



HIS MAJESTY PHONES KUWAIT CROWN PRINCE TO ENQUIRE EMIR’S HEALTH

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday made a phone call to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, to inquire about the health of Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, after the Emir underwent a surgical operation recently.

During the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere wishes of good health and long life for Shaikh Sabah, so that he could continue his wise leadership of Kuwaiti people and achieve their aspirations for welfare and progress.

Shaikh Nawaf thanked His Majesty the Sultan and valued his kind initiative, wishing him good health, happiness and long life. He wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under His Majesty the Sultan’s leadership.

GREETINGS TO SISI
His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt, on the 23 July Revolution Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to President Sisi, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant him success to achieve further aspirations of progress and growth for the brotherly Egyptian people. — ONA

NO NEED OF
PANIC BUYING

SUPPLY CHAIN INTACT TO MEET DEMAND DURING LOCKDOWN

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: With the Sultanate gearing up for the implementation of the Supreme Committee’s decisions on lockdown which is to start from Saturday evening, many people have started rushing to shops to buy whatever they may need during the lockdown.

The authorities have allayed the consumers’ fears over the availability of food items, and made it clear that there are enough stocks available in the market to meet the requirement during the lockdown and Eid al Adha.

Meanwhile, the Oman Chamber for Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has called upon companies dealing in food products and consumer items as well as medical supplies and importing agents to maintain sufficient quantities of commodities and products in their shops and stores in all governorates of the

Ban on movement during lockdown

In light of the decision taken by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to impose a complete lockdown of all governorates of the Sultanate, the lockdown will begin from Saturday (July 25) to Saturday (August 8). The ban on movement and the daily closure of all public places and commercial outlets will be from 7 pm to 6 am, starting from July 25 to August 8. — ONA

Sultanate, to ensure adequate supplies during the lockdown period. Mubarak al Dohani, Director-General of Trade, assured that all kinds of foodstuff and other necessary items are available all over the Sultanate. **TURN TO P6**



16-KM STRETCH OF AL SHARQIYAH EXPRESSWAY OPENS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport has opened a new 16-km stretch from phase 2 (part 2) of Al Sharqiyah Expressway on Wednesday. This bypass road avoids congested residential and commercial areas in Al Kamil W’al Wafi, connecting the wilayats in South and North Al Sharqiyah governorates, while ensuring smooth flow of vehicles and goods traffic.

LOCKDOWN CURBS TO LIMIT EID FESTIVITIES

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The usual hustle and bustle on the occasion of Eid al Adha will be missing this year in the Sultanate as people are expected to limit their festive celebrations within their houses.

The government has already announced that security patrols and checkpoints will be reinforced across the Sultanate with more strict measures expected to be announced by the Supreme.

Livestock markets including traditional souqs will remain closed, public prayers and family visits banned. Other public activities have already been prohibited to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Beginning this Saturday, there will be a two-week nationwide lockdown from 7 pm to 6 am, during which shops and other public spaces will be closed. All other kinds of public gatherings, including collective Eid prayers and traditional Eid markets, remain closed.

The ban on travel between



governorates will run from July 25 through August 8.

Although most commercial establishments including malls are open, due to restrictions in the number of people visiting at a time, there has not been any rush although only a few days left for the Eid al Adha, which is celebrated on the 10th of Dhul Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic Hijri calendar.

“We will celebrate this Eid as well in the same manner we had Eid al Fitr. Health is more important than celebrations or revelries”, said Mubarak al Wahaibi, owner of a contracting

company in Ruwi.

Although some people have begun online shopping, many said they do not want to go to the malls this time as there is no letup in the number of COVID-19 infections.

“Celebrations are supposed to be a group activity. With restrictions on movement, I don't think there will be much enthusiasm this year except to commemorate the day with prayers and wishing others online”, said Mohammed Mustafa, an Egyptian teacher.

Eid Al Adha marks the willingness of Prophet

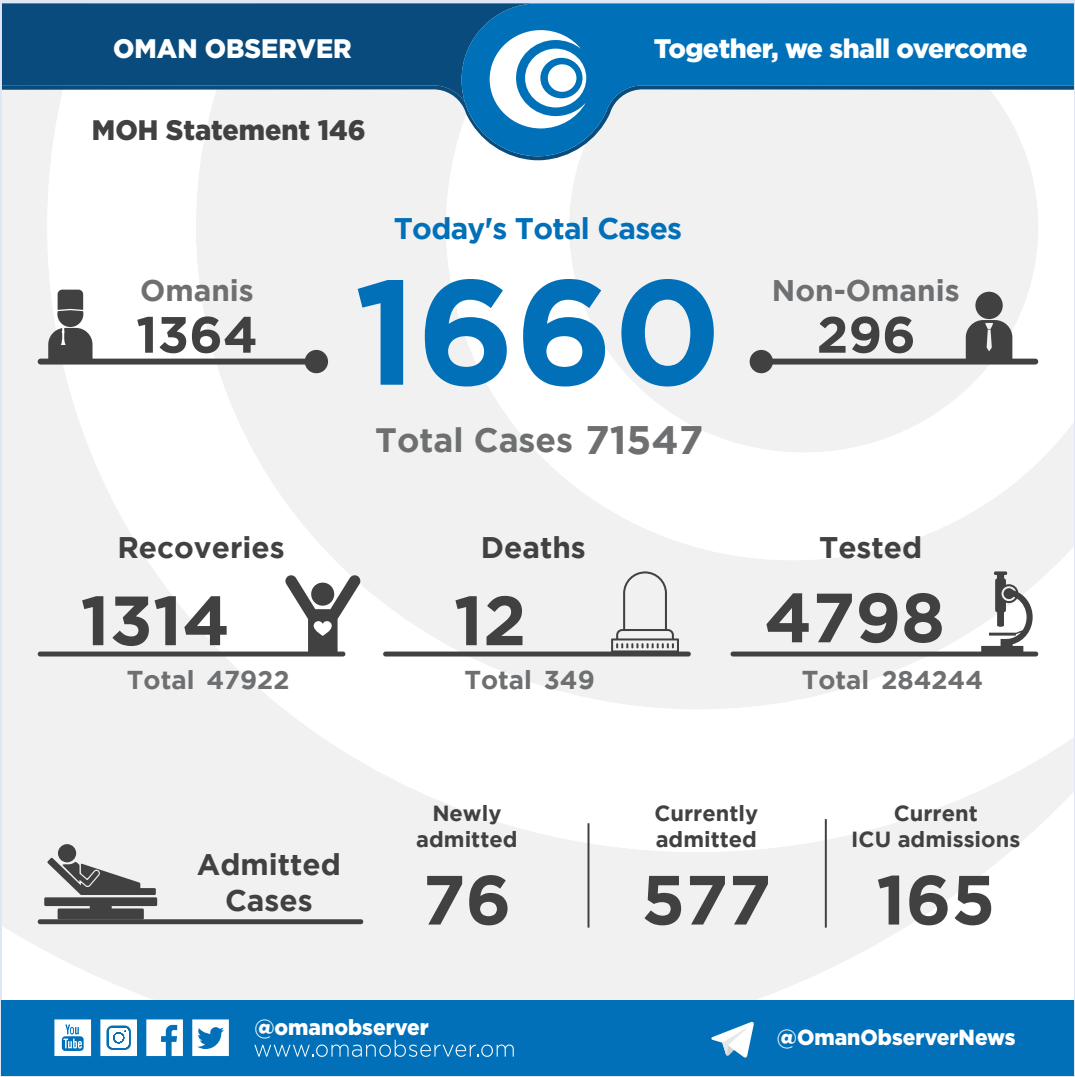
Ibrahim to sacrifice his son out of faith in Allah. In commemoration of this faith, Muslims sacrifice animals and share them with relatives, friends, and neighbours; and the remaining third is given to the poor and needy.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has urged companies operating in food, consumer goods, and medical supplies sectors to ensure the supply in sufficient quantities during the lockdown period, which includes Eid holidays.

