



Defence Pension Fund to follow general investment policy

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund (MDPF) held its first meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, MDPF Chairman of the Board of Directors.

HH Sayyid Shihab welcomed the members and congratulated them on the 50th Glorious National Day of the Sultanate, praying to Allah the Almighty to perpetuate the Sultanate's welfare and security under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, the Supreme Commander.

The meeting reviewed its agenda and took appropriate decisions regarding them, most notably the Board's approval of

the fund's accounts report and the financial statements for 2019, the Board's discussion of the performance report for 2019, and the performance report for the nine months ending on September 30, 2020, for all MDPF's investments. The Board commended the efforts exerted to achieve these good results. The Board also stressed on ensuring the continuation of cash flows to cover the pension, financial and investment obligations of MDPF.

The Board also reviewed MDPF's real estate portfolio and reviewed the progress of work in the existing and future real estate projects in the current year, and set priorities for the next stage.

The Board stressed the importance of adhering to its

approved general investment policy and following the executive regulations of the Royal Decree No 31/96 for investing the funds of the Public Authority for Social Insurance and salary and pension funds.

At the end of the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab stressed the importance of doubling efforts, increasing productivity and providing the best pension services with high efficiency and effectiveness, as well as constantly endeavouring to strengthen communication channels between MDPF, retirees, employees of the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces, and continuously working on developing workflow mechanisms to achieve the desired goals. — ONA

HM confers medals on media professionals



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday conferred the Order of Royal Commendation, Third Class, on some media professionals in recognition of their positive contributions that served the Omani media march.

They were Ibrahim bin Amir bin Nassir al Yahmadi, Hassan bin Salim bin Juma al Farsi and Mohammed bin Ali bin Saleh al Marjabi. The awardees were presented with the Royal Commendation Order by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, when he received them at his office. — ONA

Minister values HM's noble gesture

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al Harrasi, Minister of Information, has valued the Royal gesture of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who granted the Order of Royal Commendation, Third Class, to a number of Omani media personnel in recognition of their positive contribution which, he said, served and enriched the Omani media experience.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the minister said, "His Majesty the Sultan's felicitations of this Omani elite is an honour to all Omani media sectors



— print media, audio-visual media and electronic media. The Royal gesture felicitates serious engagement in media practice that portrays a highly committed national message, provides true knowledge and disseminates positive values that serve the general interest of the country and its citizens." — ONA



OCTAL sends warmest greetings and congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik
and the people of Oman on the momentous occasion
of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance

The ongoing transformation of the Sultanate continues
with vigor and purpose under His Majesty's wise leadership
and OCTAL is part of this renewed renaissance now and into the future

WWW.OCTAL.COM



Warm felicitations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
 and the people of Oman on the occasion of the
 50th National Day of the Renaissance.



COMMITTED TO
OMAN VISION 2040





FIFTY YEARS OF PEACE AND PROGRESS

Oman has gone through five decades of transformation, a journey that started with a vision and now leading towards a progressive future. As we celebrate the momentous occasion of Oman's 50th National Day of Renaissance, we offer our prayers for the late **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said** (May his soul rest in peace) and **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** (May the Almighty preserve him).

دليل للنفط ش.م.م.
DALEEL PETROLEUM L.L.C.

www.daleelpetroleum.com | daleel@dapeco.com.om



In brief

MUSCAT

FLIGHTS TO CHENNAI AND HYDERABAD
Oman Air is adding twice-weekly service to the Indian cities of Chennai and Hyderabad with service set to start on November 19. Flights to and from both cities will be operated on Thursdays and Saturdays. These schedules are confirmed until December 31. Additional information is available at omanair.com, the airline's offices and travel agents.
Guests planning to travel to Oman should ensure they are aware of all requirements, which are posted at the Civil Aviation Authority website, paca.gov.om.
— ONA

WHO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETS
The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH) took part on Monday in the virtual meeting of the 147th session of the Executive Board of World Health Organization (WHO) from Geneva.

The Sultanate was represented by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health and First Deputy Member of the WHO Executive Board, in the presence of Ambassador Idris bin Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs along with a number of MoH senior officials.
— ONA

ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK KICKS OFF
A series of virtual events in line with the Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) kicked off on Monday under the theme of 'Change Management', which are organised by the National Business Centre (NBC), which pertains to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn, in cooperation with the Public Authority for SMEs Development (Riyada) alongside 170 countries worldwide.

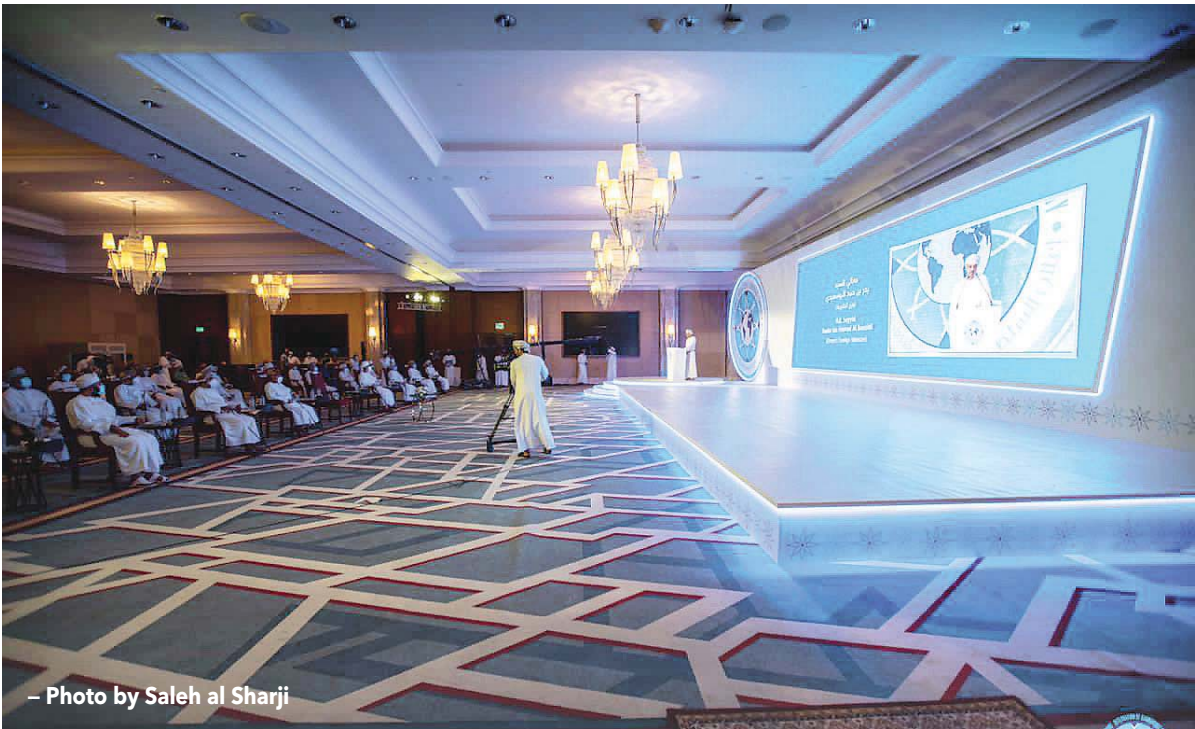
The event began with a session on Pillars of Entrepreneurship, which featured Ahmed al Ajmi, Founder of THURAYAbiz, and Mohammed al Shanfari, Chairman and Founder of National Natural Honey Company.
The GEW events this week include free consultancy sessions for the entrepreneurs and SMEs offered by the specialists in the fields of business, finance, and marketing.
— ONA

FISH LANDING RISES 38.2 PER CENT
The total quantity of fish landed in the Sultanate reached 446,881 tonnes at the end of August 2020 compared to 323,335 tonnes during the same period of 2019, which is a rise of 38.2 per cent, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Traditional fishing practices in the Sultanate contributed to 422,161 tonnes constituting a rise of 36.3 per cent. The total value of the fish stock was RO 209.44 million in 2020, representing a growth of 21 per cent. Coastal fishing and commercial fishing contributed to about 2,414 tonnes and 22,307 tonnes of total fish landings, respectively, at the end of August 2020.
— ONA

Oman praises UN initiatives on tolerance

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, NOV 16

Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values was unveiled as part of the celebration to mark UN International Day for Tolerance on Monday.
Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health; and Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, took part in the event.
“Oman's efforts in promoting a universal culture of peace, mutual understanding, respect for and appreciation of life, making people preserve their identities and consolidate the values of community partnership are truly reflected in the draft Declaration,” Al Salmi said. Al Busaidy said



the values of tolerance and understanding are deeply rooted in international understanding but they are challenged globally. However, the United Nations has been playing a crucial role in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the

world.
“We praise the pioneering role of the UN in enhancing tolerance and humanity globally. The Sultanate wants to enhance values of tolerance and the international community should focus more on dialogues

of tolerance and peace. The ideology of tolerance and mutual respect are deep rooted in our culture.”
Oman launched the initiative “Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values”, calling on the world to

adopt a global ethical order that promotes mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence in 2019 by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. This year, it's based on two important themes. The first is shared beliefs and bridging cultural gaps as an essential element to peace, security and development, and the second theme is based on adopting a global ethical order that pushes people forward to uniting their obligations and efforts, protecting mankind and earth, and achieving peace, coexistence and understanding.
“The precautions observed to fight the invisible virus these days itself is a bond to unite humanity. People across the world are following the same precautions and it is sending a message to the world that humanity is united despite its heterogeneous nature. Tolerance and mutual understanding and respect are deep-rooted in our society, culture and religion,” said Al Harrasi.

Oman Debate Centre opens



MUSCAT: Oman Debate Centre was inaugurated at Sandan Development City in Halban on Monday under the auspices of Rashad bin Mohammed al Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.
The centre aims at spreading the debate culture across the

Sultanate, upgrading the Youth's intellectual level and developing their dialogue methods.
Opening the centre also aims at reaching various institutions that deal with youth in order to consolidate the culture of debate, qualifying and training Omani youth in the field of debate, as well as organising debate competitions.
— ONA

Initiative promises better life for the elderly



AMAL AL RIYAMI
@amal29alriyami

An agreement to ensure welfare of senior citizens was signed between Nizwa Hospital and Ihsan Association at Nizwa Hospital premises on Monday.
The signing ceremony took place under the auspices of Dr Khalifa bin Hamad al Shaqsi, Director of the Hospital.
The initiative aims to find out the health, psychological and social needs of the elderly in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate to provide them a better life. It will ensure a series of services facilitated by health institutions and voluntary associations that serve the elderly in the governorate.

Fawziah bint Khamis al Yarubi, Head of Health Education and Psychological Counselling Department at Nizwa Hospital, said: “This initiative is part of Nizwa Hospital's community partnership and targets all segments of society in raising awareness about the needs of elderly.”
Prior to the launch of the initiative, teams of representatives of Nizwa Hospital and the Ihsan Society were formed to count the number of elderly who visit the health institutions in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and to assess their health, psychological and social conditions.

VOICES

Work hard and bring laurels to the Sultanate



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Oman's 50th Anniversary of the National Day has got the former Oman national Olympic hockey coach, SAS Naqvi into great excitement as he has been in Oman for the last 39 years.

He had also served as the technical adviser for Oman Hockey Association and Oman Olympic Committee. This is what the first official hockey coach of Oman has to say to the youth. “Play football and play hockey.”

As he looks back at the history of hockey in Oman and his career as a player in Indian Hockey through the displays at his museum named SAS Naqvi Sports, Olympic and Hockey Museum, he shows a picture of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos with a young hockey team in the 1970s. He quickly picks out a whistle and blows and explains it was the whistle he used in 1964 at an important hockey game.

He continues the excitement as he explains the journey of Oman Olympic Committee and the wonderful colleagues he has worked with over the years. Their pictures are on the walls. Another important part of the collection in the museum is all the Olympic Games Oman has participated over the years. He has been part of the delegation to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, 1988 Seol Olympics, 1992 Barcelona Olympics, 1992 Atlanta Olympics and the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

His passion for hockey continues and he would like to see more youngsters take up

Today Oman is one of the top countries in sports with some of the best facilities, respected and loved by many of us. I would like to tell the youth of the country to please work hard, bring laurels to the Sultanate, which has achieved a great place in the International Olympics, Asian Games and Arab Games as well as other games

SAS NAQVI
Hockey veteran

hockey.

“First of all I would like to thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Today Oman is one of the top countries in sports with some of the best facilities, respected and loved by many of us. I would like to tell the youth of the country to please work hard, bring laurels to the Sultanate, which has achieved a great place in the International Olympics, Asian Games and Arab Games as well as other games. I had the great honour to work with Dr Hamad al Ghafri, who was at that time the President of the Oman Olympic Committee,” says Naqvi. At 91 years of age, Naqvi continues to train and nurture young talent and inspire sports enthusiasts with his knowledge of sports history and collection of memorabilia. Some of the collections are priceless. It is this collection of history that has been attracting international sports stars to his museum while they are in Oman.

“The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex was a great vision of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Today sports enjoy a special status along with culture and youth affairs. His Majesty Sultan Haitham is a great sports personality who was playing hockey in my time at Oman Hockey Association during the Ramadhan Tournaments.

Of course he plays cricket too. My request to everyone is to remember late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and support His Majesty Sultan Haitham by working hard for the betterment of the country,” says the hockey veteran.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION STRIVE FOR RENEWED RENAISSANCE

STAFF REPORTER

Muscat, Nov 17

Research and innovation in the Sultanate is inspired by the speech of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on February 23 when he said, “On top of our national priorities is the education sector. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with the supporting environment, which motivates research and innovation. We will also provide it with all means of empowerment, since it is the base upon which our children will be able to participate in meeting the requirements of the coming phase of development.”

In line with the other sectors, the research and innovation sector at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) continued its efforts in building research and innovation capabilities. It contributed to the efforts exerted to deal with COVID-19, through various research and academic institutions.

COVID-19 RESEARCH

In March, the COVID-19 Research Programme was launched. The programme funded 28 research proposals with a total cost of RO 280,000. Once completed, these projects will provide scientific research information and facts on the local situation of the pandemic, as well as innovative solutions to fight coronavirus.

