attacked with “a hail of bottles” at an open-air party in central Frankfurt attended by thousands of youngsters, police in the German city said on Sunday. Five officers were injured in the riot that began at around 3:00 am when police intervened to stop a brawl involving around 30 people in Frankfurt's historic Opera square. The square has become a popular gathering place for what local media have dubbed “corona parties” as Germany's bars and clubs remain closed to contain the spread of the virus. — **Agencies**

WORLD

Syrians vote for new parliament amid war, economic turmoil

DAMASCUS: Syrians voted on Sunday to elect a new parliament as the Damascus government grapples with international sanctions and a crumbling economy after retaking large parts of the war-torn country.

More than 7,400 polling stations opened across government-held parts of Syria, including for the first time in former opposition strongholds, the electoral commission said.

President Bashar al Assad's Baath party and its allies are expected to take most of parliament's 250 seats in the third such polls to be held since the war started nine years ago.

In Damascus, dozens of voters — some in face masks to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus — headed to polling stations to cast their ballots, an AFP correspondent said.

Inside one centre, several posted their choice in a sealed envelope into a plastic ballot box, as organisers in face coverings and gloves looked on.

Nearby, volunteers carried the programmes and pictures of their candidates of choice, and tried to draw in passersby to come and vote. Hana Sukriye, 29, an employee at the finance



ministry, said she was voting for the first time in her life.

"My vote alone won't make a difference, but if we all come together to choose worthy candidates, there will be an impact and change," she said.

"Everybody needs to choose now so that they can later hold accountable and object to the performance of candidates who get elected" if necessary.

On the eve of the polls, one person was killed and another wounded in a blast in Damascus, state news agency SANA said, but the cause of the explosion was not immediately clear.

Several lists were allowed to run across the country but any real opposition is absent, and the ruling Baath party is expected to retain its hegemony.

Portraits of the contenders have been displayed

across the capital for weeks, with the 1,658 candidates including several prominent businessmen.

The elections, twice postponed from April due to the coronavirus pandemic, come at a time when most Syrians are worried about the soaring cost of living.

Many candidates are running on programmes pledging to tackle inflation and improve infrastructure ravaged by the conflict. — **AFP**

Netanyahu corruption trial resumes as anger over virus grows

TEL AVIV: Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial resumed after a two-month hiatus on Sunday, a court spokeswoman confirmed, as the Israeli prime minister and his cabinet face growing outrage over their handling of the coronavirus crisis. In the second session since the trial opened on May 24, prosecutors are expected to request that the Jerusalem District Court call up the first witnesses in three to four months. The court in May ruled that Netanyahu would not have to be present for the second session.

All-female crew embarks on Black Sea patrol

SEVASTOPOL: In a first for the Russian Navy, an all-female navy crew carried out patrols on the Black Sea in preparation for Russia's Navy Day celebrations later this month. The crew, on board a patrol boat, fulfilled a broad array of drills on their maiden voyage, simulating how they would react to an incursion by saboteurs including by tossing RGD-5 hand grenades into the sea. "I decided to become a member of the crew because it's very interesting," said Olga Chelkova, a senior engine mechanic.

Floods in India, Nepal displace nearly 4 million

GUWAHATI: Nearly four million people in India's northeastern state of Assam and neighbouring Nepal have been displaced by heavy flooding from monsoon rains, with dozens missing as deaths rose to at least 189, government officials said on Sunday. The overflowing Brahmaputra River, which flows through China's Tibet, India and Bangladesh, has damaged crops and triggered mudslides, displacing millions of people, officials said. More than 2.75 million people in Assam have been displaced by three waves of floods since late May. — **Agencies**



Biden faces pressure in search for running mate

JOSEPH AX & TREVOR HUNNICUTT

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden is facing pressure from contending groups inside his party as he prepares to interview a shortlist of women for the most important hire of his political career: his running mate.

Biden, who committed to choosing a woman for the job he held for eight years under President Barack Obama, said last week he expected the background vetting process to conclude around July 24. He would then interview each finalist before making a decision, expected by early August.

The selection of the vice-presidential candidate has taken on outsize importance this year, reflecting the desperation to defeat Republican President Donald Trump among Democrats, who have agonised over which candidate would give Biden the biggest boost in the November 3 election.

Biden leads in national and battleground-state opinion polls as voters fault Trump for his handling of the coronavirus pan-

demic, the subsequent economic recession and race relations.

Adding to the weight of Biden's choice, he would be 78 at his January inauguration, making him the oldest US president and setting up his vice president as an early front-runner for the 2024 race should he serve only one term.

"There's a lot of attention on this for a number of reasons, not least of which that Vice President Biden is 77 years old," former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said.

Reid, who has had several conversations about the topic with Biden, said the list narrowed in recent weeks but remained fairly large.

The women under serious consideration include Senators Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren and Tammy Duckworth; US Representatives Val Demings and Karen Bass; former US national security adviser Susan Rice; New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham; and Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, according to interviews with Democratic officials. — **Reuters**

Numbers are not an illusion...



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

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Fighting the battle more than once does not mean that one is strong enough to win the game! Battling with coronavirus is extremely risky, many have got into this battle, either by force or choice, but some could not make it. Yes, COVID-19 is just a virus, but it is a fatal one. However, not all are taking precautionary measures seriously, so the number of infected is increasing all over the world.

It has been said once that numbers rule the world, and it certainly reflects how coronavirus is aggressively attacking people. The statistics of infections and deaths speak for themselves, reflecting the tragedy that people are living and the cold war they are fighting. Numbers do not feel; they do not even bleed, weep or hope. They, also, never lie, only humans should understand what they are trying to indicate. What matters is that how people perceive the connotation behind numbers.