Hameed al Yaquobi, a citizen in Ruwi said he will look for an online option to get a sacrificial animal so that he could get it butchered from the municipality slaughterhouse.

Muscat Municipality announced last week that its abattoirs are being readied to receive Eid Al Adha orders.

“Strict precautionary measures will be implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19”, the municipality said in a statement.



NEW COVID-19 CASES HIT 1,660 AS 12 DIE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday announced that 12 people died of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking the total death toll in the Sultanate to 349.

The ministry also announced 1,660 new cases of COVID-19 in the Sultanate, including 1,364 Omanis and 296 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases to 71,547.

According to the MoH, a total of 4,798 people were tested in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of tests in the country to 284,244.

The MoH also reported that 1,314 new patients recovered from COVID-19 during the past 24 hours, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 47,922.

A total of 76 people were admitted to the hospital on Wednesday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 577, including 165 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

First repatriation charter for Madurai from Salalah

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: It was a big relief for the expatriates from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu to get a direct flight from Salalah to Madurai. It was the first direct flight from Salalah to Tamil Nadu.

The Salam Air charter flight arranged by the Indian Social Club (ISC) Salalah, took off from Salalah Airport on Tuesday carrying 130 passengers. The remaining 50 seats got occupied by the passengers from Muscat.

"There was a huge demand for a flight to any destination in Tamil Nadu because there were many from the state who wanted to go to their homeland in the wake of COVID-19 situation," said Manpreet Singh, Chairman ISC Salalah.

The other issue, according to him, was landing permission only to people from a particular



state. "For example, if someone has his passport issued in Kerala, he can travel only to Kerala. So it was difficult for the people from Tamil Nadu to catch a Kerala flight and cover the rest of the journey by road."

The Club registered all such

passengers and contacted the airline. Following approvals from the governments of Oman and India, the flight schedules were announced and accommodated people based on their needs.

"Priority was given to

emergency cases and those who had visa issues, cancellations, job losses etc," said Singh.

One more flight is scheduled for Kochi on July 23, while flights for Hyderabad and Delhi are being arranged by the end of this month.

FMCG companies urged to ensure sufficient stock

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: All FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) and pharmaceutical companies have been urged to ensure sufficient stock given the 15-day lockdown announced by the Supreme Committee.

"This announcement - to keep sufficient stocks of foods and medicines - is a step forward in ensuring that no one would be devoid of any lifesaving medicine or day-to-day home items," a source at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) told the Observer.

Accordingly, all dealers, suppliers and retailers in foods and beverages, convenience stores and pharmacies need to ensure that they will not run short

of any food or medicine during the lockdown period starting on July 25.

CLOSE VIGIL ON PRICE HIKE

The Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP) has told the Observer that it will keep close vigil over the market movements and any undue price hike will be brought to the notice and action will be taken.

"We are constantly monitoring the price and quantity of various goods and services being offered in the Sultanate. No one is allowed to increase the prices of any goods or services without prior notification and permission from the PACP. The violators will be booked," said an official at the PACP.



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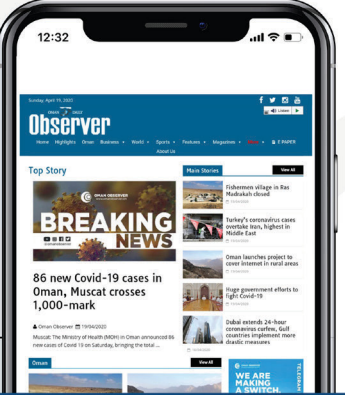
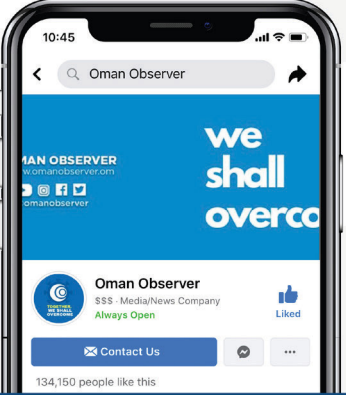
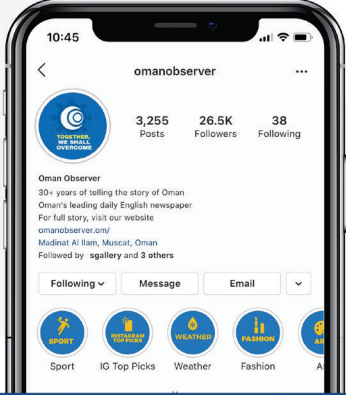
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NDC holds graduation ceremony as senior officers complete course

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) held a graduation ceremony on Wednesday at its headquarters in Bait Al Falaj Camp for the 7th national defence course, under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce and Industry.

A number of senior officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and other military and security authorities participated in the course, along with a number of senior officials in ministries, civil government bodies and institutions.

The ceremony was attended by Sayyid Dr Fahd bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, SAF Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Obaidani, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), Rear Admiral Abdullah



bin Khamis al Raisi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Maj Gen Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Assistant Head of the Internal Security Service (ISS) for Operations, Maj Gen Ahmed bin Ali Keshoub, Secretary-General of the National Security Council at the Royal Office and members of NDC Teaching

staff. The 7th national defence course began on August 28, 2019 with the aim of preparing and qualifying strategic leaders (military and civilian) by the commitment to provide an academic environment that stimulates intellectual creativity, learning, research and development, and

providing them with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that enable them to take over senior positions at the strategic level, active participation in formulating public policies, developing national strategies and making sound strategic decisions in the areas of security and defence. — ONA

MoH, Oman LNG sign pact

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) signed on Wednesday an agreement with the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Development Foundation (Oman LNG) on the purchase of medical devices for Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital.

Dr Sultan bin Yarub al Busaidy, MoH Adviser for Health Affairs, signed the agreement on behalf of the ministry and Dr Amor bin Nassir al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, for the company.

MoH Adviser for Health Affairs underscored the importance of the partnership between government and other sectors in the Sultanate for the public interest, praising the good company's initiatives that contribute in enhancing the provided service.

Health Minister takes part in WHO stocktaking meet

MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Wednesday took part in virtual meeting with ministers of health of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Eastern Mediterranean Region (EM) to take stock of the situation and systematically assess progress towards the "triple billion" targets established in Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13).

The stocktaking process came as a part of delivering on the commitments for implementing WHO's (GPW 13) that were made by WHO member states at the World Health Assembly and the



Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Triple Billions included in the WHO's strategic plan propose to achieve that by 2023: 1 billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage, 1 billion more people better protected from health emergencies, and 1 billion more people enjoying better

health and well-being.

The meeting aimed at informing participants about the stocktaking process and its impact on efforts in member countries. The meeting agenda included a speech by the Regional Director, an introduction to the stocktaking exercise, and measuring the three billions and the current situation.

Such virtual meetings and events enhance solidarity between WHO's health ministries and WHO officials, and are an opportunity to work better together and revisit joint programmes to make them more effective especially in the fight against COVID-19.