STRATEGY FOR R&D 2040

Efforts towards the preparation of the National Strategy for Research and Development 2040 (NSRD 2040) have been recently focused on preparing the plans for the strategy, which are expected to be operational by the beginning of the next year.

The MoHERI has reaffirmed the harmony between the vision of the National Innovation Strategy (NIS) with the Oman Vision 2040, reinforced by a political will and continuous institutional integration, which has resulted in various initiatives in all fields, and is evident through its innovations, institutions and efforts.

As research and development are some of the main components of the innovation system, MoHERI has also updated the NSRD 2040 to align with the Oman Vision 2040's perspective that research leads to the development of a knowledge-based society and capable national cadres, which focuses on transferring knowledge into economic revenue.

BLOCK FUNDING

During 2020, MoHERI funded 248 research projects through the Block Funding Programme, covering research support grants for holders of PhD, Master's and bachelor degrees, as well as undergraduate and

postgraduate students who are studying abroad at their own expense.

A total of 28 governmental and private institutions in the Sultanate benefited from the support for this year, including various the communications and IT sector, the environment and natural resources sector, the health and community service sector, the energy and industry sector, and the education and human resources sector.

The financial aid provided to support and finance the approved research projects has amounted to RO 1.2 million.

9 STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

There are currently nine strategic research programmes of national priority that the research and innovation sector is working on in cooperation with the relevant institutions. These include the Social Observatory Research Program, Undergraduate Research Grant Program, Strategic Research Program on Smart Cities, Omani Cultural Heritage Strategic Research Program, Integrated Pest Management for Dubas Bug Research Program, Renewable Energy Research Program and Strategic Program for Water Research.

The steering committee of the strategic grants programme approved the five-year plan for the strategic research programme to tackle harmful algae which cause red tide, protect fisheries and the marine environment and spread public awareness with the participation of various governmental and private institutions.

The ‘Omani Medical Heritage’ project addresses the Omani doctors who made great contributions to the development of medicine across the historical eras. Work is also underway on the strategic research programme on the ‘Omani Figures involved in Trade and Industry.’

The Smart Cities Ambassadors Initiative, one of the initiatives of the Strategic Research Program for Smart Cities, made a remarkable achievement by winning the 2020 Innovation Challenges competition of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

INNOVATION STRATEGY

The National Innovation Strategy (NIS) guides the country's institutions to place the NIS's initiatives as the top priorities to achieve Oman Vision 2040. This has led to the increase in the number of indicators of the Sultanate on the Global Innovation Index (GII), despite the decrease of the overall ranking of the Sultanate on the GII.

INNOVATION PARK

The Innovation Park Muscat has been officially approved as a science park in June 2019, after the issuance of the Royal Decree No 27/2019, concerning the exemption and incentives offered by the Science Parks and Other Specialised Zones. More than 90 per cent of the construction of the IPM

“On top of our national priorities is the education sector. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with the supporting environment, which motivates research and innovation. We will also provide it with all means of empowerment, since it is the base upon which our children will be able to participate in meeting the requirements of the coming phase of development

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK



building has been completed.

The IPM is a larger initiative designed to nurture and develop research talent in order to power innovation and create economic benefit for Oman and to help ensure our national prosperity and international competitiveness.

IPM seeks to provide an enabling environment for researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs by providing them with the services that help them to develop their soft skills and focus on scientific research.

It also strives to build on their ability to utilise knowledge, develop products based on scientific research, and turn ideas into commercial products.

This will promote and

contribute to the efforts made by the government to diversify sources of national economy.

IPM focuses on food and biotechnology, health, water and environment, and energy and renewable energy that may contribute to achieving sustainable development.

MAKERS OMAN

Makers Oman - The Prototyping Center is an integrated work environment that includes 3D printers of different sizes and equipment in the fields of metal and wood formation. It provides access to beneficiaries to transform ideas into innovative prototypes, with the supervision from competent youth Omani engineers.

GENETIC CENTER

Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Center (OAPGRC) aims to spread awareness of the importance of genetic diversity of Oman.

OAPGRC, with a number of partners, work on twenty-eight basic and supplementary programmes developed specifically to achieve the center's objectives that include research, data collection and preservation, awareness and community engagement.

OAPGRC has recently organised the Manafaa Ideathon Program, which is one of the programmes organised with the aim of motivating young people to innovate and develop, attracting young talents to participate in the field of unique genetic resources as well as developing skills through knowledge exchange. The programme also serves as a distinct platform for Omani innovators and entrepreneurs to create environmentally friendly products and services that benefit from the natural wealth of the Sultanate of Oman, and to transform great scientific ideas and innovations into viable products and services.

Achievements of the OAPGRC includes the establishment of the Gene Bank, in cooperation with the University of Nizwa, which is equipped with the latest equipment. A field gene bank has been established by the Agricultural Research Station of Sohar and the Algae Laboratory at Al Sharqiyah University for preserving 99 species of banana.

EJAAD

EJAAD acts as a bridge between the academic and industrial sectors through industrial research cooperation. More than 63 industrial challenges have been presented through EJAAD, while their joint research projects have reached 20 projects. The total funding from the industry for the research projects on EJAAD has reached RO 1 million, while affiliated members have so far reached 60 members.

HYDROGEN ECONOMY

EJAAD has also begun to study the feasibility of hydrogen energy and the way it can be integrated with the industrial sector to diversify the national income sources.

As a result of EJAAD efforts, the Sultanate has joined the Green Ammonia Consortium becoming the second Arabic country in this consortium, which has members representing 60 countries, companies and research institutions.

ICT START-UPS

The 4th edition of the Upgrade programme has continued to attract student projects from various academic institutions inside and outside the Sultanate to transform them into successful startups in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. Since the

programme's establishment in 2017, nine projects have been incubated on topics such as Smart Cities, Internet of Things, Information Security, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data and Blockchain.

RESEARCH NETWORK

The idea of OMREN is to create a high-speed online network linking research and academic entities. The number of affiliated members of the network has reached 50 members from various academic institutions.

In 2020, OMREN has launched a new service called 'Mirsal' that allows authenticated users to securely and easily send and receive large data. The launch of this service was to provide a new space for researchers and members of the network in light of the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

VIRTUAL SCIENCE LIBRARY

Masader recently joined the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and added the global publisher (IEEE) within their electronic research sources. Masader provides seamless and affordable access to a wealth of global research material among academics, university students, and other public and private sector researchers.

REPOSITORY PROJECT

Shuaa is a digital repository that helps in organising, managing, and representing the outcomes of academic research to increase the exposure and impact of Oman's scientific research contribution. The project is a collaborative agreement between the Research and Innovation Sector and Sultan Qaboos University.

In 2020, a cooperation agreement was signed with the Public Authority for Social Insurance to enhance the culture of social insurance and highlight its importance to individuals and the society as well as making reports and audio-visual materials available as scientific references in the field of social security for students and researchers.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation will continue to raise awareness of the importance of research and innovation, and to familiarise the public with the most important research and innovative programmes and projects of the sector through various mediums.

In March 2020, the ministry celebrated the 25th jubilee edition of Scientific Insights in Arabic and English, which is a quarterly scientific journal published every three months that explores various scientific, research and development topics. Moreover, Dialogue with a Researcher, the weekly radio programme, has continued to introduce researchers and innovators in the Sultanate and the outputs of various research and innovative projects.



British PM self-isolates as US reels from coronavirus surge



A worker cleans steps leading to the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, with statue of Anteros, at Piccadilly Circus in central London on Monday. — AFP

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in self-isolation on Monday after a contact tested positive for the coronavirus while spiralling infections in the United States saw stay-at-home measures imposed on Chicago, its third-biggest city.

Global infections have soared past 54 million with more than 1.3 million deaths, spurring governments to reimpose unpopular and stifling restrictions on social life, free movement and business.

In hard-hit Europe curbs have been brought back — often in the face of protests — from Greece to Britain, where PM and COVID-19

“It doesn’t matter that I’m fit as a butcher’s dog, feel great... that I’ve had the disease and I’m bursting with antibodies

BORIS JOHNSON
British Prime Minister

survivor Johnson insisted he was healthy and isolating out of precaution after coming into contact with

an MP who later tested positive for the virus.

“It doesn’t matter that I’m fit as a butcher’s dog, feel great... that I’ve had the disease and I’m bursting with antibodies,” said Johnson, who was hospitalised for the virus in April. “We’ve got to interrupt the spread of the disease,” he added, saying he would lead the virus response from Downing Street.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is pushing for tighter measures, including masks in all schools and smaller class sizes.

Outside work or school, contact between people should also be “restricted to those from another fixed household”, under a proposal from Merkel’s office due to be put to regional leaders. Germany began a new round of shutdowns in November, closing restaurants, cultural venues and leisure facilities. But while new cases are plateauing, daily numbers, officials say, are still too high. In France, which has been under partial lockdown for more than two weeks, Health Minister Olivier Veran warned the strict measures had slowed the disease but “we have not won against the virus yet”.

Concerns of a resurgence also remain in parts of the world that have largely brought their caseloads under control. — AFP

Syria’s veteran foreign minister Walid Muallem dead

DAMASCUS: Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, a stalwart of Bashar al Assad’s government who held his job through a decade of conflict and several reshuffles, died on Monday at the age of 79.

The veteran diplomat was hit with US and European sanctions early on in the conflict that has torn Syria apart since 2011 and was known for his tirades claiming that the war was the result of a Western plot.

Muallem, who had been foreign minister since 2006, started his career in the diplomatic service in 1964. In 2012, he also became deputy prime minister. The government announcement did not specify the cause of his death, but his health was understood to have been deteriorating for some time.

His last public appearance was at the end of last week in Damascus at the opening of a conference on refugee returns. He looked weak and was helped into the hall by two men. At the same conference, which was snubbed by most international humanitarian players, foreign attendees and Assad took part via video link. Muallem was wearing a surgical mask and appeared to have lost weight.

He was targeted by US sanctions as early as August 2011, less than six months



after the eruption of protests demanding regime change — demonstrations that the Syrian authorities brutally repressed.

Muallem has “continued to beat this drum of international conspiracy and has attempted to cover up the regime’s horrific activities by making claims that terrorists or others were responsible,” Washington said at the time.

Muallem was one of the most recognisable figures in a Syrian government which remains very isolated internationally despite recent efforts to normalise ties with Gulf countries.

Russia was the first nation to pay tribute to Muallem.

Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister, hailed Muallem as a diplomat who “understood the importance of Syrian-Russian relations.” “We have lost a very reliable partner and sincere friend,” said Bogdanov, who was formerly stationed in Damascus. — AFP

SpaceX launches four astronauts to ISS

WASHINGTON: Four astronauts were successfully launched on the SpaceX Crew Dragon “Resilience” to the International Space Station on Sunday, the first of what the US hopes will be many routine missions following a successful test flight in late spring.

Three Americans — Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker — and Japan’s Soichi Noguchi blasted off at 7:27 pm (0027 GMT Monday) from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, thus ending almost a decade of international reliance on Russia for rides on its Soyuz rockets.

“This is a great day for the United

States of America, and a great day for Japan,” said Nasa administrator Jim Bridenstine during a post-launch press conference. Twelve minutes after liftoff, at an altitude of 200 km and a speed of 27,000 km per hour, the capsule successfully separated from the second stage of the rocket. “That was one heck of a ride,” said mission commander Hopkins from orbit. SpaceX confirmed that it was on the right orbit to reach the ISS a little more than 27 hours later, at around 11:00 pm on Monday night (0400 GMT Tuesday), joining two Russians and one American aboard the station, and stay for six months. — AFP



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from launch complex 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Sunday. — AFP

Time is running out for Brexit deal, EU tells Britain

BRUSSELS/LONDON: European Union diplomats warned Britain on Monday that time was fast running out for a Brexit deal, and that it may already be too late to ratify one, as negotiators in Brussels began a last-ditch attempt to avoid a tumultuous exit at the end of December.

Almost five years since the Brexit referendum campaign began, Britain and the EU have still not worked out how nearly \$1 billion in trade per year will operate once Britain leaves a status quo transition arrangement on December 31. Britain, which left the EU

in January, called on the EU to show “more realism” if there was to be more progress in coming days.

Ireland, the EU nation most exposed to Brexit, said there were just days, or possibly weeks, left to find a way to unlock trade talks, while a senior EU official said there may no longer be time to put any trade deal agreed into force. “It’s getting terribly late and may be too late already,” said the senior EU official, as talks between the bloc’s negotiator Michel Barnier and his British counterpart, David Frost, resumed in Brussels. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

KARACHI

Public rallies banned as virus infections rise

Pakistan on Monday banned public political rallies after recording its highest daily coronavirus infections since July for four days running. Several huge religious and anti-government public rallies have been held in major cities in recent weeks. Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the ban, fearing hospitals will be overwhelmed as they were in June if people do not act responsibly.

“We have decided to ban public gatherings in the country,



including ours planned over the weekend, as large crowds help in the spread of the virus,” Khan said on national television.

There were 2,128 new cases registered on Sunday. — Reuters

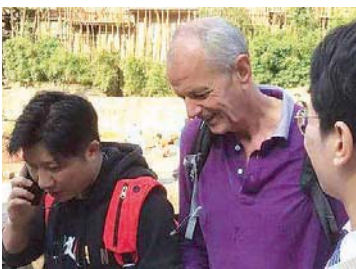
BEIJING

UK envoy earns hero status after river rescue

A top British diplomat has become a hero in China after video of him rescuing a student from a swollen river racked up tens of millions of views on social media.

Britain’s mission in Chongqing said on Monday that Consul General Stephen Ellison leapt into action in nearby Zhongshan at the weekend to save a woman who had fallen into a river coursing through the tourist town.

“Due to the timely rescue, the woman quickly recovered her breathing and consciousness,”



read the post on the consulate’s official Weibo page. Ellison, 61, was visiting the town on Saturday when he heard a cry from a crowd of people as the woman fell into the water. — AFP

DHAKA

All-woman team to fight digital abuse

Bangladeshi police launched an all-woman unit on Monday to tackle a rise in online abuse and harassment targeting women, the country’s police chief said, as authorities seek to address growing public concern about gender-based violence. Police hope the unit will encourage more women to come forward to report digital abuse including so-called revenge porn, the hacking of their social media accounts and online threats from blackmailers.