Studies show that the way people hear and understand health statistics can be influenced by how the numbers are described or framed. Different descriptions can affect how clear the information is and what emotions it brings. For instance, the statement "around 20 per cent of the people are infected with coronavirus will get extremely severe symptoms" might sound less scary from another different perspective stating, "nearly 80 per cent of the infected people will not get extremely severe symptoms of coronavirus."

A different information might seem clearer described as a percentage like "more than 1 in 5 infections will eventually die of coronavirus."

On the local front, the number of infected is hitting four digits every day. The Sultanate recently has seen an explosion of coronavirus cases compared to the past months. The rapid increase in number of infections and deaths is frustrating. Much of the new surge of infected cases appears to follow from the recent reopening of new business activities, but it was mainly due to non-adherence to precautionary measures and social distancing. People get involved in different social activities and recklessly flock to public places.

Gambling with health to risk your life is an unforgivable sin. Perhaps the daily high number of coronavirus infections is not hard enough to teach people a lesson. But what could be harder than seeing the number of infections increasing by double fold, and an average of half a dozen people are dying every day! One should always remember that prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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

BUSINESS

Instant Banking Services

Mobile Payments System

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

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UK'S BSI TO DEVELOP NATIONAL BUILDING CODE FOR OMAN

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The globally renowned British Standards Institution (BSI), which has played a key role in the drafting of national and international standards for industry products and services for over a century, has been roped in by Oman to help with the formulation of a National Building Code for the Sultanate.

Plans for the introduction of a set of modern, standardised building regulations for the Sultanate are in line with a broader effort to support the development of energy-efficient building construction. Energy efficiency and energy conservation are key priorities for the Omani government in light of the unsustainable cost associated with keeping buildings suitably air-conditioned particularly during the hot summer season.

The Supreme Committee for Planning is overseeing the formulation of a National Building Code – a set of regulations governing the design and construction of constructed objects, choice of materials

BUILDING REGULATIONS:

The AER is assisting the Supreme Council of Planning with the development of energy efficiency and sustainability codes to establish clear outcomes and performance modeling for power, energy, water and waste management for all new buildings in Oman.

used, and so on.

Building codes are designed not only to safeguard the health and well-being of occupants and the general public, but also prescribe guidelines to be kept in mind by designers and contractors from the architectural, aesthetics, construction integrity, and energy efficiency standpoints.

Last year, the Supreme Council of Planning appointed the British Standards Institution (BSI) as project advisor for the initiative. It also set up a Steering Committee, chaired by the Authority for Electricity Regulation (AER) Oman, which has been given the mandate by the Council of Ministers to champion energy efficiency and energy conservation as a strategic national goal.

“The Authority is assisting the Supreme Council of Planning with the development of energy efficiency and sustainability codes to

establish clear outcomes and performance modeling for power, energy, water and waste management for all new buildings in Oman,” AER stated in its 2019 Annual Report issued here last week.

The steering committee headed by the Authority will mainly be responsible for “approving project phases and providing support and guidance to the technical team formed under its supervision”, it further noted.

Over its 100-plus-year history, the British Standards Institution is credited with crafting over 58,000 standards, including the world’s three most widely adopted standards: quality management, environmental management and occupational health and safety. It currently offers its expertise to institutions, businesses and organisations in nearly 193 countries around the world.

In a related initiative, the Authority for Electricity Regulation Oman is spearheading a campaign for the retrofitting of government buildings with the aim of making them energy efficient and thereby helping pare the sizable electricity bills racked up by government ministries and departments.

An energy audit of government buildings piloted by the regulator has determined that energy bills can be reduced by an average of 30 per cent if suitable retrofits and energy conservation measures are implemented. It has espoused the internationally-accepted Energy Service Companies (ESCO) model for the roll-out of retrofitting services targeting government buildings.

To assist in establishing a working model for ESCOs in Oman, the Authority has retained the services of Danish Energy Management (DEM), international specialists in energy sustainability. DEM is providing advisory services to the regulator on the tendering on an initial batch of 14 government buildings identified for retrofitting.

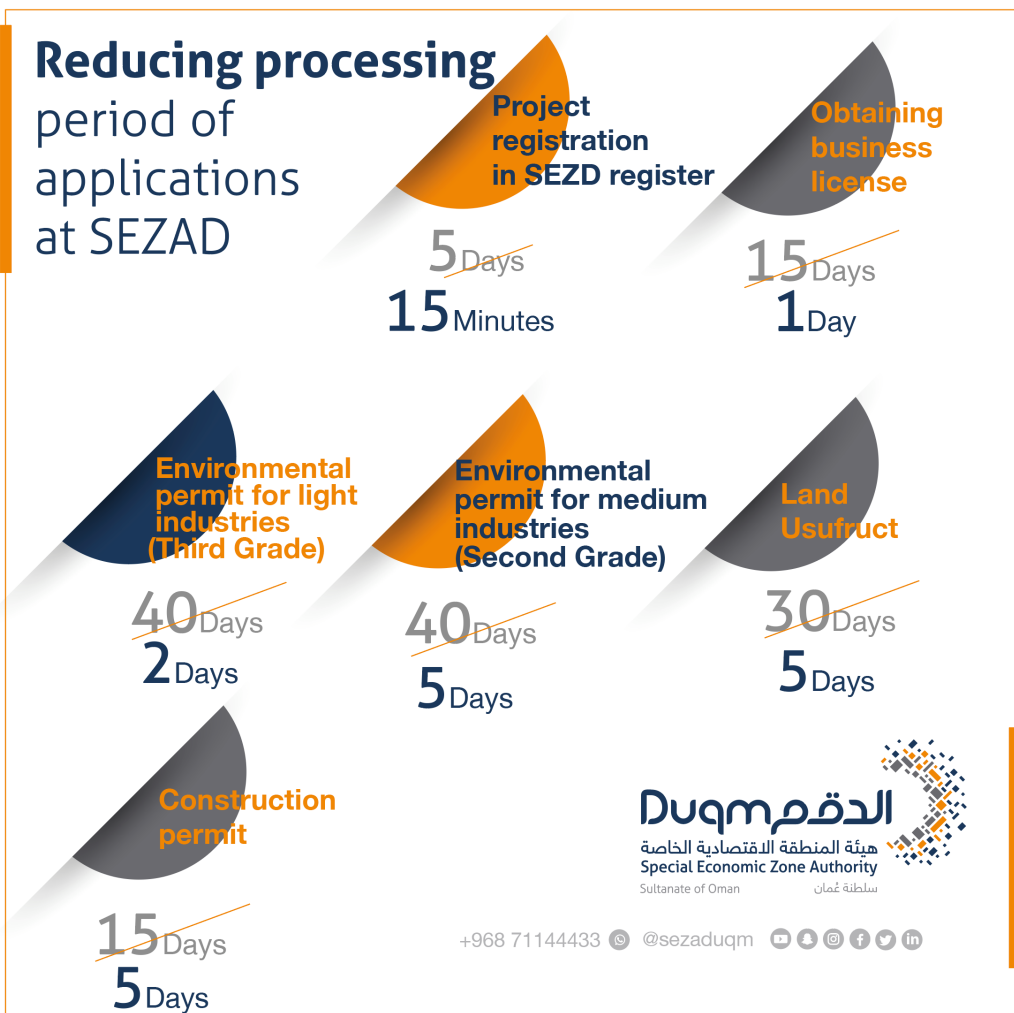
SEZAD pledges project registrations in 15 minutes