FLATTENING THE CURVE IS EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Breaking the COVID-19 pandemic chain is everyone’s responsibility. It is tough for the people to make a sudden change in routine, but this is the need of the hour and everyone has to live with it to flatten the curve.

Staying in isolation and quarantine has had its impact on people’s mind but there is no other way to break the chain. While there have been worries about social gathering for many, the concern has been the workplace as well.

One of the major decisions came on Tuesday was the announcement of lockdown from July 25. Before this, there was an announcement on reducing the presence of staff in the government offices to 30 per cent. Shopping malls and supermarkets also must not exceed a certain percentage of space occupation in the car park as well as the number of customers at the facility. But one must go beyond legislation and take responsibility for breaking the chain, say health experts.

Dr Ahmed Yar Mohammed al



Balushi, Director of Disease Surveillance and Control, Directorate-General of Health Services, Ministry of Health, said, “Gathering has an impact whether it is at home, workplace or public places.

“Wherever there are people one must wear a mask, practise social distancing and wash hands with soap and water frequently,” urged Dr Ahmed.

“It is a huge change what people are going through,” said Dr Thamra al Ghafri, Director of Planning and Studies, Ministry

of Health. “We are looking at a situation where everyone is held accountable.”

“It is not just a clinical dimension as it is not about getting sick and requiring health mcare. It is also a dimension of staying away socially, economical stress that can cause others and not forget the mental disturbance on one’s mind that can cause resistance to the compliance with the instructions. But it also depends on how you want people to come on board in resisting overwhelming change.

“I think we should accept the change and adhere to the instructions announced by the Supreme Committee. These restrictions have been announced globally and I think we should go back to our roots to make sure we protect ourselves and our family,” said Dr Thamra al Ghafri.

She pointed out the tremendous stress the health sector is going through now. If the transmission is slow the healthcare system will be able to serve you the way you deserve. “But if we get a bulk of patients at one time simultaneously that would cause a huge healthcare burden.

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provision of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law, The Company **Duqm United Logistics Company llc** which is registered with the Commercial Registration No. 1261521, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 500,000.000 to 250,000.000.

Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Al-Falaj Diamond Contracting Company announces its registration with the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Trade and Industry under No. 1227642 announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No. 30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments and on all. Anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Trade and Industry within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

State Council panel discusses study on cyber security with officials

MUSCAT: The Technology and Innovation Committee of the State Council on Wednesday hosted officials from the Omani Group for Communications and Information Technology, as part of its study on the draft of Cyber Security Law.

The panel’s 17th meeting for the first annual session of the 7th term was presided over by Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed al Lamki, deputy head of the committee, and attended by the committee members and several General Secretariat employees.

The committee discussed with the officials several aspects of the study which included: the tasks performed by the group

regarding cyber security in terms of procedures, technology, manpower, legislation, strategies, regulations and practices within which the group works to activate its role at the national level.

It also reviewed the extent of cooperation between the Omani Group for Communication and Technology Information and other institutions to activate cyber security at the Sultanate’s level, and learn about the capabilities available to it to activate its role in the field of comprehensive cyber security, in addition to listening to the group’s proposals and visions to enhance cyber security at the national level.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding (NH), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below;

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)
EHC/2020/4	CONSULTANCY SERVICE (BROKER) FOR GROUP MEDICAL BENEFIT PROGRAMME FOR NAMA GROUP	29 July 2020	12 Aug 2020	25/-

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee”, and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer company name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 12.00pm time of the Sultanate on Wednesday 12 Aug. 2020
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee”. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om)
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned) Tender Documents will be received by email
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.



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Madayn urges companies to take precaution

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn has called on investors and business owners in its various industrial cities, Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) and Al Mazunah Free Zone to take all necessary precautions and measures to ensure business continuity in the next two weeks.



No need of panic buying

FROM PAGE 1

Al Dohani called on all consumers not to rush for panic buying. He advised them to buy only necessary things as the shops and stores have sufficient consumer products. He also appreciated the efforts of traders in providing food and basic materials during the past months in all governorates of the Sultanate.

This comes as ports of the Sultanate are connected by direct shipping lines with more than 86 ports in 40 countries, besides more than 200 direct weekly flights, aiming at enhancing food security in the Sultanate, support trade facilitation, and reduce operational costs for importers and traders while supplying commodities.

Earlier this year, Asyad Group had announced providing solutions for direct import through refrigerated containers to transport vegetables, fruits, meat, poultry, and all foodstuffs that the Sultanate's markets need from the countries of origin. This was provided as one of the services that will enrich markets through direct importation from the world to all traders, importers, and shipping agencies in the Sultanate.

Emotional reunion as families stuck in India return

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: There was a flow of emotions when families stuck due to COVID-19 situation either in India or in Muscat, met after a long gap.

Darwish Ellickal and Fazeena Darwish, along with many other families onboard the Salam Air flight, OV 1582, landed in Muscat from Kochi on Wednesday.

Fazeena Darwish, Darwish's wife and mother of two, and her 9-year-old son Armaan were in tears after joining the family, thanks to the kind gesture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Public Authority for Civil Aviation

(PACA), and the Royal Oman Police (ROP). They rose to the request of Darwish and his daughter.

Seven-year-old, Zoya, daughter of Darwish, had not seen her mother for almost five months ever since she went home for a brief holiday before the COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.

Fazeena and Armaan could not take the last flight which left Kozhikode to Muscat on March 17 as airports remained closed and all flight services came to a halt after the pandemic started to spread.

They had to return to their hometown, Thalassery, which is some 85 kilometres away from

the airport.

"My daughter has been in tears ever since she came to know that she wouldn't be able to see her mother till the time the airports reopen. I took a chance by approaching the Indian Embassy, the MoFA, PACA, and the ROP."

"I had been exploring all possibilities of bringing them back as Zoya never lived away from her mother for such a long period. I approached the MoFA as instructed by Rakesh Adlakha of the Indian Embassy. After getting clearance from the MoFA, I went to the PACA for clearance which said to approach either Oman Air or Salam Air."

Steady decline in expatriate population

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The expatriate population in Oman has seen a steady decline since the start of this year, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of the expatriate population has declined from 1,662,113 in March 2020 to 1,645,041 in April; 1,622,241 in May and 1,589,883 in June.

There is a drop of 122,

915 in the expatriate population since the end of December 2019 of a drop of 55,158 in the past three months of April, May and June.

The number of Bangladeshi nationals dropped from 630,681 in December 2019 to 590,748 in June this year, Pakistanis from 207,288 to 192,676, the Filipinos from 49,456 to 47,537 during the same period.

The number of Indian expatriates dropped from

617,730 in December 2019 to 567,341 in June 2020. Around 50,389 Indian nationals have left during this period.

As per the Observer analysis, as of December 22, 2019 the total expatriate population was 1,974,598, which dropped to 1,942,632 (as of January 2020), increased marginally to 1,944,168 in February 2020, 1,941,369 (March 2020), 1,925,316 (April 2020) and 1,903,045 (May 2020) and 1,873,173 as of June 20,

2020. As of July 22, 2020 the expatriate population is 1,820,704 (40.10%) compared to 2,724,406 Omanis.

The total population of Omani is 4,545,110 as of Monday.

Muscat has the highest number of expatriate population at 683,460, followed by Dhofar 178,959 and North Batinah 220,863.

Around 52,462 expatriates are working in the government, compared to 1,259,814 in the private sector.