“We have different teams



working with cyber crime in the police... but many (women) don’t want to approach these areas, that’s why we have created an all-woman team,” said Benazir Ahmed, inspector general of police. — Reuters

Here’s to you! Let’s celebrate!

Oman’s modern Renaissance celebrates 50 years this week!

It has been a journey that has been filled with excitement, determination and dedication. November 18, 2020, will be a day for a lot of people to reflect upon the achievements through their own personal journeys.

If only we could celebrate each person’s journey, as a journalist we come across many of the stories and it is wonderful to remember the people and the years who have gone through the calendar. When we mention the reality before 1970, people often say we have heard that before; but for the generation who went through it know the challenges the nation overcame as a young ruler began to shape his vision for the nation in 1970.

There must have been excitement as schools opened up and healthcare became a dream come true. Both of these services were gifted if you were born Omani. For late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, it was a vision to build the nation and people at the same time. Education is the ultimate empowerment so higher education was the focus of the 80s.

The year 1986 is etched in the history of education in Oman as the year saw late Sultan Qaboos officially inaugurated Sultan Qaboos University bringing into focus higher education



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

IT IS IMPORTANT
TO KNOW THE
HISTORY AND
THE PATH OF
PROGRESSION
THAT IS
EXPECTED TO
HAPPEN

ever since then there have been numerous private and government higher education institutions.

Education, however, does not end with a Degree as many of the young people have discovered in the recent years as more and more fresh graduates enter the job market. Within those years of our study in the universities and colleges, we must also develop many other skills that make one a well-rounded personality.

The 1990s also focused on vocational training but the goal among youth continued to ensure a job in the government sector. The millennium came with a scare of Y2k but the IT sector just took off from the cyber cafes to homes. Electronic communications took a leap with mobile communications. The millennial trends were many from the food they eat to outlook in career and life in general. They prefer to listen to podcasts compared to the audio and video enthusiasts of the 70s, 80s and 90s. They are quite excited to get into entrepreneurship but I also hear that millennials get bored easily. Cannot blame them because there is so much information out there and learning has never been this easy. Everything is at the fingertip, and options are too many but the key factor is to sustain success.

For Generation Z it is all different

– they have not seen our excitement when we got our first mobile phones and when our phones only had the snake game. But it is this generation who will be getting ready to enjoy the results of 2040 Vision of Oman spearheaded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

It is important to know the history and the path of progression that is expected to happen as part of the continuation of the Renaissance.

The journey to 2020 has been impacted by the fall in oil price and the pandemic — COVID-19. It has not just had an effect on the economy through lockdowns but on lifestyle and especially with the mind. There are moments to remember the virus in fear yet be bold enough to go on with life as if it is normal. Schooling and education have had their challenges. We might only know later the full impact of COVID-19 on young minds.

This land has also been a blessing for many individuals who came to build a career and for many Oman, the nation has been an integral part of their life.

For now, it is time to celebrate 50 years of the renaissance. Let us celebrate each year and each person who contributed to this wonderful march. It is also time to get ready to usher in the next level of the Renaissance

DOUBLE CONFINEMENT

Gazans take coastal walks to escape stress

GUILLAUME LAVALLEE

At sunrise in Gaza, a coastal path begins to fill up with pedestrians as growing numbers of Palestinians have taken up walking to relieve the stress of being trapped inside the Israel-blockaded enclave.

Life in Gaza, controlled by Hamas since 2007, was mentally taxing even before the novel coronavirus outbreak brought additional hardship, including nightly curfews and tight movement restrictions.

“There’s a lot of mental pressure in Gaza. We suffer from it,” said 40-year-old Walid al-Louh, wearing a New York Yankees cap. “People come out to walk along the seashore, just to let off steam.”

As the pandemic has dragged on larger crowds of men in tracksuits and women, their running shoes just barely visible beneath their long robes, stroll or stride briskly along Gaza’s Mediterranean coastline.

“I used to walk before coronavirus,” Louh said. “There were maybe dozens of people walking then, but now its hundreds and hundreds.”

One of the new devotees is Hanadi al Akawy, 32, who said she walks 5 km a day with her husband “to get rid of psychological pressure”.

Gaza’s densely-packed population of two million was, in the early phase of the pandemic, seen as uniquely protected given the movement restrictions already in place.

The coastal strip has only two entry and exit points, the Erez crossing to Israel and the Rafah crossing to Egypt.

The flow of people through Erez is tightly controlled by Israel, which has fought three wars with Hamas since 2008 and maintains a crippling blockade.

As the virus began to spread globally, both crossings were almost completely closed, and Hamas imposed strict quarantine measures for the small numbers of people allowed in and out.

Gaza’s health infrastructure is weak, partly due to the blockade, so when the virus began to spread within the enclave, Hamas imposed strict measures to contain it.

Those included nightly curfews and a mandatory 5:00 pm closing hour for businesses.

Gazans began to lament their “double confinement,” referring to coronavirus restrictions and the blockade.

Gaza has so far recorded 10,985 COVID-19 cases, including 48 deaths, and Sunday’s infection number was 490, the highest yet for a single day. However, fears that a raging pandemic would devastate the enclave’s vulnerable and impoverished population have not materialised.

But, said psychiatrist Samir Zaqout, the additional stress brought by the pandemic was “too much” for a population that already felt imprisoned.

The Gaza-based expert said that watching people take their coastline jaunts reminded him of prison inmates relishing their daily walk in the exercise yard, before being sent back to their cells.

“People do what they can to let out their emotions,” Zaqout said. “Walking is a part of that, especially since the seaside is our only window of freedom.” Zaqout said Hamas had not done enough to mitigate mental health issues in the strip.

According to a 2017 study published by the PLOS ONE scientific journal, the Palestinian Territories had the highest rates of depression compared to a group of 20 countries surveyed, from Morocco to Afghanistan. — AFP

NO CONCESSIONS

Biden turns focus to economy as Trump vows more legal battles

TREVOR HUNNICUTT AND JOHN WHITESIDES

President-elect Joe Biden on Monday will focus on reviving a pandemic-battered US economy as he prepares to take office, while outgoing President Donald Trump has promised more lawsuits of the type that so far have failed to alter his election defeat.

With coronavirus cases surging, Biden will receive a briefing and give a speech in his home state of Delaware on rebuilding an economy that has suffered millions of job losses as the pandemic has killed more than 245,000 Americans.

Biden’s scientific advisers will meet this week with pharmaceutical companies developing vaccines to prevent COVID-19, a top aide to the president-elect said, in preparation for the logistical challenges of widespread vaccination after the Democrat takes office on January 20.

Trump, a Republican, briefly appeared to acknowledge defeat on Sunday only to backtrack, saying on Twitter that he concedes “nothing” and repeating his unfounded accusations of voter fraud. He later promised on Twitter to file “big cases showing the unconstitutionality of the 2020 Election,” even though he has made no headway with his legal challenges in multiple states so far.

Election officials from both parties have said there is no evidence of major irregularities. Federal election security officials have decried “unfounded claims” and expressed “utmost confidence” in the integrity of the elections, according to a statement last week by the lead US cybersecurity agency.

In another blow to Trump’s legal strategy, his campaign on Sunday dropped a major part of a lawsuit it had



President-elect Joe Biden goes for a bike ride at Cape Henlopen State Park in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, on Saturday. – Reuters

WITH CORONAVIRUS
CASES SURGING,
BIDEN WILL RECEIVE
A BRIEFING AND
GIVE A SPEECH ON
REBUILDING AN
ECONOMY

brought seeking to prevent Pennsylvania from certifying its results, narrowing the case to an issue affecting a small number of ballots. Biden won the state by more than 68,000 votes.

Biden beat Trump in the November 3 election by the same 306-232 margin in the state-by-state Electoral College that Trump proclaimed a “landslide” when he won in 2016. The former vice president also won the national popular vote by at least 5.5 million votes, or 3.6 percentage points, with ballots still being counted.

Former President Barack Obama, a Democrat who campaigned against Trump, said it was past time for Trump to concede, and criticised Republicans

who also refuse to accept the victory of his former vice president.

“When your time is up, then it is your job to put the country first and think beyond your own ego,” Obama told the CBS News show “60 Minutes” in an interview that aired on Sunday.

“I’m more troubled by the fact that other Republican officials who clearly know better are going along with this.” The Senate Judiciary Committee, which is chaired by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, one of Trump’s most loyal supporters, will hold a hearing on Tuesday titled: “Breaking the News: Censorship, Suppression and the 2020 Election.” — Reuters

sport

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.om
follow us: @observersportz



BELGIUM END ENGLAND HOPES

ITALY EYE NATIONS LEAGUE FINALS WITH 2-0 WIN OVER POLAND

PARIS: Belgium ended England's hopes of reaching the Nations League finals with a 2-0 win on Sunday while Italy edged closer to next year's title shake-up.

Belgium were just five minutes from joining world champions France at next October's finals when Iceland pulled level at 1-1 with group rivals Denmark in Copenhagen.

However, a stoppage time penalty by Christian Eriksen gave the Danes a 2-1 win and kept alive their chances of pipping Belgium to top spot in Group A2.

Youri Tielemans and Dries Mertens scored the goals which gave world number one Belgium victory over Gareth Southgate's England.

Leicester midfielder Tielemans's deflected effort went in off the post after 10 minutes.

Fourteen minutes later, Declan

Rice was harshly punished for a challenge on Kevin De Bruyne just outside the area and Mertens curled the resulting free-kick perfectly over the wall to give Jordan Pickford no chance.

"We were always in control at 2-0, sometimes it can be dangerous, you feel comfortable but we defended Thibaut Courtois's goal very well," said Belgian coach Roberto Martinez.

A second consecutive defeat leaves England down in third place, five points adrift of Belgium, with just one game remaining.

"We don't like losing, but enormous credit to the team, all the way through they created problems and defended resiliently," said Southgate.

Denmark's late winner over Iceland means Belgium still need a point when they host the Danes

on Wednesday to secure their place in the final four.

In Copenhagen, Iceland, whose Euro 2020 hopes were dashed by Hungary in a 2-1 play-off defeat in midweek, suffered more agony.

Eriksen gave the Danes the lead from the penalty spot after 12 minutes following a foul by Ari Freyr Skulason on Daniel Wass. Vidar Orn Kjartansson levelled for Iceland in the 85th minute but another penalty by Eriksen in the second minute of injury time after a handball by Hordur Magnusson gave the Danes the three points.

Italy brushed off the absences of several players and coronavirus-hit coach Roberto Mancini with an impressive 2-0 victory over Poland.

The Azzurri took top spot in Group A1 from the Netherlands,

who beat Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-1 earlier in the day. Italy will be sure of a place in next October's finals with victory over the Bosnians in Sarajevo on Wednesday.

Chelsea midfielder Jorginho opened the scoring in the 27th minute with a penalty awarded after Grzegorz Krychowiak had brought down Andrea Belotti.

In the 77th minute, Poland had Jacek Goralski sent off before the Italians added a second goal from Domenico Berardi.

"It's our culture, Italians give their best during difficult moments and become more united," said assistant coach Alberico Evani whose 41-man squad had been whittled down to 28, due to injuries, as well as positive and inconclusive Covid-19 tests.

Frank de Boer won his first

match as Netherlands coach after Georginio Wijnaldum scored twice in the win over Bosnia.

'GOOD FEELING'

Liverpool midfielder Wijnaldum struck his goals early in the first half to help new coach De Boer break his duck at the fifth attempt following three draws and a defeat, with Memphis Depay scoring the other for the dominant Dutch.

"It had been five games since we'd won, so it was a good feeling to win again," said Wijnaldum.

"If I'm playing more in a sitting role, I don't get in the box that often, but tonight I was playing as a No. 10 so I'm expected to. I basically just did my job."

The Dutch go to Poland in their final group game but even a win won't be good enough should Italy prevail in Bosnia. — AFP

Uefa Nations League results

ON SUNDAY
LEAGUE A
Group 1
Netherlands 3 (Wijnaldum 6, 14, Depay 55) Bosnia and Herzegovina 1 (Prevljak 63)
Italy 2 (Jorginho 27-pen, Berardi 84) Poland 0
Group 2
Denmark 2 (Eriksen 12-pen, 90+2-pen) Iceland 1 (Kjartansson 85)
Belgium 2 (Tielemans 10, Mertens 24) England 0

LEAGUE B
Group 1
Austria 2 (Schaub 81, Grbic 87) Northern Ireland 1 (Magennis 75)
Romania v Norway - postponed
Group 2
Slovakia 1 (Gregus 32) Scotland 0
Czech Republic 1 (Darida 7) Israel 0
Group 3
Turkey 3 (Karaman 26, Under 32, Tosun 52-pen) Russia 2 (Cheryshev 11, Kuzyaev 57)
Hungary 1 (Kalmar 39) Serbia 1 (Radonjic 17)
Group 4
Bulgaria 1 (Iliev 68) Finland 2 (Pukki 7, Lod 45+1)
Wales 1 (Brooks 67) Republic of Ireland 0

LEAGUE C
Group 2
North Macedonia 2 (Trickovski 29, Stojanovski 68) Estonia 1 (Sappinen 52)
Georgia 1 (Qazaishvili 65-pen) Armenia 2 (Ghazaryan 33, Adamyan 86)
Group 3
Moldova 0 Greece 2 (Fortounis 32, Bakasetas 41)
Slovenia 2 (Kurtic 63, Illic 90+4-pen) Kosovo 1 (Muriqi 58)
Group 4
Albania 3 (Cikalleshi 16, Ismajli 23, Manaj 63)
Kazakhstan 1 (Kuat 25) Belarus 2 (Yablonski 5, Ebong 20) Lithuania 0

ON SATURDAY
LEAGUE A
Group 3
Sweden 2 (Kulusevski 36, Danielson 45+2) Croatia 1 (Danielson 82-og)
Portugal 0 France 1 (Kante 53)
Group 4
Switzerland 1 (Freuler 26) Spain 1 (Gerard Moreno 89)
Germany 3 (Sane 23, Werner 33, 64) Ukraine 1 (Yaremchuk 12)

LEAGUE C
Group 1
Cyprus 2 (Kastanos 34-pen, 71) Luxembourg 1 (Kousoulos 5-og)
Azerbaijan 0 Montenegro 0

LEAGUE D
Group 1
Malta 3 (Emili Garcia 56-og, Degabriele 59, Dimech 90+3) Andorra 1 (Rebes 3)
Latvia 1 (Kamess 59) Faroe Islands 1 (G Vatnhamar 60)
Group 2
San Marino 0 Gibraltar 0



Sabalenka replaces Serena in top 10 after Linz title

Aryna Sabalenka returned to the WTA's top 10 on Monday at the expense of Serena Williams after the Belarusian captured her eighth career title in Linz at the weekend. The 22-year-old Sabalenka finished the season in style with a straight-set victory over her doubles partner Elise Mertens in Sunday's final in Austria.