MUSCAT: The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD) announced on Sunday dramatic reductions in the time required to process investor applications. The move is aimed at accelerating investment in the SEZ and positioning Duqm as an investment destination of choice in the region.

SEZAD Chief Executive Officer Dr Ismail bin Ahmed al Balushi (pictured) said that reducing the processing period of investors' applications is another positive step towards attracting investors by completing their applications speedily.

"The digital transformation plan being currently implemented by SEZAD has contributed on reducing the time required for completing investors' applications, leading to have this decision that serves investors and customers alike when processing their requests.

In addition, investors can get their business license from SEZAD in just one day without approaching other entities once all required documents are submitted. This will ensure that projects can start their economic activities in a



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION:

Oman's leading industrial and economic hub slashes processing time for investor applications.

speedy and flexible manner," he said.

The new procedures include reducing project registration from 5 days to 15 minutes only. SEZAD offers investors' two options to register their companies, either by visiting the One-Stop Shop in Duqm or Muscat to register the company and pay the prescribed fees in 15 minutes or by processing the registration through the services portal on SEZAD website and paying the fees online.

Dr Al Balushi stated that SEZAD welcomes various types of companies from different parts of the world.

He pointed out that, investors can register their projects in the commercial register of SEZD in any legal form available in the Sultanate as per the new companies law issued in 2019. The new law came up with the sole company as a legal form to start their business. In addition, investors can register their companies as a branch of a local company whose main business headquarter is outside the Zone or register as a branch of an international company whose main business is a broad.

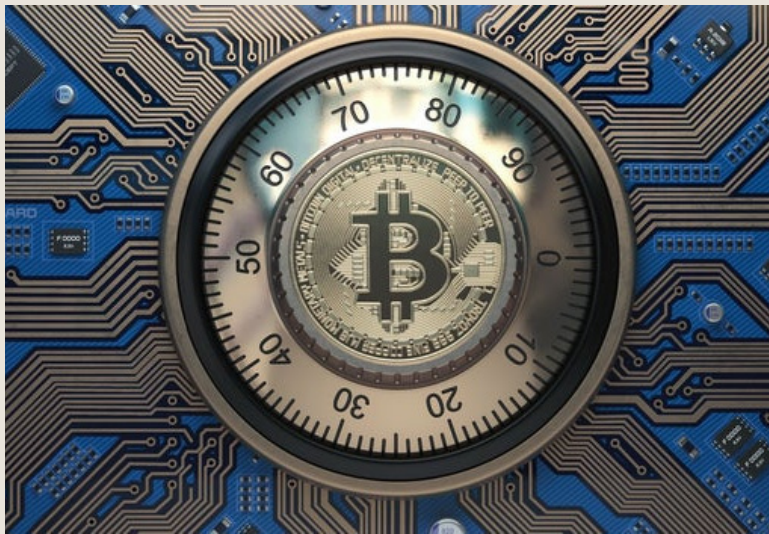
SEZAD has also compiled all of the services provided to investors into an inte-

grated guide, which describes investment requirements, applications processing periods, and prescribed fees of each service. The guide also provides an overview of SEZAD, the investment incentives of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and investment steps. SEZAD will be printing the services guide in the coming few months and upload it on SEZAD website to facilitate investors access. The guide, which is around 100 pages in Arabic and English, introduces around 60 different services to investors.

Processing of usufruct application will take five days instead of 30 days in the past. In fact, processing usufruct applications takes several stages to be completed by the competent departments including Land Usufruct Department, Urban Planning and Survey Department and GIS Department.

The first stage in Land Usufruct application starts with the investor choosing the required land and area. SEZAD gives investors the right to choose the land depending on the project type and its feasibility; subsequently the One-Stop Shop contacts the investor within 5 working days and provide him with a sample of the usufruct agreement for his revision and comments before signing the agreement.

CBO issues advisory against crypto-currencies



MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has reiterated that it has not licensed any agency or bank to trade in crypto-currencies.

Consequently, protections granted under the Banking Law 112/2012 do not cover such digital or virtual currencies, as well as activities involving their usage. The regulator warned that anyone transacting with crypto-currency dealers do so

at their peril, and potentially expose themselves to financial, operational, legal and security risks.

Furthermore, the National Center for Financial Information (NCFI), the Sultanate's frontline financial intelligence agency operating under the auspices of the Royal Oman Police, does not regard crypto-currency based transactions as legal under current Omani laws, it noted.