Yemen’s children starve amid rising fears of famine



HAJJAH: Weighing just 9 kg at ten years old, Hassan Merzam Muhammad is so emaciated by the severe malnourishment plaguing hundreds of thousands of Yemeni children like him that he can no longer walk.

Fears of famine in Yemen are resurfacing, the United Nations says. A UN report on Wednesday said Yemen was returning to “alarming” levels of food insecurity.

“My son is sick and I don’t know where to take him. He has fever and I’ve nothing to treat him, I can’t even get water,” said Zaina Muhammad, mother to

Hassan and his six siblings. “Sometimes we go days without washing.”

Coronavirus restrictions, reduced remittances, locusts, floods and significant underfunding of this year’s aid response have compounded an already dire hunger situation after five years of war.

Resurgent violence in recent weeks between warring parties, despite UN peace efforts, is also killing and injuring civilians.

Famine has never been officially declared in Yemen. UN warnings in late 2018 of impending famine prompted an

aid ramp-up after which the World Food Programme fed up to 13 million a month.

“Now all those improvements are at risk,” WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs said.

Despite mounting economic and health pressures on Yemen, the world’s largest aid response is scaling back due to insufficient funding.

Nutrition services for 2.5 million children could cease by the end of August. The WFP already in April halved food aid to alternate months in north Yemen.

“They are on the brink of

famine but it is not famine yet... It’s not too late,” she said, appealing to donors.

Displaced five times by war, Hassan’s family now live in rural Hajjah, one of the poorest regions, with no income.

“Warplanes circle above us, Houthi armaments are nearby; we cannot move on,” Zaina said.

Nurse Makieh al Aslami watched Hassan’s father carry the boy, unable to walk or react, into the malnutrition clinic she runs.

“Hassan has no health problems. His problem is hunger,” she said. “Like all children, Hassan needs play, school... It’s like he’s in a cage, with hunger increasing depression.”

After a few days’ treatment Hassan started to walk about and - mute since birth - used signals to request things.

“He was coming back to life,” she said.

Thin and exhausted herself, Aslami says malnutrition is increasing.

The number of malnourished under-fives could rise by 20 per cent to 2.4 million by year end on funding shortfalls, Unicef has said.

— Reuters

IN BRIEF

Ukraine cancels visa requirement for many countries

KYIV: Tourists from Australia, New Zealand and several Arab states will no longer need a visa to visit Ukraine from August 1, according to a decree signed by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and published on his website. In June, Zelenskiy said Ukraine was considering cancelling its visa requirement for tourists from several countries, including China, in order to attract more visitors once lockdowns imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic are eased. The new visa-free regime will apply if the tourist’s stay in Ukraine does not exceed 90 days.

Anti-apartheid campaigner Andrew Mlangeni dies at 95

JOHANNESBURG: South African anti-apartheid campaigner Andrew Mlangeni, who was jailed alongside Nelson Mandela in 1964 after a treason trial, has died at the age of 95. Mlangeni, who spent 26 years in jail and was the last of the eight defendants in the trial to die, had been admitted to hospital following an abdominal complaint, South Africa’s presidency said in a statement. President Cyril Ramaphosa, who fought with Mlangeni for racial equality and an end to white minority rule, described him as a “beacon of ethical leadership and care for humanity” whose death marked the end of a generation of history and left the future in the hands of those who remained.

Saudi King makes TV appearance from hospital

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia’s King Salman has been shown on state television leading a government meeting from a hospital in Riyadh to which he was admitted earlier this week. Saudi state television Al Ekhbariya broadcast footage on Tuesday night of the King looking alert as he examined documents during the online meeting. On Monday, King Salman was admitted to the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the capital Riyadh for medical tests after experiencing an inflammation of the gall bladder, the Saudi royal court said in a brief statement. He was later reported in stable condition. — Agencies

WORLD



Global coronavirus cases exceed 15m

SYDNEY/LONDON: Global coronavirus infections surged past 15 million on Wednesday, according to a Reuters tally, with the pandemic gathering pace even as countries remain divided in their response to the crisis.

In the United States, which has the highest number of cases in the world with 3.91 million infections, President Donald Trump warned: "It will probably, unfortunately, get worse before it gets better."

The top five countries with the most cases is rounded out by Brazil, India, Russia and South Africa. But, the Reuters tally shows the disease is accelerating the fastest in the Americas, which account for more than half the world's infections and half its deaths.

Globally, the rate of new infections shows no sign of slowing, according to the Reuters tally, based on official reports.

After the first COVID-19 case was reported in Wuhan, China, in early January, it took about 15 weeks to reach 2 million cases. By contrast, it took just eight days to climb above 15 million from the 13 million reached on July 13.

Health experts stress that official data almost certainly underreports both infections and deaths,

particularly in countries with limited testing capacity.

The official number of coronavirus cases at 15,009,213 is at least triple the number of severe influenza illnesses recorded annually, according to World Health Organization data, while the death toll of more than 616,000 in seven months is close to the upper range of yearly influenza deaths.

With the first wave of the virus still to peak in several countries and a resurgence of case numbers in others, some countries are reintroducing strict social distancing measures while others relax restrictions.

Stung by low approval ratings for his handling of the epidemic and downplaying the

risks during the early stages, Trump made a significant shift in rhetoric on Tuesday, encouraging Americans to wear a face mask.

While the epidemic worsened in the United States, Trump's focus ahead of a presidential election in November has been on reopening the economy, and governors in the hard-hit states of Texas, Florida and Georgia continue to push back hard against calls for stricter restrictions.

— Reuters

THE TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST CASES IS ROUNDED OUT BY BRAZIL, INDIA, RUSSIA AND SOUTH AFRICA. BUT, THE REUTERS TALLY SHOWS THE DISEASE IS ACCELERATING THE FASTEST IN THE AMERICAS, WHICH ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN HALF THE WORLD'S INFECTIONS AND HALF ITS DEATHS.

IN BRIEF

THAILAND SET TO EXTEND CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

BANGKOK: Thailand is set to extend a state of emergency prompted by the coronavirus pandemic to the end of August, officials said, even as it prepares to start allowing more foreigners into the country. General Somsak Roongsa, Secretary-General of the National Security Council, said on Wednesday that the emergency decree is still necessary to contain the coronavirus and to make sure foreigners entering the country are subject to 14-day quarantines. The emergency decree was first imposed on March 26 to fight the pandemic. It gives the prime minister sweeping powers to introduce and enforce regulations.

IRELAND MAY TIGHTEN TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS FOR HOT SPOTS

DUBLIN: Ireland may introduce further travel restrictions for countries with a very high instance of COVID-19, Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Wednesday after the government lifted its 14-day quarantine requirement for 15 European countries. Ireland, which has one of the lower rates of infection in the European Union with around 5 cases per 100,000 people in the past 14 days, decided late on Tuesday to drop the restriction for people coming from countries with a similar or lower rate. Coveney said the government would turn its attention in the coming weeks to whether it should introduce steps beyond the 14-day quarantine from areas hardest hit, including a potential requirement to take a coronavirus test before departure.