Pedersen wins first Saudi ladies golf title

Denmark's Emily Pedersen won the first-ever women's golf tournament in Saudi Arabia in a tense play-off on Sunday. With a birdie on the extra hole, Pedersen edged out England's Georgia Hall and secured the \$150,000 winner's cheque in the inaugural Saudi Ladies International at the King Abdullah Economic City.

Johnson finally nets Masters title

AUGUSTA: Dustin Johnson finally clinched an elusive second major title with a five-stroke victory at the Masters on Sunday, staving off self-doubt as he overcame a shaky start to his final round to end with a tournament-record low score at Augusta National.

American Johnson led throughout, though only by one stroke early, and did not drop a shot in the final 13 holes on his way to a four-under-par 68 and an unprecedented 20-under-par 268 total.

Australian Cameron Smith and South Korean Im Sung-jae kept Johnson honest after starting four shots back. They both shot 69 to tie for second on 15-under, but in the end, they had no answer to the champion, who played the final 13 holes bogey-free.

"It was a very difficult day," an emotional Johnson said after having a famous Green Jacket draped over his shoulders by last year's champion Tiger Woods.

"I was nervous all day, but I felt like I controlled myself very well, controlled the golf ball very well in difficult conditions."

World number one Johnson, from nearby Columbia, South Carolina, did not get to enjoy what would have been a magnificent reception from the gallery at the 18th green. Instead, he received polite applause from the several hundred people allowed on-site, with paying patrons absent this year due to coronavirus restrictions.

The victory, however, will go a long way to cementing the 36-year-old Johnson's reputation



Dustin Johnson of the US celebrates with his green jacket and the trophy after winning The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club. — Reuters

as a pre-eminent player of his generation. He previously won the 2016 US Open, but before Sunday was 0-4 when leading into the final round at majors and had a reputation of frequently not rising to the occasion in the biggest moments. Among his near-misses was a tie for second behind Woods at last year's Masters. "It's always tough to get it done at a major no matter how good you are," he said.

KNIFE EDGE

The final margin did not reflect the fact that the result seemed on

a knife-edge early in the round after Johnson made two straight bogeys and a meltdown loomed large.

A majestic hawk soared overhead as the 36-year-old walked to the sixth tee with a one-shot lead. If the bird of prey was looking to swoop, it might have had an eye on the metaphorically wounded Johnson, who looked as calm as ever on the outside.

Inside, however, his stomach was churning and his mind racing at the suddenly real prospect that he was losing his grip on the

Green Jacket. Yet his nerves were steadied in style.

At the 180-yard par-three sixth, he took dead aim with an eight-iron from on top of the hill, and his ball never looked like ending anywhere but near the pin. It settled seven feet away and he converted the birdie, while Sung-jae bogeyed the same hole and Johnson was suddenly three shots clear. It was the decisive blow and Johnson never looked like faltering the rest of the way, though he did not relax until safely negotiating the water at the famous par-three 12th. "After that, I felt like I could breathe a little bit," he said.

Three straight birdies from the 13th allowed him to relax and enjoy his march to victory over the closing holes, even if he refrained from looking at a leaderboard. — Reuters

84TH MASTERS FINAL SCORES (USA unless noted)

268 - Dustin Johnson 65-70-65-68
273 - Im Sung-jae (KOR) 66-70-68-69, Cameron Smith (AUS) 67-68-69-69
276 - Justin Thomas 66-69-71-70
277 - Dylan Frittelli (RSA) 65-73-67-72, Rory McIlroy (NIR) 75-66-67-69
278 - CT Pan (TPE) 70-66-74-68, Jon Rahm (ESP) 69-66-72-71, Brooks Koepka 70-69-69-70
279 - Webb Simpson 67-73-71-68, Corey Connors (CAN) 74-65-71-69, Patrick Reed 68-68-71-72
280 - Marc Leishman (AUS) 70-72-70-68, Hideki Matsuyama (JPN) 68-68-72-72, Kevin Na 73-68-69-70, Abraham Ancer (MEX) 68-67-69-76
281 - Xander Schauffele 67-73-71-70, Patrick Cantlay 70-66-73-72
282 - Scottie Scheffler 71-68-72-71, Cameron Champ 68-74-68-72, Sebastian Munoz (COL) 70-68-69-75, Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 71-66-71-74
283 - Louis Oosthuizen (RSA) 68-70-75-70, Justin Rose (ENG) 67-70-76-70

Jotun, Pitspot, Vanderlande notch contrasting victories

MUSCAT: Sreelal Pillai's superb 75 helped Jotun CT to a comfortable 68-run victory against OCT Mabela in a D Division T20 game at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Amerat on Friday.

Jotun reached 192 for 5 in 20 overs as Sajith Pillai's 39 and Amal Raj's whirlwind 38 not out off 19 balls provided the much needed impetus. OCT Mabela failed to match that effort, limping to a modest 124 for 8 in their quota of 20 overs. Satish bowled well, taking 3 for 29.

Brief scores (D Division T20 League): Jotun CT 192 for 5 in 20 overs (Sreelal Pillai 75 - 10x4, Sajith Pillai 39 - 4x4, 1x6, Amal Raj 38 not out - 4x4, 1x6) trounced OCT Mabela 124 for 8 in 20 overs (Zafarullah Al Balushi 35 - 4x4, 1x6. Issam Uthman 21 - 3x4. Satish 3-29, Roymon Basil 2-24) by 68 runs. **MoM:** Sreelal Pillai (Jotun).

HAMSA HELPS PITSPOT TO THRILLING WIN

In another D Division match on Friday, Fahad Hamsa's brilliant all-round show helped Pitspot to a thrilling one run win over Safar International at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Pitspot posted a healthy 159 for 8 on the board thanks to major contributions from Rajesh Periyannan (38), Wajid Ali (37) and a swashbuckling 27 off 12 by Fahad Hamsa.

Safara started off well, reaching 117 for 3 in 13 overs before slumping to 126 for 6 in the 15th over. The team fought well right till the very end but fell short by just one run, ending their innings at 158 for 9 in 20 overs. Opener Adeel Anwar top-scored with 36.



Vanderlande's Muhammed Muzaiyen

Brief scores (D Division T20 League): Pitspot 159 for 8 in 20 overs (Rajesh Periyannan 38 - 3x4, 1x6, Wajid Ali 37 - 2x4, Fahad Hamsa 27 - 5x4. Sandesh Pusalkar 2-12, Shameel Mohammed 2-23, Amol Dhotre 2-30) bt Safara International 158 for 9 in 20 overs (Adeel Anwar 36 - 7x4, Shadab Kazi 25 - 4x4. Monty Navani 2-17, Fahad Hamsa 2-29) by 1 run.

MUZAIYEN SHINES AS VANDERLANDE WINS

Vanderlande rode on Muhammed Muzaiyen's match-winning talent to beat Spanio VDD by 29 runs in a D Division clash on Friday.

Invited to bat, Vanderlande scored a respectable 170 for 6 in 20 overs thanks to Muzaiyen (50 off 35) and Barathwaj Vinayagam (36 off 23). Spanio failed to recover from a dismal 49 for 4 in 8 overs, ending its 20 overs at a below par 141 for 9. Muzaiyen was the pick of Vanderlande bowlers, taking 3 for 29.

Brief scores (D Division T20 League): Vanderlande 170-6 in 20 overs (Muhammed Muzaiyen 50 - 5x4, 1x6, Barathwaj Vinayagam 36 - 4x4, Rahul Chadha 23 - 2x4. Jibin Joseph 2-24) bt Spanio VDD 141-9 in 20 overs (Shinu Prasad 36 - 2x4, 3x6. Muhammed Muzaiyen 3-29, Navin Joseph 2-32) by 29 runs. **MoM:** Muhammed Muzaiyen (Vanderlande).

OFA's Serbian expert to launch workshop for coaches



Slobodan Pavkovic with the OFA officials.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
 MUSCAT, NOV 16

Slobodan Pavkovic of Serbia, technical director at the Oman Football Association (OFA), will launch a technical programme for the youth coaches in the domestic clubs. The workshop will begin in the forthcoming weekend and will continue during the next few months to cover all the 44 clubs in the Sultanate.

The Serbian technical expert told *Oman Daily Observer* that the workshop will target the coaches of under-15, under-17 and under-19 teams.

"The programme — Vision, Ambition and Solutions — will cover all the clubs in the

governorates and wilayats in Oman. We will start from Muscat on November 20 and 21 with the participation of 10 clubs including Bausher, Muscat, Seeb, Ahli Sidab, Qurayat, Al Shabab, Fanja, Al Musannah, Samayil and Al Rustaq. Our target is to have three coaches from each club representing the U-15, U-17 and U-19 teams," he said.

The second workshop will be on November 27 and 28 at Al Saada Sports Complex while the third workshop is scheduled to take place in January 2021 in Sur. Next will be in Nizwa, Suhar and finally in Musandam.

The 64-year-old Serbian said each workshop will be two days long.

We will start from Muscat on November 20 and 21 with participation of 10 clubs. Our target is to have three coaches from each club representing the U-15, U-17 and U-19 teams

SLOBODAN PAVKOVIC,
OFA Technical Director

"There will be four presentations on each day and followed by a practical session a with total of eight theory sessions and two practical sessions. The content of the programme is to cover the technical aspects related to football coaching including football history, development of footballing systems, basics movement, match analysis,...etc. We will deliver the right coaching techniques for the youth players starting with some specific football movement. Also, the course will feature coaching methodology and technical details on a small area with limited players. History of football is another part of the theory lecture besides the development of footballing

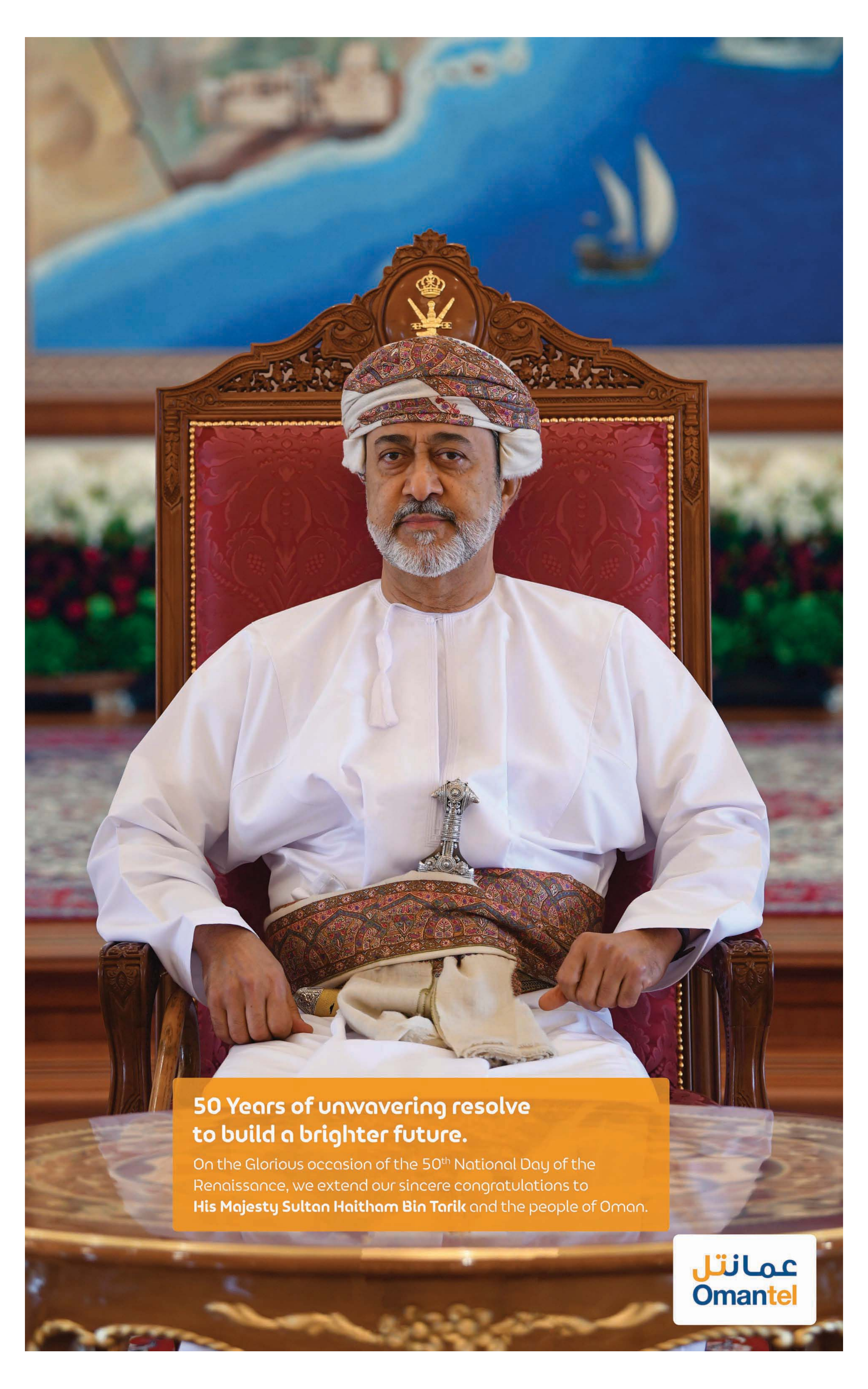


system from 2-3-5 and moving to 4-2-4, 4-3-3 and 4-3-2-1. Another significant part in the programme is match analysis. In this lesson, the coaches will understand the right approaches on obtaining the match statistics, analysing the match video and writing the match conclusion report," he said. It is expected that this planned workshop will assist the domestic clubs a lot and will build the technical capability and ability of the coaches. Also, after completion of the workshop, the youth coaches can implement the learned theoretical and practical skills with the teams in the forthcoming competitions.