BUSINESS

OMANTEL GROUP ACHIEVES RO 100M NET PROFIT IN H1

MUSCAT: Oman Telecommunications Company SAOG Group announced its financial results for the six-month period ended June 30, 2020 achieving a net profit of RO 100.5 million (before non-controlling interests) compared to RO 126.5 million in 2019, a decline of 20.5 per cent.

This decline on the business was mainly driven by a 27 per cent year-on-year (YoY) decline in Group's net profit for the second quarter of 2020 due to the unavoidable impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, predominantly on the core mobile business. The Group recorded relatively stable consolidated revenues reaching RO 1242 million in first half of 2020 compared to RO 1258 million in 2019.

Omantel Group achieved these results despite the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic that virtually halted economic activity and travel across the region. Omantel's management priority was to ensure its network was operating at

optimal levels to provide vital connectivity to the Omani authorities and community, as demand for mobile and fixed broadband reached historic highs.

Omantel domestic operations revenue witnessed an increase of 11 per cent YoY reaching RO 288 million in the first half of 2020 compared to RO 259 million in the same period of 2019. This was mainly driven by increase in international transit international wholesale business and handset revenues, which are typically low margin revenue streams compared to the core mobile operation's revenue. Adjusted for the above, core mobile related

revenues for first half of 2020 was RO 221 million compared to RO 232.5 million in 2019, a decrease of 5 per cent YoY which had a significant impact on EBITDA and net profit during the period.

Zain Group contributed RO 94.8 million to the net profit in the first half of 2020 (before non-controlling interest) of Omantel Group compared to RO 114.8 million in 2019 a decrease of 17.4 per cent YoY. After adjusting for non-controlling interest, Zain Group contributed RO 18.2 million in the first half of 2020 compared to RO 21.4 million in year 2019.

Commenting on these results, Talal bin Said al

Mamari, CEO of Omantel said, "There is no doubt that the Corona pandemic and the precautionary measures taken by the concerned authorities to alleviate its effects have affected all business sectors around the world. Omantel proactively sought to mitigate the impacts of this pandemic, first by focusing on providing vital connectivity to all to ensure access to essential medical, commercial and financial services. Second, our business continuity strategy saw the implementation of a number of innovative measures and initiatives to mitigate the effects of the lockdown on the business".



MEDRC supports Omani start-ups in water treatment sector

MUSCAT: As the economy adapts to the impact of Covid-19, MEDRC has launched the 'Tahyla for SMEs Programme' to support local start-ups in the water treatment sector, boosting job creation and economic growth.

The programme has been launched in partnership with bp Oman and under the patronage of Mohammed Abdullah al Mahrouqi, Chairman of Public Authority for Water (Diam).

Yousuf al Ojaili, BP Oman President commented: "Our purpose at bp is to reimagine energy for people and our

planet. This is a great example of how we're doing that - supporting SME understanding of water and energy conservation, a vital part of Oman's future growth. Training young Omani entrepreneurs in technologies such as solar powered desalination and grey water treatment offers real business opportunities."

Solar powered desalination units can offer a financially viable and sustainable long-term solution to Oman's farmers. A small business that emerges from this programme will be equipped to help farmers tackle the challenge of crop irrigation using the latest solar technologies.

MEDRC's Tahya programme has been training young Omanis in desalination since 2017. This new programme will target graduates who are looking

to develop their technical skills and start their own business. The three-month long intensive training course will be delivered virtually at MEDRC's state-of-the-art training centre in Muscat.

During the virtual launch event, Ciarán Ó Cuinn, MEDRC's Centre Director commented: "The Tahyla for SMEs programme is underpinned by MEDRC's commitment to look for ways to produce low cost, environmentally friendly water and Oman's national objective of fostering the growth of private enterprise. Through the support of our partners we will deliver a comprehensive training programme that will build the capacity of our brightest young graduates and put them on the pathway to self-employment and job creation."

Oman Oil Marketing adds LPG retail unit

MUSCAT: In another first, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed an agreement with Muscat Gases Company (MGC) to sell and refill cooking gas cylinders through LPG retail units at select service stations. The five-year partnership is the latest in a line of collaborations OOMCO has secured to transform its service stations into integrated service hubs, and drive its customer satisfaction and growth.

“We are always looking to add more value to the communities in which we operate and enhance the customer experience through



convenient and quality products. Our latest agreement with MGC builds on our extensive portfolio that offers food products, home services, automobile care, and more, all in a single location. As the only fuel marketer in the

Sultanate to provide LPG services, we’re focusing on expedient offerings that are sustainable and can contribute towards an improved quality of life for our customers, whether that is through ease-of-access, superior quality or

both,” said David Kalife, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Oil Marketing Company.

Through the agreement, OOMCO customers will be able to drive to select OOMCO service stations to buy and refill cooking gas cylinders for everyday use. The service will be rolled-out in phases with more than 10 stations offering the service in Phase 1. MGC will operate the LPG retail units for a minimum of 12 hours per day from 10 AM until 10 PM, six days a week, with the option to operate 24/7 according to the business needs of individual sites.

Bank Muscat wins Wells Fargo Award

MUSCAT: In keeping with its role as the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat has won the Wells Fargo Operations Excellence Award. Recipients of this award have traditionally demonstrated superior transaction processing quality, resulting in higher efficiencies, faster payments, cost reductions and honoured commitments to operational excellence to their customers. Wells Fargo recognised the bank’s commitment to the highest standards of quality in meeting the stringent criteria for quickly and seamlessly processing international payments.

The international payments landscape is an essential part of banking relationships in today’s global economy. Given the dynamic environment and continuous enhancement in technology, the responsibility for quicker and efficient processing is a shared effort by all financial institutions that are involved

in the payment cycle. Wells Fargo is among Bank Muscat’s prominent correspondent banks for dollar payments and provides Bank Muscat with high quality payment processing, seamless and efficient servicing and outstanding customer service.