TOKYO GOVERNOR TELLS RESIDENTS TO STAY HOME

TOKYO: Tokyo's governor on Wednesday urged residents of the Japanese capital to stay at home during an upcoming four-day holiday weekend, as the number of new local coronavirus cases surged. The city is on its highest coronavirus alert level, with experts warning infections appear to be spreading rapidly and widely. "The infections are spreading not only among young people but also among middle-aged and older people," Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said during a meeting with infectious disease experts. "I'd like to ask (Tokyo residents) to refrain from going out as much as possible, especially elderly people and those with pre-existing conditions," she said ahead of the holiday weekend. Tokyo hit a new daily record of 293 cases last week, and the figure has stayed above 200 in recent days. — Agencies



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at Marienborg Castle in Copenhagen, Denmark. — AFP

A year after tussle over Greenland, Pompeo visits Denmark

TOM LITTLE, MARC PRÉEL

A year after the US and Denmark butt-ed heads over President Donald Trump's offer to buy Greenland, his secretary of state is visiting the Nordic country on Wednesday, with Arctic issues at the top of the agenda.

After a stop in the UK, Mike Pompeo is due to arrive in Denmark around 10 am (08:00 GMT) to meet with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

He is then expected to hold talks with his Danish counterpart Jeppe Kofod at noon, when they will be joined by foreign affairs representatives for Greenland and the Faroe Islands, also a Danish autonomous territory.

In Kofod's words, Denmark considers the US its "absolutely closest ally" and has contributed troops to Nato missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

But relations hit some turbulence in August 2019 when Trump floated the idea of the

US buying Greenland, an Arctic territory covering over two million square kilometres.

Frederiksen called the proposal "absurd", leading Trump to cancel a planned visit to Copenhagen over the "nasty" tone of the response.

While the offer was the subject of some ridicule, analysts say it is also indicative of the US' renewed strategic interest in the Arctic region, which had subsided somewhat after the end of the Cold War.

A few phone calls between the countries have since eased the tensions, and Greenland officials say they want to put the affair behind them.

"What we said in the past and what we do today are two different things. And what matters is what we do and what we say today," Greenland foreign affairs representative Steen LyngetoldreportersonTuesday.

The US reopened a consulate in Greenland's capital Nuuk last month, with approval from Copenhagen, and provided a \$12.1 million aid package in April.

— AFP

Go Home!



Sonia Ambrosio
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Go with the flow. It is stress-free. It reaches its purpose. That is the positive thinking to avoid anxiety and therefore health issues: developing the capacity to act effectively to bring about desired results.

First, there is a need to make some sense of what is going on in the world in order to feel able to comprehend and to engage with one of the greatest social challenges. After reading a large cardboard note on someone's door saying in bold letters GO HOME! I thought it was rude and sad, but also correct and rightful.

How someone could have such a note on the front door? I look for some answers, and perhaps a bit of inspiration. I saw butterflies around the flowers. This fragile insect has powerful representations such as endurance, change, hope, and life. Exactly what is needed at the moment: stamina to cope with the weird social order coronavirus brought upon us; hope that we still can return to some sort of normalcy as we knew it; changes that will be for the better. Then, I check the representations of a bug named COVID-19. The first thing I come across is the iconic medical illustration of the coronavirus: a spiky blob created to display the gravity of the situation, and to grab the public's attention.

The representations of coronavirus are about threat, health risk, fear, and death. On top of these loaded words, the communication narrative for corona is all war metaphors such as combat, fight, and defeat. The storyline and the illustrations are to foster a sense of collective action while to justify fighting the enemy at all costs.

Studies say that representations that are too threatening have negative effect, such as fear, has only limited effectiveness in promoting positive behavioural change. In the academic article Social Representations, Identity, Threat and Coping Amid COVID-19, the authors Rusi Jaspar and Brigitte Nerlich, point out that some of the key representations of COVID-19 are that social distancing and the wearing of masks are necessary to reduce disease incidence. The study also indicates that individuals can respond to these representations in two ways: "Like others, I am at risk", or "Covid is dangerous, but I am young and healthy".

One of the most accepted truth is that rivers don't go upstream. However, there are unusual situations that rivers can flow upstream. It is correct to say that for each generalisation, there is an exception. Nonetheless, it is almost certain that what happens upstream will affect downstream. Better, go with the flow!

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

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Bids invited for Oman’s biggest solar power scheme

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A Request for Proposals (RfP) has gone out to international consortiums and developers that have been prequalified by Oman’s authorities to compete for contract awards to build the country’s biggest solar photovoltaic (PV) based scheme at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The landmark scheme consists of two co-located Independent Power Projects (IPPs) each of a minimum installed capacity of 500 megawatts-peak (MWp). Dubbed ‘Manah Solar I IPP’ and ‘Manah Solar II IPP’, they will offer an aggregate capacity of around 1 gigawatt (GW), effectively making the combined scheme the largest renewable energy venture of its kind when it comes into operation during the summer of 2023.

On Monday, the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) – the sole procurer of new power generation and water desalination capacity under the sector law – issued RfPs to nine developers and groups that have been prequalified to participate in a competitive tender for the pair of IPPs.

They comprise: (1) Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company PJSC – Masdar (UAE) and EDF Renewables SA (EDF); (2) ENI SPA and SB Energy Holding Limited; (3) International Company for Water & Power Projects (ACWA Power); (4) Jinko Power (HK) Company

LANDMARK VENTURE:

Nine groups led by international developers in contention for awards to build a pair of solar PV schemes each of 500 MWp totalling 1 GW in capacity at Manah.

Limited (5) Korea Western Power Company Limited; Hanyang Corporation; Solar Reserve Limited and Nafath Renewable Energy LLC (6) Marubeni Corporation (7) Power Construction Corporation of China Limited (8) Tag Energy SA and Al Shanfari Group, and (9) Total Solar International.

The scope of each project covers the development, financing, design, engineering, construction, ownership, operation and maintenance of a solar PV power plant and associated facilities. An area of over 1,200 hectares has been earmarked in the Wilayat of Manah for the implementation of the two IPPs.

Significantly, given the size of the combined scheme, an award for their implementation will go to two separate bidders, according to OPWP. “Each bidder is required to submit one id for each of the two Projects. Each project will have a separate ranking list of Preferred Bidders based on the primary evaluation criteria. The first-ranked bidder for each project would be determined based on a combination that leads to the lowest economic obligation for OPWP across both projects, subject to the evaluation criteria specified in the RFP and also subject to the requirement that a single bidder cannot be awarded both

the projects,” the procurer explained.

Advising OPWP in the procurement of the giant scheme is a consortium of consultants comprising Synergy Consulting (Financial Advisory Services), Fichtner (Technical) and DLA Piper (Legal).

Meanwhile, construction of Oman’s first large-scale grid-connected solar PV based renewable energy project is well underway at Ibri in Dhahirah Governorate. Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company SAOC (SAGC), a consortium led by Saudi-based ACWA Power, is developing a 500 MWp project with an investment of around \$400 million project. Slated to come into operation in the summer of 2021, the Ibri-II solar IPP will sell its clean energy output to state-owned OPWP under a 15-year contract.

Australia to post biggest budget deficit since World War 2

SYDNEY: Australia will record its biggest budget deficit since World War Two, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will say on Thursday (today), as the spread of COVID-19 saw the government roll out billions in stimulus to support a shuttered economy.

Detailing for the first time the full extent of the economic impact of COVID-19, Frydenberg will say government revenues have plummeted at the same time Australia channels about A\$290 billion in fiscal support.

“Our announced measures, together with large declines in taxation receipts, has seen a hit to the bottom line,” Frydenberg will tell Australian lawmakers in Canberra.

“But this has been necessary in order to cushion the blow for millions of Australians, and to keep businesses in business and keep Australians in jobs.”