Pavkovic is a well-known personnel at the YouTube channel

as he used to have many online training sessions in different e-learning platforms. He provided different sessions including the technical coaching fundamentals to the junior players. Besides, he had presented a series of videos for the cadet and hopes level to learn the basics in football. The Serbian expert coach had launched the online training programmes at OFA social media accounts in April. Pavkovic had delivered many coaching training programmes for all the teams including the junior teams. The initiative was raised by the OFA and was part of the technical training skills to the national coaches during those days of suspension of all the sports activities due to the COVID-19

coronavirus outbreak. Pavkovic had developed a lot for Singapore as he was the technical director in the Football Association of Singapore. He had applied different systematic implementation of player development and coaching education programmes to improve the overall standard of play in Singapore. Slobodan Pavkovic began his technical charge at the OFA technical department since the first quarter of this year. The technical expert has a wide experience as he was the former coach of Kuwait national team, the Serbia U-19 team, as well as some of the top clubs in Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Sweden and his native Serbia.

A portrait of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik of Oman. He is seated on an ornate wooden throne with a red upholstered backrest. He is wearing a white thobe, a patterned ghutra, and a decorative sash. The background features a large mural of a sailboat on the wall and a patterned rug on the floor.

50 Years of unwavering resolve to build a brighter future.

On the Glorious occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance, we extend our sincere congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik** and the people of Oman.

عمانتل
Omantel



Devoted to our Country and Leader
Celebrating the 50th National Day of the Renaissance

On the occasion of the Glorious 50th National Day of the Renaissance,
it is an honour to offer our heartiest congratulations and
best wishes to our inspirational leader

His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik,
and the loyal people of Oman.

We pledge to work together and ensure a bright future
for our beloved country.



#لك_المجد





#MAISARAHWORLD

#WinningIsEasier

With Special Prizes Draw from Maisarah Prize Account!

Special Prizes

National Day Prizes
2,000 OMR each
for 8 winners

Ministry of Health Prizes
Guaranteed Prize 1,000 OMR each
for 10 winners (one winner per month)
500 OMR each
for 15 winners (General entries)

Armed Forces MOD/ROP Prizes
Guaranteed Prize 1,000 OMR each
for 10 winners (one winner per month)
500 OMR each
for 15 winners (General entries)

For more information visit: www.maisarah-oman.com/Default/MaisarahPrizeAccount.aspx



100 sq km earmarked for clean energy projects

OMAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS CO (S.A.O.G)

Chairman's Report and Condensed Consolidated Financial Statements (unaudited) for the period ended 30th September 2020

Respected Shareholders,

We are pleased to present to you a summary of the results of the operations for the 9 months' period ended 30th September 2020.

Operating performance:

REVENUE

Group Revenue for the period ended September 2020 has reached RO 1,859.2 million compared to RO 1,893.4 million for the corresponding period 2019. The Group revenue include acquired business of Zain Group, which contributed revenues of RO 1,458.2 Mn.

Omantel (Domestic performance) Revenues recorded a growth of 3% and reached RO 410.1 million compared to RO 396.3 million for the corresponding period 2019, mainly contributed by Fixed Broad band and Revenues from Wholesale International business and devices (which are typically of low margin compared to the core revenues). Adjusted for the above, Core revenues for the nine months period 2020 is RO 328.2 Mn compared to RO 345.4 Mn in 2019, a decrease of 5%, which impacted the overall margins. However, the performance was impacted as well by the Corona pandemic (Covid19) as well as the drop in oil prices which both have consequences on the economies of countries.

EXPENSES

Group's total Operating expenses increased to RO 1,548.6 Mn compared to RO 1,538.1 Mn for the corresponding period 2019, an increase of 0.7%. Omantel (Domestic performance) cost of sale increased to RO 145 Mn compared to RO 119.4 Mn. The increase is mainly due to increase in revenue related expenses. Omantel has managed to reduce its Operating and administrative expenses by 6% YoY resulting from the Cost Optimization measures.

NET PROFIT

The Group achieved an after tax Net Profit of RO 167.7 Mn compared to RO 198.3 Mn in 2019. Zain Group contributed RO 150.3 million to the net profit (before non-controlling interest) of Omantel Group for the nine months period 2020 compared to RO 179.6 million of the same period in 2019, a decline of RO 16.3%. After adjusting for non-controlling interest, Zain group contributed RO 28.9 million for the nine months period 2020 compared to RO 33.8 million of the same period in 2019.

Omantel domestic operation results has been resilient considering the serious business disruptions witnessed since March '20 resulting from Covid-19 pandemic. Omantel domestic operation witnessed 6% decline in Net profit for the nine months period 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. However, proactive cost optimization measures taken by the management has positively contributed in achieving a 6% reduction in Operating and administrative expenses YoY. Group Earning per Share (EPS) for the period ended 30th September 2020 is RO 0.062 compared to RO 0.070 for the corresponding period of year 2019.

SUBSCRIBER BASE

The total domestic subscriber base as of September 2020 (including mobile and fixed businesses) was 3.2 Mn (excluding Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.4 Mn of the corresponding period of the previous year, recording a decline of 7% over the last period. Total subscriber base with mobile resellers reached 3.8 Mn.

Subsidiary Companies:

- 1) Mobile Telecommunication Company (Zain):** Group revenues recorded a drop of 3% and reached RO 1,499.6 Mn as of September 2020 compared to the corresponding period revenues of RO 1,549.2 Mn. EBITDA stands at RO 629.5 Mn, recording a decline of 8%. Net profit stands at RO 165.2 Mn compared to RO 194 Mn of the previous period.
Zain Group's resilient results were achieved despite the widespread disruption in economic and social activity. To counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Zain Group financials, management proactively took decisive cost optimization measures in areas such as contracts renegotiation, and management of cash flows that succeeded in reducing operational expenses by RO 50.1 Mn.
Total customer base of Zain Group decreased by 0.4% to 48.9 Mn compared to 49.1 Mn of the previous period.

Market Share:

Omantel's Mobile market share (including Mobile Resellers) is 53% with a revenue share of 58.5%. The Fixed Telephone (post & pre-paid) market share is 69.9% with a revenue market share of 80.7%.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

OAs part of its ongoing commitment to support the society and environment, Omantel has embarked on number of CSR initiatives and programs and has extended its support to various organizations and events. The below summarizes the major initiatives and events supported during the period July-September 2020:

- 1. An agreement with Be'ah to promote recycling culture:**
As part of the ESG Initiative, Omantel has signed a strategic partnership agreement with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) to foster the recycling culture among communities in Oman through the deployment of Reverse Vending Machines (RVMS) across Muscat.
- 2. Omantel launched a SMS donation campaign to support Lebanon & Sudan:**
Omantel through its cooperation with the Oman Charitable organization announced its support for the
 - a. Lebanese citizens to help them after the Beirut explosion.
 - b. Sudanese citizens to help them to face the repercussions of the floods.
- 3. Other CSR Initiatives:**
 - a. Upgrade-4: a program aims to transform graduating students' projects into financially viable fourth industrial revolution start-ups
 - b. Ideation program: Omantel with partnership with NBC run a pre-incubation program that targets talented students and potential entrepreneurs who need help in forming a business around their ideas.

Covid19 Management Response:

To manage the challenges posed by Covid'19, Omantel management has put in serious of measures as follows:

1. Proactive Cost optimization measures which include postponement of non-critical Capex projects, strict working capital management and implementing effective opex management.
2. Activating Digital channels across most of the customer touch points and encourage customers to use the digital channels including the mobile app, E-shop and chatbot 'Noor' through IVR announcements and SMS. Also, activated Work From Home for Call center agents to provide uninterrupted call center service to the customers.
3. Introducing COVID-19 solutions that enable public and private organizations to work effectively from home, and resume work from office safely. In addition to providing the healthcare sector with solutions to monitor patients' health, condition remotely.
4. Enhancing the mobile app experience by enabling SIM ordering with the ability to track the order, Gift Internet, request for more data, WFBF profile management, bill payment history for up to six months and e-SIM activation for existing customers.

Awards & Recognitions

1. Omantel bagged the "Happiness at Work" award for the best employee engagement program in the third edition of Happiness at Work ceremony organized by Sustainable Minds (Dubai).
2. Recognized as the "best data/ capacity provider of the year in the Middle East regional operator of the year in the 4th Carrier Community Global Awards 2020.

Future outlook:

The Covid-19 outbreak continues to have a profound impact on the global and local economies as well as the telecom sector in specific. The uncertainty created by the pandemic has led to sever disruptions especially in the tourism and retail sectors, resulting into substantially altered spending patterns across companies, Public Sector institutions and households. Business closures and the current reduction in expatriate workforce also puts further pressure on an already decreasing market for telecom services and increases the risk of non-payments and termination of services. Despite these challenges, the current situation also offers unique opportunities for the telecom sector in general: the "New Normal" has led to a dramatic shift in how telecommunication services are being used and how much capacity is required (Working from Home, acceleration of online business transactions and extended digitalization of services).

In addition to the Covid-19 impact, the Omani market will further be impacted by 2 major evolutions: the arrival of the 3rd MNO and the emergence of a new technology 5G:

- The arrival of the third operator in Oman will have a profound impact on the current competitive dynamics. The Omani market is showing signals of saturation and we are witnessing a decline in both core telecom market revenues (such as voice, data and messaging) and subscribers, as the number of expats is expected to decrease due to the overall economic impact. It is expected with the entry of the third operator will impose further challenges on the existing operators.
- At the same time, the continuing growth of OTT (over-the-top) services such as Netflix, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram drives an increasing demand of bandwidth volumes, which is in principle a potential for operators to grow revenues. Nevertheless, the popularity of free services and the dominance of global content players with a capability to leverage a global customer base while being subjected to limited domestic regulation, makes it challenging for domestic telecom operators to compete on value added services. Furthermore, investment in expanding the infrastructure to support this demand remains a substantial burden on operators, putting an increased pressure on the margins.
- Under these circumstances, it is additionally challenging for operators to find the funding for the required investments in 5G. Even with the far superior services 5G can provide in terms of speed and latency, as well as the possibility to develop a new stream of advanced smart services and IoT (Internet of Things) solutions, history in previous network upgrades such as 4G has proven that the monetization of these advanced features is challenging in the short term. As with every new technology, the real use cases will only become clear once the network has been rolled out and the appropriate echo system is developed. This will provide a dilemma for operators to decide when and how to pace the deployment of 5G networks.

In light of the current situation and in order to strengthen our position as one of the primary enablers of Oman's digital ambitions, we have developed our new strategy, "Shift Gear to achieve sustainable profitability growth". Our new strategy builds further on the key transformation initiatives started under Omantel 3.0 (such as digitalization, Customer Experience, ICT, Carrier of Carriers and Agility) and focuses further on extracting maximum value from these activities. In addition to the above, Omantel has introduced stringent controls in spending to assure the impact of Covid-19 is minimized while continuing to invest in essential strategic domains.

Thanks and appreciation

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our shareholders and loyal customers for their continued support that enabled us to achieve these excellent results. Also, we wholeheartedly appreciate the sincere contribution of the Executive Management and Employees for the performance in the challenging situation. With your support, we are confident that Omantel will continue its good performance and will be able to reach new heights of excellence.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the staff, we are honored to greet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of the 50th National Day. We pray to Almighty Allah to return this occasion to His Majesty with good health, happiness and long life, and to the Omani people with prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. We pray to Almighty Allah to grant him long live, health and welfare to achieve more progress, prosperity and welfare for Oman and its people.

CHAIRMAN

Condensed consolidated statement of financial position as of September 2020

ASSETS	Unaudited 30 September 2020 RO'000	Audited 31 December 2019 RO'000
Current assets	RO'000	RO'000
Cash and bank balances	503,006	470,575
Trade and other receivables	875,453	823,726
Contract assets	104,112	98,417
Inventories	63,377	69,837
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	16,381	18,590
Investments at amortised cost	2,000	-
Assets of disposal group classified as held for sale	7,899	21,787
Total current assets	1,572,228	1,502,932
Non-current assets	26,053	34,805
Contract assets	28,317	26,779
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	9,014	7,868
Investments at FVOCI	-	2,000
Investments at amortised cost	70,303	84,921
Other assets	106,254	106,865
Investment in associates and joint ventures	236,571	245,173
Right of use assets	2,022,312	2,055,101
Property and equipment	3,535,597	3,567,637
Intangible assets and goodwill	6,034,421	6,131,149
Total non-current assets	6,034,421	6,131,149
Total assets	7,606,649	7,634,081
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,361,584	1,322,203
Contract liabilities	145,687	156,748
Income tax payables	70,368	76,422
Borrowings	218,315	229,384
Lease liabilities	50,851	57,765
Liabilities of disposal group held-for-sale	1,234	6,678
Total current liabilities	1,848,039	1,849,200
Non-current liabilities		
Borrowings	2,320,909	2,352,073
Other liabilities	681,524	616,285
Lease liabilities	205,855	194,842
Total non-current liabilities	3,208,288	3,163,200
Total liabilities	5,056,327	5,012,400
Equity		
Share capital	75,000	75,000
Legal reserve	25,000	25,000
Voluntary reserve	49,875	49,875
Capital contribution	7,288	7,288
Capital reserve	36,893	36,893
Foreign currency translation reserve	(68,877)	(60,150)
Fair value reserve	(1,335)	(1,425)
Other reserves	(11,574)	(2,846)
Retained earnings	440,239	435,136
Attributable to equity holders of the company	552,509	564,771
Non-controlling interests	1,997,813	2,056,910
Total equity	2,550,322	2,621,681
Total liabilities and equity	7,606,649	7,634,081

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS for the nine months ended 30 September 2020 (unaudited)

	Three months ended September		Nine months ended September	
	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000
Revenue	617,149	634,476	1,859,153	1,893,360
Cost of sales	(173,713)	(173,004)	(527,251)	(519,714)
Gross profit	443,436	461,472	1,331,902	1,373,646
Operating and administrative expenses	(171,213)	(174,641)	(520,668)	(522,805)
Depreciation and amortisation	(148,953)	(153,353)	(447,811)	(460,177)
Expected credit loss on financial assets	(16,148)	(10,936)	(52,911)	(35,452)
Operating profit	107,122	122,542	310,512	355,212
Gain on sale and lease back transaction	-	-	5,806	-
Gain on modification of financial liabilities	13,580	-	13,580	-
Interest income	1,322	3,261	5,100	10,401
Investment income / (loss)	396	30	736	(76)
Share of results of associates and joint ventures	191	258	1,013	2,244
Other (expenses) / income	(56)	3,972	(3,511)	6,794
Finance costs	(39,005)	(47,673)	(126,140)	(145,313)
Loss from currency revaluation	(5,414)	(2,531)	(16,593)	(9,814)
Net monetary gain	(120)	1,674	4,121	6,712
Profit before taxation	78,016	81,533	194,624	226,160
Taxation	(10,830)	(9,778)	(26,953)	(27,907)
Profit for the period	67,186	71,755	167,671	198,253
Attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Company	22,390	19,517	46,353	52,680
Non-controlling interests	44,796	52,238	121,318	145,573
Earnings per share	67,186	71,755	167,671	198,253
Basic and diluted – RO	0.030	0.026	0.062	0.070

Note:

1. The unaudited consolidated financial statement will be delivered to any shareholders or other interested party who requests them, within 5 days of the written request. The request must indicate preference for Arabic or English.
2. Request may be addressed to Secretary, Board of Directors, Omantel P.O. Box 789, P.C. 112, Ravi Sultanate of Oman. Fax: 242 40 586.