Bank Muscat’s exceptional quality of SWIFT messages on dollar payment and an outstanding error-free rate for remittances were among the main criteria, which were highlighted by this award. In fact, Wells Fargo representatives commended the operational teams involved in processing dollar payments at Bank Muscat for the error-free rate maintained consistently throughout the high volume of remittances processed during the year. The commendation letter from the correspondent bank appreciated the Bank Muscat’s commitment to operational excellence and the valued partnership with Wells Fargo.

BankDhofar achieves excellent ATM uptime

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its position as one of the leading banks in Oman, BankDhofar has recorded ATM uptime of more than 98 per cent during COVID19 pandemic. With the aim of ensuring safe banking experience for customers, and in response to the calls for applying preventive measures, the Bank distributed sanitisers in all the ATMs and CDMs, to ensure that customers sanitise their hands before and after conducting any transaction.

Commenting on the achievement, **Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Operating Officer** at BankDhofar said: “At BankDhofar, we prioritise our customers’ convenience and satisfaction by providing best banking experience. During this exceptional condition, in which the world is facing COVID 19 pandemic, we have implemented the preventive measures to ensure a safe and healthy banking environment for our customers. We continued serving our customers seamlessly through our digital channels, including ATMs and CDMs, and we are proud to record ATM uptime of more than 98 per cent. ATM uptime is crucial for maintaining customer loyalty and it is a key focus for us at BankDhofar.”

Dr Tariq Taha, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar noted: “This achievement is attributed to the dedication of our team of professionals who focus on researching, identifying and deploying the best technologies, in addition to following up to ensure best performance of the ATMs during the pandemic. Additionally, the Bank has invested heavily in the infrastructure of its machines in order to keep up with the requirements of its customers, while ensuring they receive fast and efficient banking services 24/7.”

BUSINESS

G20 pledges to keep cooperating to bolster global economy



Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed al Jadaan wears a protective mask as he attends a virtual meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Riyadh. — Reuters

RIYADH: Finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies vowed on Saturday to continue using “all available policy tools” to fight the coronavirus pandemic and bolster the global economy, warning that the outlook remains highly uncertain.

G20 finance ministers and central bankers, in a communique issued after a virtual meeting on Saturday, said the global economy would recover as economies gradually reopen, but said further actions were needed to ensure growth.

“We are determined to continue to use all available policy tools to safeguard people’s lives, jobs and incomes, support global economic recovery, and enhance the resilience of the financial system, while safeguarding against downside risks,” they said in statement after the meeting ended.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, has infected more than 14.14 million people and killed 596,576, according to a Reuters tally. The United States, the world’s largest economy, tops the list of deaths.

Sweeping shutdowns aimed at halting the spread of the disease have caused massive disruption to the global economy, and are hitting the world’s poorest countries hardest.

G20 finance officials said 42 of the world’s 73 poorest countries had requested a freeze in official bilateral debt payments through the end of the year, amounting to about \$5.3 billion in deferred payments.

Reflecting concerns raised by the

G20 finance ministers and central bankers said the global economy would recover as economies gradually reopen, but said further actions were needed to ensure growth

World Bank that China, a G20 member and the largest creditor to developing countries, was not participating fully, the officials urged all official bilateral creditors to implement the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) fully and transparently.

They also “strongly encouraged” private creditors to participate on comparable terms, and said they would consider extending the debt standstill in the second half of 2020.

Private creditors had not received any formal requests from countries for debt service suspension under the G20 initiative, the Institute for International Finance (IIF) said on Wednesday, ahead of Saturday’s meeting.

“We encourage the private sector investors to participate in this, but we need to be very careful not to interfere on private agreements,” Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al Jadaan said in a press conference at the end of the meeting. — Reuters

G20 eyes solution to digital tax row

WASHINGTON: Finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies vowed to resolve major differences over taxing big tech companies and reach a broad, consensus-based solution on international taxation this year. The United States has been at loggerheads over the issue with Britain, France and other key allies, who have adopted or are considering digital service taxes as a way to raise revenue from the local operations of big tech companies.

Critics say those firms profit enormously from local markets while making only limited contributions to public coffers, but Washington contends the taxes discriminate against US tech firms such as Google, Facebook and Apple Inc.

The Trump administration this month ratcheted up pressure on France over its 3 per cent digital services tax, saying it would impose additional duties of 25 per cent on French imports valued \$1.3 billion but would hold off on implementing the move while talks continued in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

— Reuters

SPORTS



RAHM GRABS FOUR-SHOT LEAD

BIG-HITTING SPANIARD EYES NUMBER ONE RANKING

LOS ANGELES: Jon Rahm used a sizzling finish on a steamy hot afternoon at the Memorial Tournament to power four shots clear at the top of the leaderboard at Muirfield Village on Saturday, setting himself up for a run at the number one world ranking.

Chasing a fourth career PGA Tour win, the big-hitting Spaniard got his day off to a quiet start by mixing a birdie and a bogey on his outward nine but he caught fire after the turn to card four straight birdies from the 13th for a four-under 68.

It was the third consecutive round in the 60s for the world number two, putting him at 12-under for the tournament and four shots ahead of Americans Tony Finau and Ryan Palmer, who had shared the overnight lead.