The exact size of the deficits for the financial years 2019/2020 and 2020/21 will be published later on Thursday.

Economists expect that for the year that ended on June 30, the budget deficit will top A\$75 billion, or about 4 per cent of Australia’s gross domestic product.

Next year, the deficit is tipped to be in excess of A\$200 billion or about 10 per cent of GDP.

The figures could also deteriorate as Australia struggles to contain a fresh outbreak of COVID-19.

Australia on Wednesday posted its biggest one-day jump in new infections amid a surge in cases in the country’s second most populous state, which ordered nearly 5 million people to stay home unless for essential reason two weeks earlier.

The figures are far cry from estimates made as recently as December, 2019.

Back then, Australia was expecting to post its first budget surplus in more than a decade. — **Reuters**



Omran Group signs agreement with National Training Fund

MUSCAT: Omran Group, the Sultanate’s executive arm for tourism development, recently signed a Capability Building Agreement with the National Training Fund (NTF). The strategic two-year collaboration project aims to attract young Omani hospitality enthusiasts and provide them with hands-on operational experience to become the future hoteliers of the Sultanate’s growing tourism industry.

The agreement was signed by Peter Walichnowski, Chief Executive Officer of Omran Group and Sharifa bint Tahir Aidid, Chief Executive Officer of the National Training Fund, during a virtual signing ceremony in the presence of senior officials from both parties.

The main objective of the programme revolves around increasing the Omanisation level at Omran hospitality assets from the current overall 40 per cent – which so far is considered larger than the private sector average – and boost it further to 50 per cent within a two-

year period. The programme will identify 175 Omani job seekers with high school, diploma and bachelor’s degrees, and facilitate their skills development and professional growth in a hospitality career.

The programme is also expected to increase awareness amongst Omani youth about the advantages and character-building potential of an early hospitality career.

In order to create a link between the educational outcomes and the market needs, potential collaboration and capacity-building programs will be explored at Oman Tourism College, including various specialised programs to be conducted by NTF.

On this occasion, Peter Walichnowski, Omran Group CEO said, “The collaboration with NTF reflects Omran Group’s commitment to support the goals of the National Tourism Strategy 2040. We are fully determined to invest in local talents and enable them to embrace a sustainable career path. The hotel industry, indeed, has great potential to

serve as an engine for job creation and a driving force for economic growth and development”.

Sharifa bint Tahir Aidid, NTF’s CEO, said, “NTF is pleased to ink this strategic partnership with Omran Group. It will positively open up a broad spectrum of opportunities for young Omanis in Omran’s diverse hotel portfolio.”

“This collaborative project will deliver several training programmes that will strengthen the skills and capabilities of job-seekers, and increase their probability to secure employment in the hospitality and tourism sector. These industry-standard vocational programmes are attuned to realise the needs of the industry. Moreover, this gamut of trainings will enable young Omanis to familiarise themselves with the type of work they will be delving into, thereby, facilitating the work readiness of competent hoteliers. Ultimately, these Omani talents will make an immediate and valuable contribution to the local economy” she added.

BUSINESS

How to launch an e-commerce marketplace in Oman

I recently advised my Omani friend Ibrahim on a new marketplace idea in Oman. This is the second part of the column.

When I operated my shops on e-commerce marketplace I felt the pinch of logistics when I started receiving too many orders. I used to pack each product in a nice box with a nice label and bring the box personally to the post office.

Then one day I started receiving many orders every day. That quickly became a very tiring job. I was waking up in the morning with pending orders, then I proceeded to prepare the orders and pack them for delivery.

By the time I was done with preparation of the first batch, more orders reached my inbox. So I would have quickly prepared the new batch and rushed to the post office before noon. On the way back another batch of orders was received. So I



STEFANO VIRGILLI

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would have gone back home, packed the new orders and back to the post office for the second time.

So if Ibrahim was planning to allow each merchant to handle its own logistics, he could have expected quite a bit of headache to solve because clients might not be willing to wait too long. Hence having minimum standards of logistics quality for the merchants to match is essential.

I then asked Ibrahim who was going to handle the customer service. If the wrong products were delivered to the customer, then who should have the customer complained to? The merchant or the marketplace?

There should be a com-

mon ground between merchants and marketplace, where the marketplace withholds the client's payments for a period of time able to cover the return policy.

Then the funds — after retaining a commission — are released from the marketplace to the merchants. So merchants are only paid once that the client has received the correct items.

On the other hand, this implies that clients should return the goods before being refunded. So the marketplace should have a return policy and a refund policy to meet the expectations of both the client and the merchant.

We often hear about customer experience and customer service, but in a mar-

ketplace the satisfaction should be met and exceeded for all parties involved.

Customers, merchants, logistics partners and financial institutions. By satisfying everyone's expectations, the project can stand high chances to grow and expand. But focusing only on the final customer could be too narrow to guarantee success.

A complete business plan to include a financial model is essential before starting. Then subsequently prepare and define all the policies to regulate returns and refunds.

Then finally prepare an onboarding process so that all the merchants joining the platform, as well as all the customers utilising it, are aware of what are the terms and conditions to participate in the ecosystem.

Only at that point he could have started planning the practical elements, such as the brand and the website.

Novavax executives could get big payday even if vaccine fails

WASHINGTON: One of the leading US firms developing a coronavirus vaccine, Novavax Inc, has awarded executives stock options that could pay out tens of millions of dollars even if its efforts fail.

Novavax CEO Stanley Erck and three other executives would earn the options, worth \$101 million at Tuesday's closing stock price, if the company's vaccine candidate enters a mid-stage clinical trial - regardless of its eventual success, according to a company filing.

The incentive plan, which has not been previously reported, allows the executives to start exercising the



Dr Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, holds up a model of SARS-CoV-2, during a US Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing known as Operation Warp Speed on Capitol Hill in Washington. — Reuters

options a year after Novavax starts the so-called Phase 2 trial, as it expects to do soon.

Starting the Phase 2 trial is no guarantee the vaccine candidate will make it to

market. Novavax would have to successfully complete more extensive Phase 3 trials and win approval from the US Food and Drug Administration.

The Gaithersburg, Maryland-based company has not brought a vaccine to market in its 33-year history. But its market value has rocketed from \$250 million to \$8 billion in about five months on news of its coronavirus vaccine prospects.

The Trump administration has given Novavax \$1.6 billion under its "Operation Warp Speed" programme to accelerate coronavirus vaccine development.

— Reuters

Japan’s travel ban has hit 85pc of European businesses there

TOKYO: Japan's travel ban to stop the spread of the coronavirus has hit a majority of European firms in the country and could prompt those businesses to rethink their future in the world's third-largest economy, a European business lobby said.

Many countries have imposed travel curbs amid the pandemic but Japan's are among the most strict, effectively banning entry of tourists and visa holders coming from 129 countries. Even permanent residents are restricted entry unless they are granted an exception under humanitarian grounds, while in the United States and Europe, non-citizen residents are allowed to return.

A recent survey by the European Business Council of 376 members in Japan showed that 85 per cent had been negatively impacted by the ban, with



Very few passengers are seen at Narita Airport in Tokyo. — Reuters

44 per cent reporting financial losses. The EBC said the travel restrictions run counter to international treaties.

“This situation may also trigger some investment disputes against Japan,” EBC president Michael Mroczek told reporters.

The way the ban was handled creates an air of unpredictability that may cause CEOs to “rethink their policy regarding Japan,” he said.