ENERGY TRANSITION: International companies express interest to invest in green hydrogen projects in Oman's SEZs and free zones

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, NOV 16

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has established a dedicated zone for the clean energy projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). Covering an area of 100 km², the zone is large enough for renewable and alternative energy related investments with an electricity generation capacity of about 10 gigawatts (GW), according to an official of OPAZ.

Jalal bin Abdulkarim al Lawati, Director, said a number of international companies have evinced interest in developing green hydrogen and other clean energy projects in the SEZs and free zones of the Sultanate. OPAZ, he said, is currently evaluating a number of investment requests in this field. Interested investors are looking at opportunities in Duqm SEZ and Sohar Free Zone as hubs for the production of electricity from solar and wind resources, as well as green hydrogen for export.

Clean hydrogen projects are considered one of the future strategic projects that international companies are interested to invest in as an environment-friendly alternative to oil and gas by-products

JALAL BIN ABDULKARIM AL LAWATI

Director, OPAZ

The international interest reflects the Sultanate's ideal characteristics as one of five promising destinations for investments in clean energy, he said, citing studies carried out by these companies.

An abundance of natural solar and wind energy resources, notably in Duqm, coupled with the availability of ample land for development make Oman an attractive venue for investments in utility-scale solar PV projects and wind turbines, he stressed.

"Clean hydrogen projects are considered one of the future strategic projects that international companies are interested to invest in as an environment-friendly alternative to oil and gas by-products.

Usually electricity is generated from clean sources and used to separate hydrogen bits from oxygen in water, and then use hydrogen bits as a source of energy or converted to other chemicals such as ammonia or methanol," he stated.

OPAZ is also coordinating with other concerned government bodies to support the allocation of a dedicated cluster within Sohar Free Zone for solar energy related investments.

The Authority seeks to support Oman's inclusion in the global green hydrogen production ecosystem through investments in the SEZs and free zones, he noted.



Sultanate of Oman: 50 golden years of progress



MOHAMMED AL RIYAMI

Oman has had an incredible 50 years filled with many great milestones. Its citizens and general population have reaped the benefits of its growth and security under the wise leadership of our late Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said (May the Almighty rest his soul in peace) and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The journey has been filled with challenges and we have been able to navigate through them and make them into successes. The first ten years were the defining years.

As we all know, the modern birth of Oman started in 1970, when the late Sultan assumed the throne. Oman became a member of United Nations and the Arab League.

The fruits of modern Oman were symbolised with the opening of Seeb Airport in 1973 and

before that we had a basic airstrip in Ruwi. There have been many important milestones of progress. A few of them are indicated in the chart.

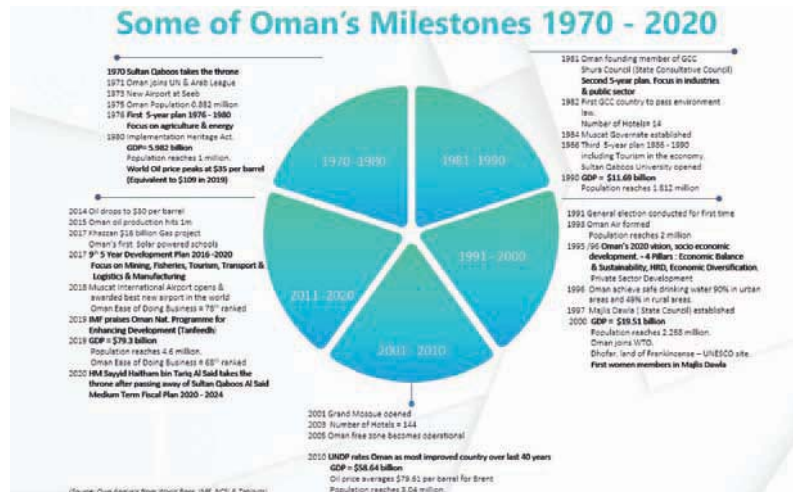
Our population and real GDP have grown to commendable levels on the back of a prosperous hydrocarbon industry. The five-year development plans have evolved over the different slices of ten years.

Albeit, the fundamentals of our socio-economic landscape are changing. Profit margins are shrinking, while a growing young population puts a strain on the private and public sectors. At this juncture, we need to be united and find ways to move forward in an unpredictable diverse world.

To this end, the government put in motion the Ninth 5-year Development Plan (2016 – 2020). Mining, fisheries, tourism, logistics and manufacturing were identified as sectors for strategic and economic diversification.

At the outset, the criteria for the economic sectors encompassing diversification are four-fold: creation of job opportunities, developing a competitive business environment, supporting sustainable growth, and catalysing the development of other sectors.

Mining's share of GDP is expected to grow to 0.5



per cent from 0.4 per cent. The fisheries sector is expected to grow to 0.6 per cent of the GDP, from 0.5 per cent, with average annual growth of 7 per cent per annum and expected investment of RO 1.1 billion.

Tourism will increase to 3.3 per cent of the GDP, from 3 per cent. Investments in tourism are expected to increase to RO 1.6 billion for the period 2016 to 2020. According to the National Centre for Statistics (NSCI), tourism grew 4.9 per cent in 2019, from the previous year to RO 1.3 billion.

Transport & Logistics' share of the GDP is expected to grow to 7 per cent from 6.2 per cent. The average growth is expected to be 5.4 per cent per annum, with total investment of RO 6.1 billion.

Manufacturing's share of the GDP will grow to 11 per cent from

9.8 per cent, with total investment of RO 2.6 billion.

Additionally, the national diversification programme (Tanfeedh) involved the government and experts from the industry to carve out initiatives to diversify and sustain Oman's economy with the aid of workshops and labs to find solutions.

It is very clear the government has worked very hard to diversify the economy away from hydrocarbons. Still, the hydrocarbon and energy industries are still a major component of our economy.

There is a clear focus and opportunity to increase gas production and renewables. This fits well with Oman's commitment to control GHG emission growth by 2 per cent in 2020 - 2030, based

on the UN Conference of Parties (COP19).

This will help avoid climate change impacts like coastal erosion, heat waves, water scarcity and their general impact on the ecosystem and biodiversity.

In 2020, we had an unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought the world economy to a grinding halt. Oman's oil prices for January to September 2020 average \$47.2 per barrel, compared to \$64.6 in the same period in 2019.

The oil budget for 2020 is \$58 per barrel, resulting in a sharp deficit. Oman's fiscal balance during the last few years has been on a downward trend. The fiscal deficit in 2014 was RO 1.5 billion and it sharply increased to RO 17.6 billion in 2019.

Tawazun, the national fiscal balance programme, has the mandate to reduce the fiscal deficit within the next few years with efficiency measures and increase revenues from government companies.

Indeed, the government is doing a sterling job to reduce cost duplication, enhance cost optimisation, incentivise foreign direct investments and initiate other measures. This has resulted in Oman Investment Authority

taking control of all government companies (except for PDO and a few others).

Also, some ministries were merged and enhanced, and new ones to take Oman into the future with confidence and resilience under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

In 2018, Oman was ranked 78th in "Ease of Doing Business in Oman", up from 68th in 2019. Currently the Financial Committee of the Majlis AshShura is discussing the Tenth 5-Year Plan (2021 – 2025) on its objectives, as well as to realise the all-important 2040 Vision.

As we move forward, we need to keep the momentum going, to make the business environment favourable for companies to prosper, create more jobs, add value and create opportunities.

To this end, we may foresee more cleaner energy options, renewables, diversification initiatives and general investments coming into Oman with a win-win approach, where the government, public and international companies are all working together to support a sustainable future. *(The writer has more than 20 years of experience in the oil, gas & investment sectors. He can be reached at malriyami2@gmail.com)*

Oman Drydock inks pact with Turkish shipyard



NEW MILESTONE: Partnership agreement with TOR Group is in line with ODC's ambitions to venture into the shipbuilding market

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Oman Drydock Company (ODC), which operates and manages one of the region's largest ship repair and maintenance yards at Duqm, has announced the signing of a partnership agreement with leading Turkish shipyard TOR Group — a move that will support the former's ambitions to add shipbuilding to its range of capabilities.

Istanbul-based TOR Group, a family owned business first established in 1880, has investments spanning the shipbuilding and

maritime repair business chain. Its flagship investment is the Torgem Shipyard featuring multiple piers, slipways, fabrication workshops, and an outfitting and repair quay. It has so far over 100 newbuildings to its name, including a number of tugboats, fast patrol boats, various port service vessels, and diving vessels. In a post on social media, ODC — part of Asyad Group — said the partnership agreement with TOR Group will help "fulfil new-build requests" from the government and private sectors.

"This partnership agreement adds to ODC's portfolio of business, which include but are

not limited to, the following shipbuilding projects in the shipyard: Tugboats, Oil Recovery Vessels, Fish Trawlers, Work Boats, Pilot Boats, Barges, Floating Docks, and Offshore Support Vessels (OSVs)," it noted.

Since it was brought into operation in 2011, the wholly government-owned yard has so far received over 900 vessels of all types for dry-docking and maintenance repairs.

As many as 176 vessels were handled last year — a number projected to rise to an average of 200 ships annually on the back of an aggressive marketing effort by

the company.

Of late, the yard has ramped up its capabilities to offer a range of value-added services to ship-owners bringing their vessels for dry-docking and repairs. Notable is the fabrication and installation of on-board scrubbers and ballast water systems designed to help ships meet their emission and effluent control requirements.

Additionally, the yard has strongly promoted its ability to build platforms, upgrade the topsides of offshore rigs and jack-up rigs, and undertake conversions for FPSOs, and storage units of offshore platforms.

Ubhar Capital completes merger with GBCM

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, NOV 16



(30 per cent) respectively.

The merged entity will continue to focus on key business segments of Asset Management, Corporate Finance, Wealth Management, Brokerage/Research and Custody Services. The highly complementary investment banking capabilities of Ubhar Capital and GBCM will strengthen the combined organisation's ability to provide services to an expanded number of clients in Oman, the region and around the globe.

"This acquisition underscores our vision for Ubhar Capital to become a premier investment bank out of Oman — with

global reach and capabilities. The acquisition will also benefit from significant synergies and will create growth opportunities for Omani nationals," said Anwar al Jabri, Chairman of Ubhar Capital SAOC.

"I am immensely proud of the Ubhar Capital team and our achievements. This merger will further solidify our position as a leading player in the investment banking sector in Oman. The merged entity under the Ubhar Capital umbrella will create a truly exciting and comprehensive investment banking proposition and will enable our collective team to serve a far wider spectrum of clients, backed by utilising our qualified Omani human capital," said Lo'ai Bataineh, Chief Executive Officer of Ubhar Capital SAOC.

New initiative offers internships for Omanis

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, NOV 16

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has joined forces with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and a number of higher education institutions to launch a new programme which aims to enhance the working relationship between industry and academia.

"Eidaad" is a pioneering education initiative to establish a one-academic-year internship programme with leading companies in the Sultanate so students can engage in an extended period of applied learning in a discipline that is needed by industry.

The aim of the programme is to equip participants with valuable technical experience and critical thinking, communications, behavioural, fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and high-level transferable skills so that they may develop the professional competencies required to establish successful and sustainable careers in a dynamic and competitive economy.

The agreement governing the collaboration was signed today (16 November) by representatives from PDO, MoHERI, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, the National University of Science and Technology and the German University of



Technology (GUtech), at MoHERI's headquarters.

PDO Managing Director Raoul Restucci said: "PDO is proud to play its part in this pioneering national initiative to add value to the nation and nurture young talent. It is key that we continue to work together to align academic development with industry needs and enhance the curriculum to include industry challenges. We are looking forward to this collaboration that will pave the way for young Omani students to enter the jobs market with a strong skillset that will help and support their career development and growth."

The first batch of 223 students have been placed with leading companies in the Sultanate, including PDO, Asyad, OLN, Nama, Be'ah from leading educational institutions, such as Sultan Qaboos University, GUtech, the National University, University of Technology and Applied Sciences — Sohar and Muscat University, and a second batch is planned for September 2021.

WJ Towell Group Company



Quality car rentals
at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles

• Choose from a wide range of brands & models

• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available

• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت
ORBIT

Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Observer

For Advertisements
Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Muhammad Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Rakim Al Shihri
9998977
bakht.omandaily@gmail.com

Ali Al Maashari

99639264
wadi.oman@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Ahri
9942094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Subar Office

Muhammad Al Saidi
9942032
sohar.daily@outlook.com

TEUSDAYNOVEMBER 17, 2020RABEE AL THANI 1, 1442 AH

Observer

Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

FOR RENTINVESTMENTBUYINGACC AVAILABLEFOR SALE/RENTRENT A CARSERVICES

NEW family flats in Darsait near the beach, 5 bedrooms, hall with AC, 4 bathrooms, balcony with sea view, RO 450 per month. Contact: 99315986.