Finau had a much more adventurous back nine, mixing a pair of double-bogeys and a bogey with three birdies for a one-over 73, while Palmer also suffered a late stumble with bogeys at

US PGA TOUR MEMORIAL TOURNAMENT SCORES

Third round (USA unless noted, par-72):
204 - Jon Rahm (ESP) 69-67-68
208 - Tony Finau 66-69-73, Ryan Palmer 67-68-73
210 - Danny Willett (ENG) 74-66-70
211 - Henrik Norlander (SWE) 74-66-71, Jason Day (AUS) 73-66-72
212 - Matt Wallace (ENG) 72-70-70, Chez Reavie 71-67-74
213 - Patrick Rodgers 70-72-71, Patrick Cantlay 70-70-73, Mackenzie Hughes (CAN) 74-66-73
214 - Scottie Scheffler 71-73-70, Brendan Steele 68-75-71, Kevin Na 74-69-71, Rory McIlroy 70-72-72, Jordan Spieth 70-70-74, Gary Woodland 68-70-76
215 - Brendon Todd 75-72-68, Matthew Wolff 77-68-70, Zhang Xinjun (CHN) 72-73-70, Dylan Frittelli (RSA) 73-68-74, Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG) 75-66-74, Lucas Glover 69-72-74
216 - Bubba Watson 78-68-70, Carlos Ortiz (MEX) 74-72-70, Adam Hadwin (CAN) 76-70-70, Kim Si-woo (KOR) 73-73-70, Justin Thomas 74-67-75

16 and 18 for his 73.

Rahm and American Brendon Todd (68) were the only golfers to dip under 70 on a day of gusting winds that produced lightning fast greens and challenging scoring conditions.

If Rahm can hold on for the win on Sunday he would replace Northern Irishman Rory McIlroy at the top of the world rankings.

“It’s extremely important. It’s obviously a big deal,” said Rahm, who would join

Seve Ballesteros as the only Spaniards to reach number one. “I can’t sit here and... try to diminish it and avoid it because it would just be lying to myself because it is a big deal. But it is a consequence of me winning tomorrow.

“What’s important to me tomorrow is hit good shots, be committed and get the job done.”

With a four-shot cushion, Rahm will start Sunday in a commanding position but conditions for the final round are expected to be tougher than on Saturday which will make it even more difficult for someone to mount a charge.

Britain’s Danny Willett, the 2016 Masters champion, had a 70 to sit alone in fourth, six off the lead, with Australia’s Jason Day (72) and Sweden’s Henrik Norlander (71) another stroke adrift at five-under.

McIlroy had an even par 72 for the second consecutive day to stand at two-under, a massive 10 strokes behind the leader.

— Reuters

SPORTS



West Indies' Kraigg Brathwaite plays a shot. — Reuters

Brathwaite, Hope frustrate England

MANCHESTER: Kraigg Brathwaite and Shai Hope proved a thorn in England's side once again as the West Indies lost just one wicket on the fourth morning of the second Test at Old Trafford on Sunday.

West Indies were 118-2 at lunch, still needing a further 152 runs to avoid the follow-on as they look to win their first Test series in England for 32 years.

Brathwaite was 41 not out and Hope 25 not out, with the pair having scored three hundreds between them when the West Indies beat England by five wickets in the second Test at Headingley three years ago.

It was a frustrating morning for England, 1-0 down after a four-wicket loss in last week's first Test at Southampton in a series that marks international cricket's return from the coronavirus lockdown.

Enforcing the follow-on looks like England's best route to victory after the whole of Saturday's third

BRATHWAITE AND HOPE SCORED THREE HUNDREDS BETWEEN THEM WHEN THE WEST INDIES BEAT ENGLAND BY FIVE WICKETS IN THE SECOND TEST AT HEADINGLEY THREE YEARS AGO.

day in Manchester was washed out.

By contrast, play resumed on Sunday in bright sunshine with the West Indies 32-1.

Nightwatchman Alzarri Joseph, who might have been lbw to Sam Curran had England reviewed on Friday, should have been dismissed for 16 on Sunday when he edged Chris Woakes.

But third slip Ben Stokes dropped the catch after Zak Crawley, moving across from second slip, obscured his view.

Off-spinner Dom Bess, however, succeeded where England's quicks had failed when, with just his second ball of the day, he had Joseph caught by Ollie Pope at short leg for 32 with a sharply turning delivery.

WASTED REVIEW

The West Indies were now 70-2, with England looking to regain the Wisden Trophy after a 2-1 series loss in the Caribbean last year.

But Hope, whose two Test hundreds were at Headingley in 2017, coverdrove left-arm swing bowler Curran for two fours.

England wasted a review after Brathwaite, on 24, was rightly given not out following a caught-behind appeal off Woakes.

Dom Sibley then referred himself to the umpires after inadvertently applying saliva to the ball in breach of the bio-secure regulations governing this series.

But with players allowed some leeway, officials took no further action after cleaning the ball.

England came into this match with a revamped pace attack.

Having already decided to rest James Anderson and Mark Wood, in the midst of a schedule of six Tests in seven weeks, they have also been forced to do without Jofra Archer after the fast bowler was ruled out after admitting making an unauthorised trip outside of the teams' protective 'bubble' to his home after the first Test.

However, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Saturday that, following a disciplinary hearing, Archer would be available for the third Test at Old Trafford starting on July 24.

England had established a strong position by making 469-9 declared after losing the toss.

All-rounder Stokes top-scored with 176 and opener Sibley made a painstaking 120, the pair sharing a fourth-wicket partnership of 260.

BACH ANNOUNCES RE-ELECTION BID



IOC chief sees 'no solution today' for Tokyo Olympics

LAUSANNE: Thomas Bach said on Friday he will stand in 2021 for a second term as president of the International Olympic Committee, admitting however there is "no solution today" to the challenges posed by coronavirus to the postponed Tokyo Games.

The 66-year-old German was elected for an eight-year term as Olympic chief in September 2013, taking over from Belgian Jacques Rogge. Bach will be eligible for a second and final four-year term.

Speaking at an IOC Session held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bach said: "If you, the IOC members, want, I am ready to run for a second term as IOC president and to continue to serve you and this Olympic movement we all

love so much for another four years."

The IOC presidential elections are slated to take place in Athens in June 2021.

Bach, who won gold for West Germany in the foil fencing team event at the 1976 Olympics, claimed a large number of IOC members had recently approached him asking if he would seek re-election.