Japan allows its citizens to return to the country if they take a coronavirus test at the port of entry

and observe a period of self-quarantine.

Foreigners living in Japan face much higher hurdles for re-entry, such as demonstrating the need to visit dying relatives or be reunited with family in the country.

— Reuters

OIL PRICES SLIP AS US INVENTORIES, VIRUS FEARS GROW

SINGAPORE: Oil prices fell on Wednesday as industry data showed a bigger-than-expected inventory build in the United States, where climbing coronavirus cases may further dent fuel demand in the world's biggest oil consumer.

In his first press briefing in months on the pandemic, US President Donald Trump said the outbreak would probably get worse before it gets better, one of his first recent acknowledgements of the spread of the problem.

Industry group American Petroleum Institute (API) reported US crude inven-

tories rose last week by 7.5 million barrels, against expectations for a draw of 2.1 million barrels.

Brent crude fell 35 cents, or 0.8 per cent, to \$43.97 a barrel by 05:41 GMT, and US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude dropped 39 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$41.53.

Oil prices climbed about \$1 the previous day, reaching their highest since March 6.

“Crude's rally hit a brick wall after the API report showed a sharp rise in stockpiles and on President Trump's warning that the coronavirus pandemic in



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes in this illustration picture. — Reuters

the US is likely to worsen,” said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA in New York.

“The crude demand outlook just got a double whammy with what could be the biggest rise in stockpiles since late May if confirmed by the EIA report tomorrow and on Trump's downbeat virus briefing,” Moya said.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) will release official oil data later on Wednesday.

The United States reported more than 1,000 deaths from COVID-19 on Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally, marking the first time since June 10 the nation has surpassed that grim milestone. — Reuters

BUSINESS

GREEN ENERGY RATCHETS UP POWER DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



A general view shows solar panels to produce renewable energy at the Urbasolar photovoltaic park in Gardanne, France. — Reuters

LONDON: Renewable power has taken up a record share of global electricity production since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a review of data, suggesting a transition away from polluting fossil fuels could be accelerated in the coming years.

Advocates of traditional energy have long argued that clean energy sources, like solar and wind farms, which depend on fickle weather, cannot be trusted to provide steady supplies of electricity into national grids that were designed to operate in tandem with reliable coal and gas generators.

But the past three months have shown that renewable energy has become more dependable, sector experts say, accounting for well over half of output in some European countries, while grid operators proved they could successfully manage larger doses of fluctu-

ating energy flows.

"This has been a real test of how resilient the grids are, and we know they coped because the lights stayed on," said Rory McCarthy, energy storage senior analyst at global consultancy firm Wood Mackenzie.

"Maybe this will give confidence to governments and policy makers who were apprehensive, that they can be more ambitious about the number of renewables on the grid."

However, before governments take decisions based on recent experiences, they will have to answer various questions, says Michelle Manook, chief executive of the

World Coal Association, a lobby group for the industry.

These include how the system would have coped in the mid of winter, when sunshine is at a premium, or how it will manage when the economy picks up and demand gathers pace.

"What seems little known or understood is that a carbon-free electricity generation system based wholly on renewables ... is not currently attainable," Manook said.

The recent boost for wind and solar power came for all the wrong reasons: the health crisis has tipped the world into recession, pushing down

electricity usage by more than a fifth in some countries, according to the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA).

Most grid operators automatically turned to the cheapest energy supplies to meet the falling demand. Wind and solar power costs very little to generate once the installations are built and is often backed by government mandates and subsidies. As a result, more expensive fossil fuel sources were the first to be pulled.

Data from Finnish energy technology group Wartsila, collated from Europe's electricity grid operators, shows renewables generated an average of 44 per cent of power across the 27-nation bloc and Britain from April to June, when many countries were in lockdown, against 37.2 per cent in the same period last year. Daily peaks hit 53 per cent.

— Reuters

ADVOCATES OF TRADITIONAL ENERGY HAVE LONG ARGUED THAT CLEAN ENERGY SOURCES, LIKE SOLAR AND WIND FARMS, WHICH DEPEND ON FICKLE WEATHER, CANNOT BE TRUSTED TO PROVIDE STEADY SUPPLIES OF ELECTRICITY INTO NATIONAL GRIDS.

SPORTS



Altuve, Bregman drilled in Astros’ win

KANSAS, US: Jose Altuve and Alex Bregman each were hit by pitches with the bases loaded during back-to-back at-bats in the second inning, and the Houston Astros cruised to a 15-6 win over the host Kansas City Royals on Tuesday.

Two innings later, Altuve exited the game because of a left leg contusion after a collision at home plate. His status is day-to-day, with the Astros set to open the regular season Friday night against the visiting Seattle Mariners.

Royals right-hander Jorge Lopez hit Altuve and Bregman upon entering the game, but the beanings did not appear to be intentional as both forced in a run. The Astros enter this season under increased scrutiny following a sign-stealing scandal, and the team's hitters could get

plunked more this season as retribution.

George Springer was among five Astros players who homered during the rout. Springer also drew two walks and scored three runs — and he was hit by a pitch, too.

Franchy Cordero and Bobby Witt Jr. finished with two hits apiece to lead the Royals.

—Joey Votto was among four Cincinnati Reds players to take a knee during the national anthem before an exhibition game against the Detroit Tigers.

Amir Garrett, Phillip Ervin and Alex Blandino also knelt along the first base line during the anthem. Mike Moustakas put his hand on Ervin's shoulder, and manager David Bell stood next to Blandino, according to the Cincinnati Enquirer.

George Springer was among five Astros players who homered during the rout. Springer also drew two walks and scored three runs — and he was hit by a pitch, too

Garrett and Ervin are the only Black players on the Reds. Votto and others have worn T-shirts with “Black Lives Matter” printed on the front during workouts this month.

—The New York Yankees purchased the contracts of veterans Chris Iannetta, David Hale and Luis Avilan.

New York also sent left-hander Jordan Montgomery to the club's alternate site in Moosic, Pa. Montgomery is a candidate to return in the next couple weeks to join a rotation led by Gerrit Cole, James Paxton and J.A. Happ.

Iannetta likely will serve as the Yankees' third catcher behind Gary Sanchez and Kyle Higashioka. Hale bolsters the team's right-handed depth out of the bullpen, while Avilan provides another southpaw option in relief. — **Reuters**



TIMBERWOLVES FOR SALE, GARNETT INTERESTED



“People have inquired who are interested, but they want to move the team,” Taylor told The Athletic, adding that the WNBA’s Lynx would likely be included in any deal. “They are not a candidate. We’ve made that very clear. ... Everybody’s been told it has to stay in Minnesota.”