FLAT for rent. 98403020

SOUTH Al Ghubra flat in villa on the first floor, 3 rooms + 3 toilets + majlis + family room and dinning room with balcony very nice view, the house all with AC, RO 400. 96559696.

GENERAL clinic licence along with building and clinical equipment in Maabela. Size: 400 sqm. 99323030.

FLAT for rent in Maabela 3 master rooms. 96088926.

FLATS in Mumtaz, Al Khuwair and Al Ghubrah, 2BHK and 1 BHK. 99341138/ 90991079.

2 BEDROOM flat Al Khuwair. 99322344.

FOR rent in Salalah, north Auqadain. Call 91711118.

ONE bedroom flat at Darsait near Medical RO 170/-. Two BHK Al Khuwair RO 300/-. Athaiba behind Zubair RO 300/-. 24790449, Fax: 24790559

NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-. 92838118

WELL maintained 1&2 BHK and office space/ store available at Rex Road. Contact 92227165

NEW penthouse, N Ghubra — 2 bedroom + 3 toilets + 1 maid room with toilet and 1 big hall 99370300.

FLAT for rent at Al Khuwair 33, 4 bedrooms, majlis, 2 halls, kitchen and store. 99383446.

NEW apartment in Ruwi near church consists of 2 rooms with its facilities. Contact. 94664635, 95850345.

1BHK & 2 bhk flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. 93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

3 BHK Flat & studio flat in central Ruwi & 2 BHK in Medinat Al Ilam. Call 99238012/ 24704994.

SIT. VACANT

SALES ENGINEER (PEB) B.Tech Mechanical with minimum 7 years of experience in Pre Engineered Steel Building (PEB) sales and marketing. Responsibility involves Technical discussion with the customers, preparing proposals, cost estimation and quotation. Valid GCC driving licence is a must. Contact: hrjob191@yahoo.com.

JOB Vacancy in a private School. 1. Biology teacher; 2. Chemistry or Physics teacher. Required: 1. Appropriate qualification. 2. Experience in teaching languages. 3. IELTS Certificate minimum 6. Contact: 96062530

DENTAL Clinic looking for experienced **Female Nurse** with bachelor/ diploma & three years' experience. Candidates who are ready to join, please send your resume to hiringmedicalstaff@hotmail.com

URGENT requirement, Marble grounding expert 2 nos. External glass cleaner - 2 nos. Visa available. Mobile: 95175645, 97468796

Duct Man/ Fabricator URGENTLY required for Duct Factory **Duct Men/ Fabricator** With minimum 4 years Oman experience. Contact: 98901648.

WE are urgently for AC & Auto electrician (car electrician) who can join immediately. Contact: 99677756.

AN organic jaggery (Al Harifayuh)1 manufacturing industry available for partnership or investment in Hubli India. 0091 9742421122.

SIT. WANTED

YOUNG experienced Pakistani driver with Omani light vehicle driving licence seeks suitable opening. Speaks Arabic, Hindi, English and familiar with interior and Muscat areas. Contact GSM 95856719.

CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job 97299165.

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact 93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, PROJECTS, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact. 99884291 / 99741875 Email vipul70@gmail.com

SMART Indian professional, excellent English, double Masters — journalism & communication, finance, writing & research skills, Arabic speaker, 15 years diversified Oman experience in Muscat Airport project, healthcare, media, EPC, seeks suitable role. NOC. 99283938

AL Awsad Modern llc, electronic and furniture used. 99834373.

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. 90202090.

SIT. WANTED

LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM 92541510

33 years, Indian, female having MBA in finance looking for position of accountant, having 8 years of experience in Muscat as accountant. NOC available. Contact No: 79161458.

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkhdhanush11@gmail.com

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. 968 94991705.

FOR SALE

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.

A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. 92470024.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Al Mashary Al'alyt Llmoawlat**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **126521**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 255,000.000 to

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non-cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact 99657906

MANPOWER

MANPOWER from Philippines. Whatsapp: 91206344.

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocroaches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

COCKROACH

BEDBUG

RODENT

FLIES

TERMITE

SNAKE

FOR SALE OR LEASE

A STORE which can be made into a two-storey building, has a 350 sqm area. Contact 97811111.

FOR SALE

INSTITUTION Licence contact 95595512.

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. 92836774

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

NEW 3 storey villas for sale/rents Wadi Kabir/Al Khuwair), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). 96596348.

Buttercup Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS
○ Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
○ Rent for one month and get 5 days free.
All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. ☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We are a company dealing in ambulance service in the interior and in capital area of OM. We are looking for male nurse (Omani) retired from service between the age of 40 to 55 years. Having ACLS, BLS certificate and Ministry of Health License. Interested parties may please send their CV along with copies of ACLS, BLS and MoH license to: **khalfan@rawabittrading.com** or **george@rawabittrading.com**

A reputed company in Sultanate of Oman is looking for the following personnel :

1. **Wiring Electrician – General:**

• To read SLD, GA Drawing, Schematic drawing & BOM

• Prepare Layout & component assembly as per GA drawing

• Prepare Busbar links and busbar assembly

• Wiring of electrical components based on schematic drawing

• Testing of panels.

• Should follow his superior instructions and work closely with team

2. **Technician for Cold Storage Systems:**

• ITI holder (Mechanical), candidate should be able to install insulated cold storage panels, condensing units and evaporator units. Basic electrical knowledge will be an added advantage.

3. **AC Technician:**

• ITI holder. Adept in handling package unit/chiller installation and commissioning.

4. **Laundry Technician:**

• ITI/Diploma Holder: Capable to handle the installation of the Industrial Heavy duty Laundry Equipments namely washers, dryers, dry cleaning machines, flat work ironers and finishing presses. Basic knowledge in electronics/programming feature of the machine will be an added advantage.

5. **Kitchen Equipment Technician:**

• Preferably ITI / Diploma Holder in Electrical/Electronics.

• Min 5 years hands on experience in installation / Trouble shooting and Maintenance of Commercial kitchen equipments (Combi ovens, All gas and electrical cooking equipments, Dishwashers, Ice machines, Refrigeration system etc.)

• Must have hands on experience in reading Circuit drawings, operation manual and trouble shooting guide.

• Must be able to work independently with minimum supervision with maximum flexibility.

Experience: 5-8 years
Age Group: 25 -32 years

Interested candidates may send in their resume on **igcc.res@gmail.com** or fax on **24816976**.

SITUATION WANTED

A Graduate Civil Engineer having 25+ years of rich experience in Oman and GCC in lead roles is looking for a suitable placement. Visa available.

Contact mob: 78391432. Email: mohamedpmc2020@gmail.com

VACANCIES				
A leading company in Oman is looking for suitable candidates for following positions.				
Trade	Qty	Salary (OMR)	Qualification	Contact Details
Rotating Technicians	30	250 - 300	Preferred Diploma in Mech/ Elect and experience of Maintenance in Oil & Gas. (VISA readily available) (Work Place: Sohar & Fahud)	careers1572@gmail.com
Electrical Technicians	20			Inteshar Siddiqui: +968 93214353
Instrument Technicians	20			Wasim Kazi: +968 93221460
Planning Engineers	4	400 - 500		Khalifa Al Tourshi: +968 99224602

features

OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | editor@omanobserver.om



Better date palm pollination tech helps farmers improve harvest

Oman date palm farmers are perennially hounded by the need to aid the pollination process of date palms. Dates are among the plants that do not self-pollinate and the process is not only time consuming but effort financially draining. This start-up company is providing an alternative solution... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

ENTERTAINMENT



SORY BAMBA: MALIAN MUSIC'S FORGOTTEN GREAT

Sory Bamba, a Malian music pioneer, spends his days ensconced in the courtyard of his home in the old quarter of Mopti, a town in the centre of the country on the edge of the Sahara... **Story on Page P20**

HUMAN INTEREST



SEVEN-YEAR-OLD ITALIAN INFLUENCER CHALLENGES DISABILITY STEREOTYPES

Sirio Persichetti can't speak and can't feed himself but the seven-year-old has taken the social media world by storm with his daily antics, proving that a disability... **Story on Page 19**

READ



FORTUNE AND GLORY

BY JANET EVANOVICH

The 27th book in the Stephanie Plum series. Stephanie deals with a soldier of fortune from Little Havana.

MUSIC



OPERA SINGER SERENADES PARIS IN SECOND LOCKDOWN

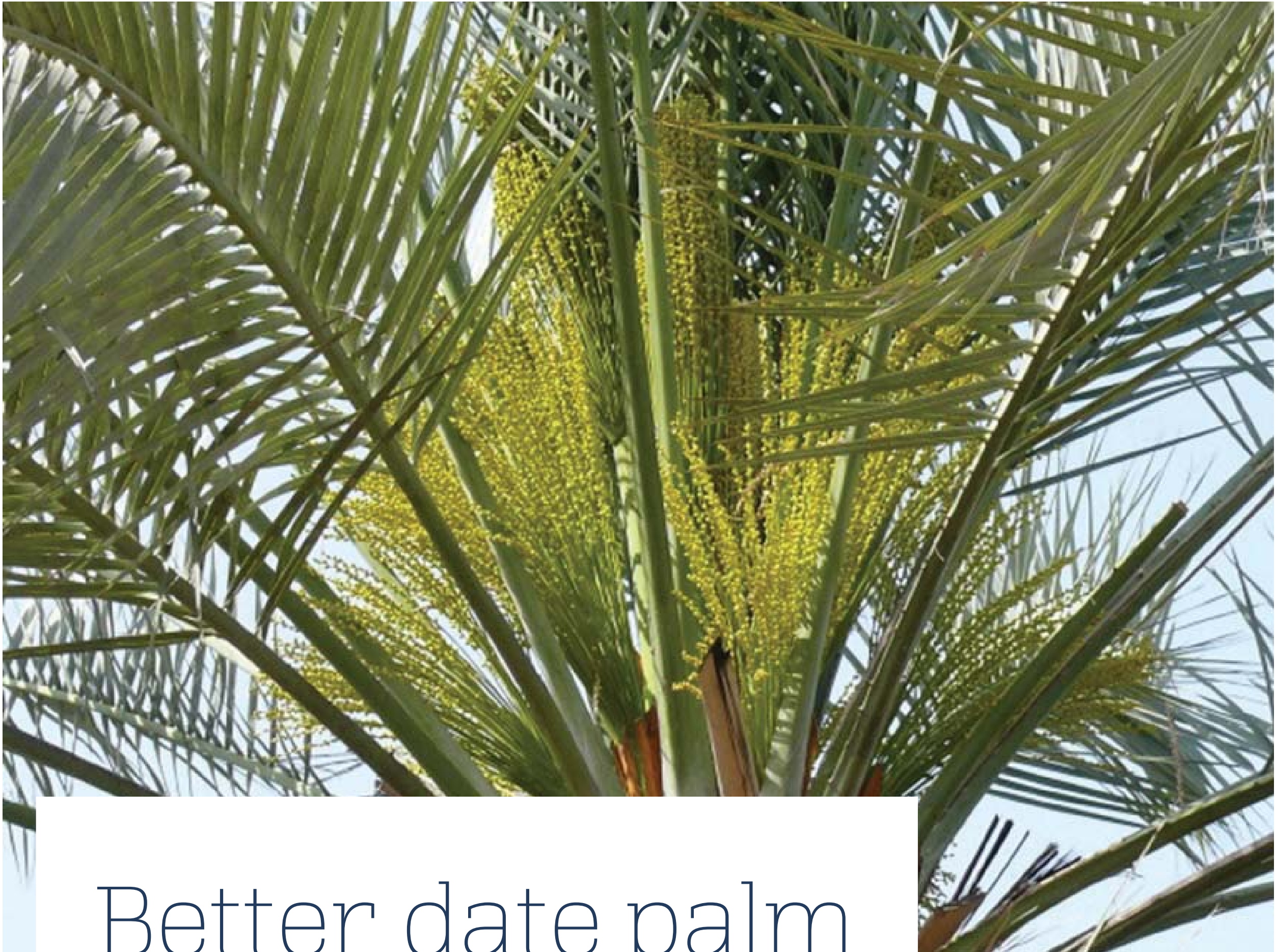
French tenor Stéphane Senechal has been subsisting on pasta and potatoes since the coronavirus pandemic forced opera houses to close and work dried up, but he has at least made a name for himself by performing - for free - from his Paris window... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



TAKE A HIKE DAY

Take a hike day aims to reconnect us with nature and to maintain healthy hearts and bodies. It reminds us that we are creatures of the wild as well as of civilisation. Make sure to invite your family today even for a short walk.



Better date palm pollination tech helps farmers improve harvest

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

The pollination of date palms determines the development and growth of the plant and is a great way to gauge the plant's lifecycle and productivity. Done by farmers at a specific period in the growth process, modern measures are not conducive to improve both the quality and quantity of fruit production.

"Luqah" is a student company that was borne out of the Injaz Oman initiative. This startup specialised in developing and producing plant fertilisation pollens that aid date palm farmers in improving their annual yields.

"Our company focused on producing palm tree pollen for several reasons. Most important of these reasons is that the Sultanate has a large number of these plants and farmers are dependent on their productivity," said Mouath al Shuaili, the company's CEO.

The Sultanate relies heavily on the production of dates. The national production of dates has reached a total of 368,940 tonnes in 2018 based on the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

Date palms are plants that do not self-pollinate according to Mouath. He shared that farmers often have to be manually part of the pollination process and doing manual pollination not only consumes a lot of time, it is also financially draining and labour intensive. With this gap in the process, Mouath and his team dedicated time and research to find a method that will help date farmers save them from their perennial burden.

"Luqah" product can be a good choice for farmers for many reasons. Normally, pollen is very sensitive to temperature and humidity and it quickly loses its vitality, but as Mouath shared, the company's product can be kept at room temperature.

"We have formulated a mixture that preserves the vitality of pollen grains at a temperature of 45 degrees Celsius. Since all plants are exposed to direct sunlight and the temperature can go higher than 45 in the summer, the product proved its success in such circumstances," he shared.