"I am grateful and deeply touched by the many words of encouragement and confidence," Bach said.

Turning to the Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed in March until July 2021, Bach expressed hope that they could be "a unique milestone for the entire world".

"They will be the first worldwide gathering after coronavirus."

But Bach warned that the unprecedented health situation meant multiple scenarios were being considered in planning the format for Tokyo.

"There is no solution today, it is too much (to be) expected," he said.

Bach said the scenario of holding the Games without spectators was one that had been examined, although he stressed that he was opposed to the idea.

"It's one of the scenarios we have to look in to because the debate has to do with travel restrictions and quarantine.

"It's too early to tell (if there will be no spectators). It's not what we want. We want stadia full of enthusiastic fans."

Tokyo 2020 organisers said on Friday they had secured all the venues

needed to hold the Olympics next summer, clearing a major hurdle to hosting the event.

They added that refunds for ticket holders unable to attend the rescheduled games will begin in late 2020.

COE GETS INTO IOC CLUB

The IOC Session also saw Sebastian Coe, the head of World Athletics, voted in as an IOC member after being turned down several times.

Coe's belated entry into the IOC club is significant because he has been mentioned as a potential future president of the Olympic movement.

As Coe signed his IOC oath, Bach let slip a telling greeting: "Finally, welcome!"

— AFP

SPORTS



AUBAMEYANG PUTS ARSENAL IN FA CUP FINAL

ANDY JALIL

LONDON: Two brilliant goals by Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang stunned Manchester city as Arsenal made it into the FA Cup final for a record 21 occasions. Their shock victory was a result of clinical finishing by Aubameyang as well as a resilient defence in which David Luiz was outstanding.

It was a most significant victory yet for Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta, who has been in charge only since December and is already producing improvements in his

team's overall performance.

Arteta said: "We always go with the plan we have in place, we are always clear on our plan. We are really happy with what happened in the last four or five games, a lot of credit to players for the level of performance and fight they are showing on the pitch."

He added: "The task that we had in front of us against such a big team and we've done it. The players are fighting for each other." He also spoke about Luiz who has been criticised in the past. "The way he has been training

and performing, he deserves the praise.

People can see this side of him. We trust him and we don't doubt what he can do."

18 PASSES

Arsenal were slow to start with City having much the better of the first half as Arsenal managed only 29 per cent of possession. Their goal came in the 19th minute with a sequence of 18 passes. Nicolas Pepe, receiving a long pass from Hector Bellerin curled a ball across to the left where Aubameyang stole behind Kyle Walker to hit on the

half volley with the outside of his right foot.

Arteta said of his striker Aubameyang: "He showed today on the pitch, not just talk, but on the pitch what he can do."

The second goal came again with Pepe involved. He passed to Kieran Tierney behind who then lofted the ball to Aubameyang, for him to slide the ball into the net.

City pressed hard in the second half and claimed a penalty when Shkodran Mustafi challenged Raheem Sterling in the box but the referee did not think it was a foul and VAR did not overrule him.

FEATURES

COLOMBIAN ARTISTS' COLOURFUL DEPICTION OF OMANI ICONS A VISUAL TREAT

The intense colours and intricate detailing in the artwork by Rebeca Nigrinis are guaranteed to arrest attention. Her work has a tangible sense of vibrancy to it, with strong brushstrokes, flowing lines and dramatic hues... **page 20**



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Banksy mural stolen at Bataclan returned to France from Italy



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Scientists unravel secrets of ultra-black fish swimming the deepest depths



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FEATURES

Colombian artists' colourful depiction of Omani icons a visual treat

MARY OOMMEN

Thanks to research undertaken, we now know that colour affects not just our brains and nervous system but also stimulates our emotions and moods. It is no wonder then, that the bright colours in the evocative artwork created by Rebeca Nigrinis induce a sense of happiness and vivacity. "My art is colourful and vibrant. My intention when I paint, is to brighten spaces with my unique pieces. I feel thrilled to see people displaying my art proudly at their homes or businesses. I always try to create pieces that bring joy," she says.

Born into an artistically inclined family, creativity was always an intrinsic part of Rebeca's life. "I painted since I was a little girl and my parents always encouraged my artistic endeavours. I remember having a wall in my room where I could paint," she says. However, it wasn't until she moved to the Middle East with her husband that she began developing her love for art and decided to pursue her dream of becoming an artist. An Industrial Engineer by training, her art conveys a seamless blend of her colourful Colombian origins and the strikingly inimitable influences of Oman where she has been living since 2012.

The intense colours and intricate detailing in the artwork by Rebeca Nigrinis are guaranteed to arrest attention. Her work has a tangible sense of vibrancy to it, with strong brushstrokes, flowing lines and dramatic hues. "The colours I use reflect my inner self. I like bright and colourful spaces that reflect happiness and harmony, so every time I create a piece, I try to bring all the joy inside me to the painting.