"The Luqah" product, as Mouath noted, is packed in spray cans to make it easy for the user to preserve and use.

"All a farmer has to do is to direct the nozzle of the spray cans to specific parts in the head of the palm," he said.

The company is also busy working

to develop pollination technologies. "We are currently developing technologies to make it even easier for farmers owning large farms that include more than 50 palm trees. This is by employing artificial intelligence techniques through robots and drones," he said.

The product saves farmers a great deal of money because only a small spray will do the magic.

"The results of the field experiments carried out indicated that one spray is sufficient to pollinate the date palm tree, and in rare cases it has been found that they needed two spray cans," he noted.

"The product's substance helps the pollen grain to stick in the palm's female parts. The pollen grain is also preserved from damage until the female flower blooms and pollinates it," he added.

This saves a lot of the pollen powder used in the pollination process.

"As in the traditional method, the farmer consumes 1.5-3 grams per palm in varying sprinkles, but Luqah product consumes 0.28-0.5 grams per palm," he said.

It is natural for any project to face challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge for "Luqah" product is the seasonality of pollinating palm trees. "We must wait a whole year before we get



the opportunity to set up field experiments, which is the important part of the study and research," he explained.

While the Luqah product is still in its baby steps phase, the company had received a great turn out from farmers to try this solution.

"We advertised for the product through social media and it worked not only internally in Oman, we even got some requests from outside the country," the CEO said.

He added, "Early next year, we anticipate that the product will be available in the market with an initial production number of 1,000 spray cans. After testing the satisfaction of consumers, we will start the commercial production. Consumers can reach us on (@_luqah.om)."



find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



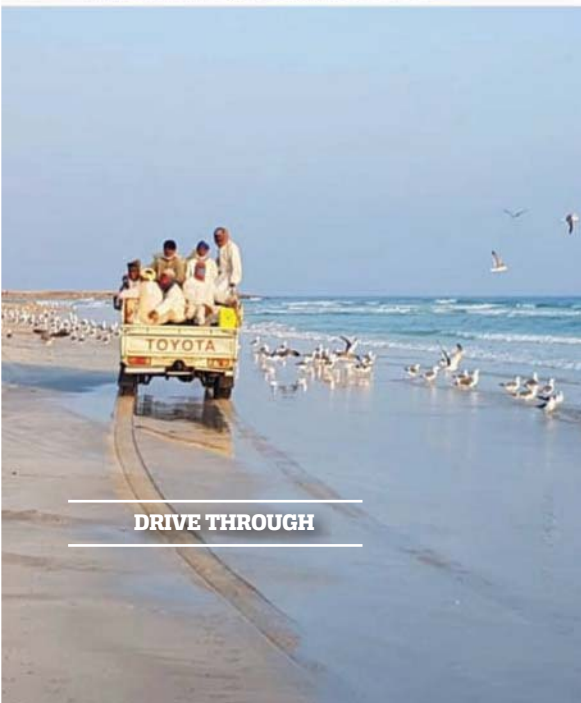
shafeeksshas • Follow

Al Ajyah Castle, Sur, Oman



omanexcursvod • Follow

Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman



omanexcursvod • Follow

Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



HUMAN INTEREST

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.com



Seven-year-old Italian influencer challenges disability stereotypes

Sirio Persichetti can't speak and can't feed himself but the seven-year-old has taken the social media world by storm with his daily antics, proving that a disability is no barrier to inspiring others. Sirio has spastic tetraplegia, a form of cerebral palsy that affects the movement of three limbs. His mouth is permanently open, blocking him from forming words properly or swallowing.

He is fed liquid nutrition through a tube in his stomach and has had a tracheotomy to help him breathe. He bears this with such resilience, vivacity and lust for life that it prompted his mother Valentina to create a website and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

accounts to chronicle his everyday life in hopes of inspiring others.

She uploads heart-warming videos of him with funny anecdotes under the title "Sirio and the tetrabonds", that have touched the hearts of people all over the world. Tetra comes from the first half of tetraplegia and bond from vagabond.

"We wanted to tell the story of disability in a different way, to tell it for what it is, something that is not easy to face, but that if channelled in the right direction, with the right help, it can allow these children to enjoy something that can actually be called life," Valentina said.

The response has been overwhelming, with some videos getting more than 130,000 views. "In a short time the response, especial-

ly from families living in similar situations, was powerful and exciting so we decided to keep going," Valentina said.

BREAKING THE STIGMA

She posts videos of Sirio going to school carrying a backpack almost as big as he is, or driving a toy electric car or mercilessly waking up his older brother Nilo, 10. Sirio's followers respond with dozens of likes and messages of support.

Imagining the world as seen through his eyes, Valentina writes the posts that accompany the videos. "Here I am arriving at the playground, fearless and proud while mamma watches me like a hawk. It's not easy trying to live a normal life when you have disabilities but I try anyway," reads

one post. Valentina, 38, who works in a call centre for the postal service, is helped by her husband Paolo, a 58-year-old researcher, and two caregivers who work alternate days.

She said she never expected it to go viral "but we realised that is useful, that it helps and is a necessary step to make the life of many people much more normal".

Valentina said she wanted to break the stigma that often surrounds disability by showing that having special needs does not mean an end to fun for a child.

"We understood that it is absolutely necessary to talk about disability without (seeking) pity, different from the usual way disability is narrated," she said.

— Reuters



MUSIC

Opera singer serenades Paris in second lockdown



FRENCH TENOR Stephane Senechal has been subsisting on pasta and potatoes since the coronavirus pandemic forced opera houses to close and work dried up, but he has at least made a name for himself by performing - for free - from his Paris window.

When France entered its first lockdown in March, Senechal joined other musicians, professional and amateur, who took to their balconies or windows across Europe to serenade their neighbours and lift their spirits. France is now in its sec-

ond lockdown, and Senechal, 44, has started to sing at his window again, although this time he has scaled back from daily performances to singing Monday and Friday evenings.

"When lockdown happened, culture came to a complete halt. It really felt like it was the end," Senechal said in his apartment, a 15-minute walk from the Sacre Coeur basilica. But he said he found a way to recreate a little haven of culture. "Here, at my window, it's stronger than the opera because I'm not playing a role, I'm myself," he said.

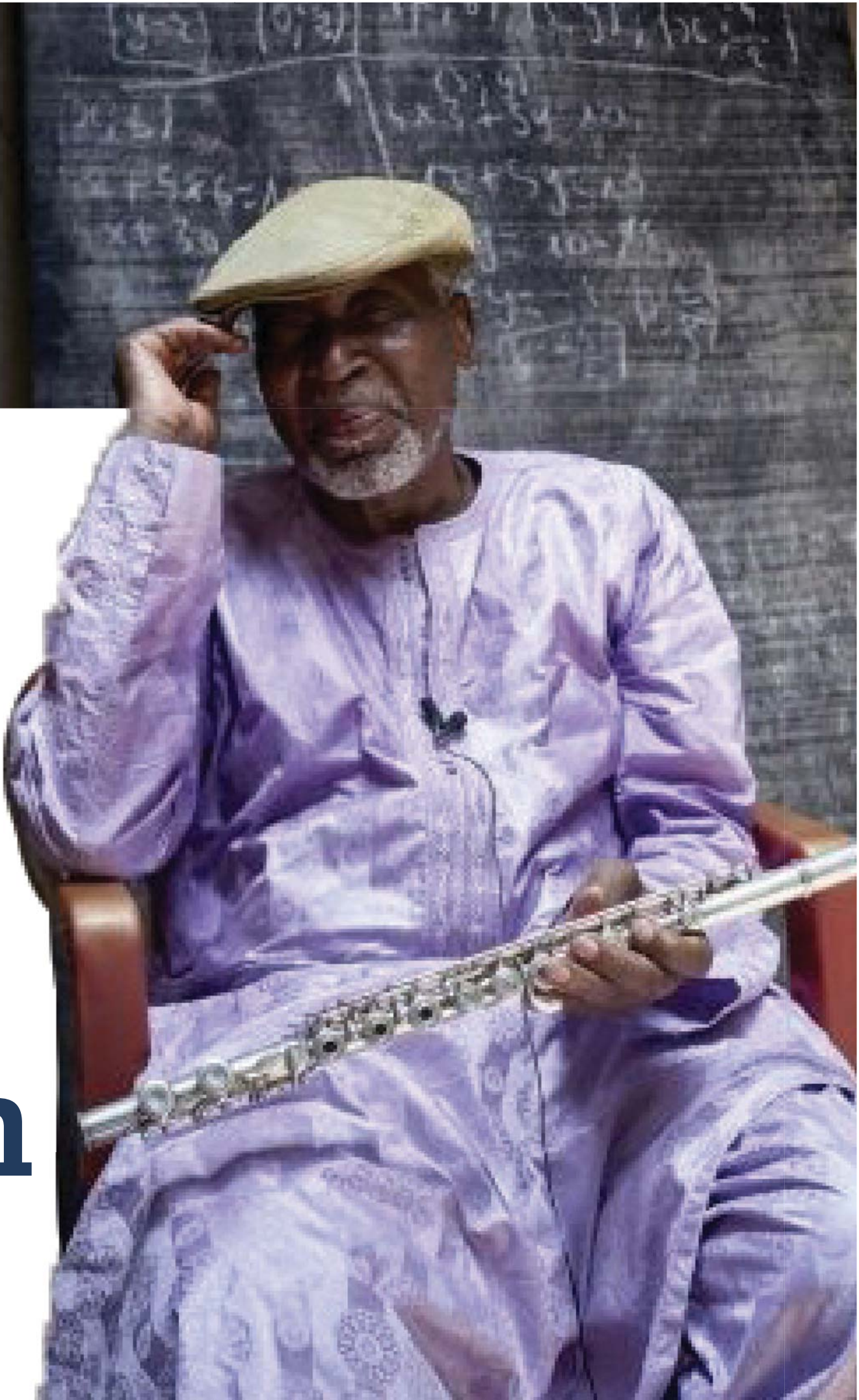
Senechal said he tailors the repertoire to fit the national mood. When his audience is in need of something stirring, he sings French national anthem the "Marseillaise." After the US presidential election, he sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." Senechal is not receiving state assistance for performers during the pan-



demically because his income for the year is above the level to qualify. He is working on a few projects outside opera, including a short film. For the most part though Senechal, who lives alone, gets by on the money he saved up in better times. "I try to save money by eating pasta, rice and potatoes," he said. "And I am a very bad cook. It's a disaster." - Reuters

demically because his income for the year is above the level to qualify. He is working on a few projects outside opera, including a short film. For the most part though Senechal, who lives alone, gets by on the money he saved up in better times. "I try to save money by eating pasta, rice and potatoes," he said. "And I am a very bad cook. It's a disaster." - Reuters

Sory Bamba: Malian music's forgotten great



Sory Bamba, a Malian music pioneer, spends his days ensconced in the courtyard of his home in the old quarter of Mopti, a town in the centre of the country on the edge of the Sahara. One of the original modernisers of Malian music, the 82-year-old infused traditional sounds with funk and jazz. He was also a dedicated talent scout. But few now remember Sory Bamba in Mali, a conflict-ridden state known to music fans for its strong guitar-playing tradition. Outside of the country, the musician is almost a complete unknown, though connoisseurs insist he belongs among the ranks of Mali's musical icons such as Ali Farka Toure or Salif Keita. "He is one of the greatest Malian musicians," says Cheick Tidiane Seck, a Malian musician himself whose blend of jazz and traditional music won him renown in the 1990s. But Bamba "is not someone who puts himself forward," Seck says, adding that he prioritised "real music" over commercial tunes. Wearing a corduroy flatcap, and with eyes clouded by cataracts, Bamba sits in his courtyard surrounded by clucking chickens and children at play. He says he once brought a young Ali Farka Toure to play in his home — long before the sing-

er-songwriter achieved international success — and that few recognised his talents. "Many people didn't like (his) type of rhythms," Bamba says. Toure, who died in 2016, went on to become a two-time Grammy winner and one of the African continent's most important musicians. Bamba, who never achieved the same level of success, appears to harbour no bitterness. "He was here, in this very house," he says of Toure, with a smile, before taking out his flute and spontaneously beginning to play. **MALI'S PINK FLOYD** Bamba began his musical career as a child in the late 1940s

when Mali was still a French colony and a friend gifted him a flute. Later, he worked as an assistant to a trumpet player in a Mopti band — before making off with his boss's instrument and dedicating himself to music full-time. In 1957 he started his first group, Kanaga de Mopti, which quickly became popular with youngsters in the town. The band found wider success after Mali's independence in 1960, through nationwide musical competitions designed to foster a sense of national identity in the vast country. Bamba, as leader of the group, also sought and received rare permission from ethnic Dogon elders to play their traditional music — to which he added his own layers of Latin-jazz, funk and folk. Some dubbed Kanaga de Mopti "Mali's Pink Floyd". But reggae artist Koko Dembele,

66, a former member of Kanaga de Mopti, said: "Anything that doesn't evolve is bound to disappear," says Malian. "Sory Bamba has always evolved by trying to make innovative music". Bamba recruited Dembele to his band when the latter was 18 years old, and was known to scour the floodplains of the Niger river and the rural camps of nomads for undiscovered musical talent. **NOTHING WITHOUT MUSIC** Next, Bamba pursued a solo career in Ivory Coast, and then in France, completing 33 tours. He also cut a record titled "Du Mali" in 1979. But international recognition never really came. Bamba's prospects brightened in 2010 when Universal Music offered him a record deal, after the then 72-year-old musician gave a concert in Paris. But the ensuing album, Dogon Blues, enjoyed little commercial success, and Bamba returned home to Mopti. His children now describe him as "tired", and some hope he will stop playing music. But this is out of the question for Bamba, who hums tunes with young children every time they pass him by in his courtyard. "Without music, it's all over. And there are so many things left to do," he says, resting his flute on his knees. — **AFP**

Bamba began his musical career as a child in the late 1940s when Mali was still a French colony and a friend gifted him a flute. Later, he worked as an assistant to a trumpet player in a Mopti band — before making off with his boss's instrument and dedicating himself to music full-time.