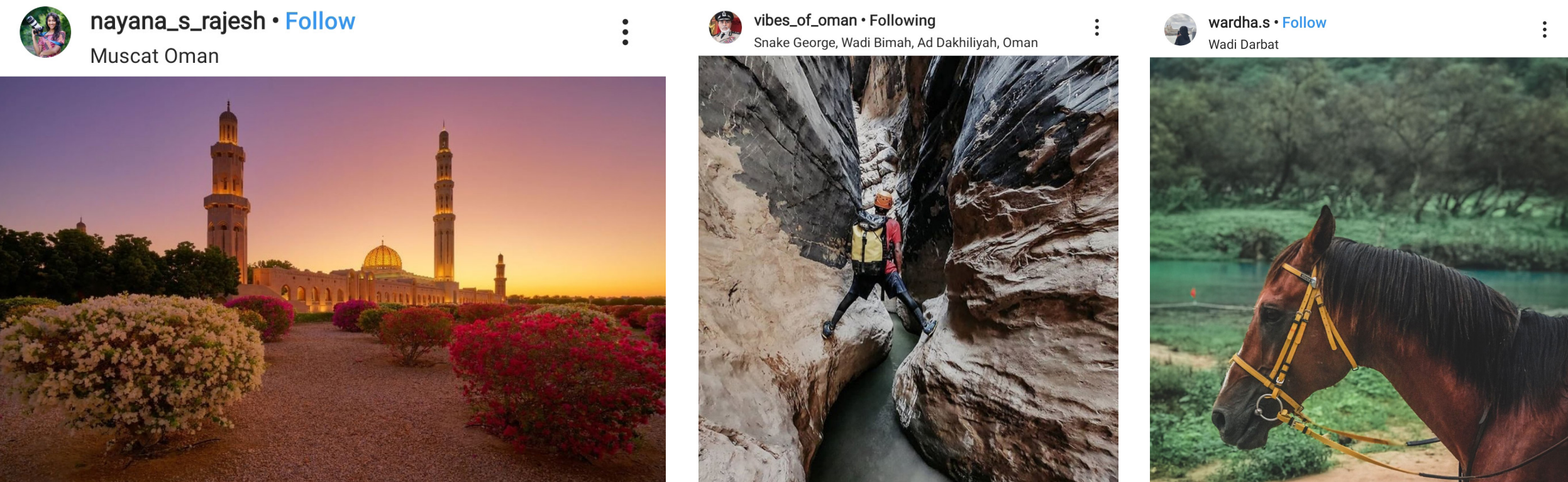
"The beauty I saw around me in Oman sparked my creativity. In fact, the quaint buildings and landmarks of the Sultanate were my biggest inspiration for the creation of my series on 'Arabian Cities and Villages.' Her 'Omani Doors' series beautifully captures traditional Omani doors in all their decorative detail. She also draws inspiration from women around the work and has created an interesting series titled 'Divas' which portrays women of different nationalities and backgrounds in vivid hues.

"I am really glad and thankful that I have my art because painting helps me to destress and release all my anxieties during these difficult times. I create my own rules and try to ensure that my work has a distinctly unique identity. I have my own way of blending colours and I don't like following pre-set steps or techniques. I'm constantly looking for inspiration wherever I go. If there's something I want to learn I just try it myself several times and make an effort to improve as I go along.

Rebeca's work has received many accolades and several awards and has been admired in Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Oman in collective and solo exhibitions. Her advice to emerging artists is, "to create your own style and not copy anyone because that can ruin the whole creative process. Just be yourselves and learn from your own mistakes." To see more of Rebeca's work, you can visit her website www.rebecanigrinis.com or follow her work through her Instagram channel @rebeca.artist.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Banksy mural stolen
at Bataclan returned to
France from Italy



ROME: Italy on Tuesday handed back to France a mural painted by British street artist Banksy which was stolen from the Paris Bataclan theatre, where militant Islamist gunmen killed scores of people in an attack in November 2015.

In June 2018, Banksy created a mural of a veiled female figure in a mournful pose on a fire-exit door of the concert venue where 90 people were killed in one of the coordinated attacks which caused 130 fatalities

in the French capital.

The door, stolen in January 2019, was found last month in a farmhouse by the Italian police and given to the French ambassador in Rome on France's most important national holiday, Bastille Day.

"It is a very moving moment to get back this door on our national holiday... it was witness to the massacre that claimed the lives of 90 people," French Ambassador to Rome Christian Masset said dur-

ing a ceremony at the embassy.

"Many people in the audience escaped through this emergency door. It has lived, heard and seen the whole massacre," he added.

Banksy, whose real identity is unknown, has become one of the most well-known personalities of the modern art scene with a series of inspired works in public places that combine street art techniques with topical themes.

Last month, he published

a new artwork online as people around the world protested the killing of George Floyd, the black American who died in Minneapolis after a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes while detaining him on May 25.

On Tuesday, Banksy published on his Instagram account a video of a new art work installed on a London underground train titled "If you don't mask - you don't get" showing a sneezing rat. — **Reuters**

FEATURES



Scientists unravel secrets of ultra-black fish swimming the deepest depths

WASHINGTON: For fish inhabiting the immense darkness of the deep sea, being ultra-black offers great camouflage in a fish-eat-fish world. Scientists studying some of these exotic creatures now have unraveled the secret behind their extreme color.

These fish - like the fangtooth, the Pacific blackdragon, the anglerfish and the black swallower - have modified the shape, size and packing of the pigment in their skin to the point that it reflects less than 0.5% of light that hits it, researchers said on Thursday.

They studied 16 species that fit this definition of ultra-black. These spanned six different orders of fish - large groupings that each have a shared evolutionary history - indicating this modification evolved independently in all of them.

"In the deep, open ocean, there is nowhere to hide and a lot of hungry predators," said zoologist Karen Osborn of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, a co-author of the research published in the journal *Current Biology*. "An animal's only option is to blend in with the background."

Very little sunlight penetrates more than 650 feet (200 meters) below the ocean's surface. Some of these fish reside three miles (5,000 meters) deep.

At such depths, bioluminescence - light emission by living organisms - is the only light source. Some of the ultra-black fish have bioluminescent lures on their bodies to coax prey close enough to be eaten.

The skin of these fish is among the blackest material

known, absorbing light so efficiently that even in bright light they appear to be silhouettes, as Osborn discovered when trying to photograph them after they were brought to the surface.

The pigment melanin is abundant in this skin and distributed in an unusual fashion. By packaging perfectly sized and shaped melanosomes - pigment-filled structures within the skin cells - into tightly packed and continuous layers at the skin's surface, the fish ensure that essentially all light reaching them will hit this layer and never escape.

"This mechanism of making thin and flexible ultra-black material," Osborn said, "could be used to create ultra-black materials for high-tech optics or for camouflage material for night ops." — **Reuters**