GLEN TAYLOR
TIMBERWOLVES
OWNER



NEW YORK: The Minnesota Timberwolves are for sale, and franchise icon Kevin Garnett is part of a group of investors looking to buy the team, the Hall of Famer announced on Tuesday. Sportico reported owner Glen Taylor had retained the Raine Group to sell the franchise, adding that several parties have bid on the team. Others interested in purchasing the team, according to ESPN’s Adam Schefter, include the Wilf family, which owns the Minnesota Vikings, and Timberwolves minority owner Meyer Orbach. Taylor confirmed to The Athletic that he has received inquiries, including from groups who want to

relocate the franchise, which is a nonstarter. “People have inquired who are interested, but they want to move the team,” Taylor told The Athletic, adding that the WNBA’s Lynx would likely be included in any deal. “They are not a candidate. We’ve made that very clear. ... Everybody’s been told it has to stay in Minnesota.” Taylor, 79, bought the franchise in 1994 for just under \$90 million and has sold off a few minority stakes in recent years. Sportico reported he is seeking at least \$1.2 billion to sell the team and that a deal could be reached within a month. Forbes pegged the franchise’s value at \$1.38

billion. Taylor has a net worth of around \$3 billion. Garnett took to Instagram on Tuesday, replying to a post about the potential sale of the Timberwolves, “I’m one of the groups trying. ... LAWD PLSS LET MY GROUP GET THIS.” He also wrote on Twitter, “My passion for the Minnesota Timberwolves to be a championship team is well known but I have a deeper affection for the city of Minneapolis. I once again want to see Minneapolis as the diverse and loving community that I know it is. “No two people love the city more than myself and Glen Taylor and I look forward to trying to work with him to achieve my dream.” — Reuters

KOEPKA CONDEMNS FLOYD’S DEATH, SAYS RACISM MUST BE CONFRONTED



NEW YORK: Golfer Brooks Koepka said that racism must be confronted across the globe, speaking to reporters ahead of the 3M Open, the first major sporting event in the greater Minneapolis region since the death of George Floyd in police custody.

Floyd’s death in May prompted widespread protests across the country and a reckoning over racism in the United States, as more professional sporting leagues embraced protests for racial justice.

“It’s pathetic what happened,” Koepka told reporters on Tuesday. “Then you watch it multiple, multiple times, it’s tough. You know, I get chills right now just even thinking about it.”

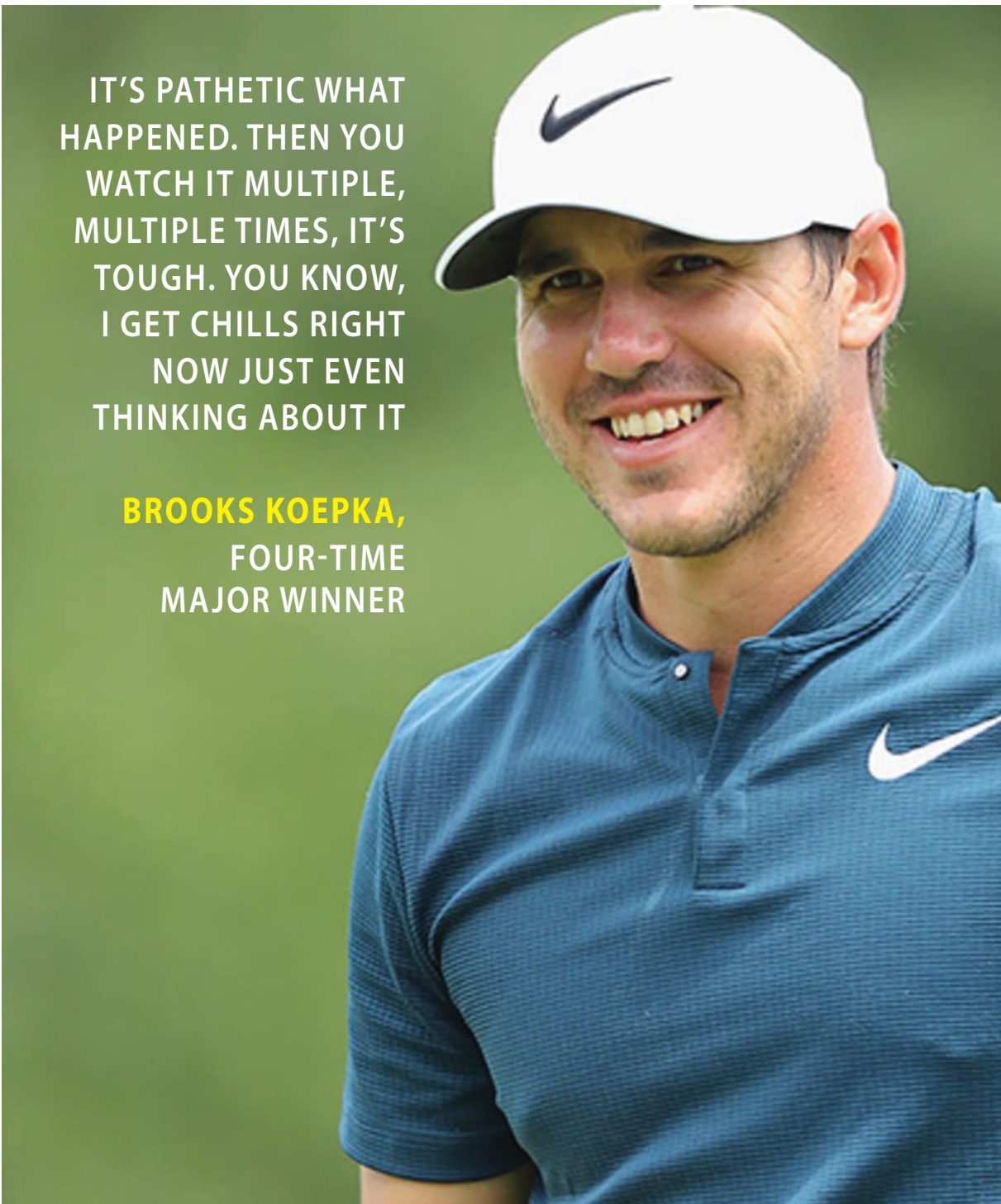
The four-time major win-

ner added: “If there’s anything good, we’re starting to see change.”

Athletes from Major League Baseball to the English Premier League have taken a knee in support of Black Lives Matter. The NBA, which resumes its COVID-interrupted season on July 30, will have “Black Lives Matter” printed on the game court.

The PGA Tour held a moment of silence for Floyd at each round of June’s Charles Schwab Challenge, as it returned from hiatus.

“Obviously this is a difficult time for everyone,” world number four Dustin Johnson told reporters. “No one ever wants to see something like that happen. Hopefully we can do things to mitigate those circumstances in the future.” — **Reuters**



IT’S PATHETIC WHAT HAPPENED. THEN YOU WATCH IT MULTIPLE, MULTIPLE TIMES, IT’S TOUGH. YOU KNOW, I GET CHILLS RIGHT NOW JUST EVEN THINKING ABOUT IT

BROOKS KOEPKA,
FOUR-TIME
MAJOR WINNER

SPORTS



TOKYO 2020 PREPARING TO DELIVER GAMES WITH COVID 19

TOKYO: Tokyo Olympics organisers are preparing to host the Games next year even if the global coronavirus pandemic hasn't eased substantially, organising committee chief executive Toshiro Muto said on Tuesday.

The Tokyo Olympics had been scheduled to start on Friday but were put back to 2021 because of the pandemic.

Since then, organisers have scrambled to rearrange an event that has been almost a decade in the making whilst trying to ensure next year's Olympics are safe for athletes, officials and supporters.

Muto said that although organisers hoped the threat posed by the virus could be reduced, nobody knows what the situation

will be when the Games start on July 23, 2021.

Organisers are assuming coronavirus will remain a major problem.

"It is rather difficult for us to expect that the coronavirus pandemic is contained," Muto said. "But if we can deliver the Games in Tokyo with coronavirus, Tokyo can be the role model for the next Olympic Games or other various international events."

Muto said he hoped Tokyo 2020 could be the benchmark in a post-pandemic world.

"By delivering the Games successfully in Tokyo we strongly hope that can create a legacy that is in the history of mankind."

NEW SPONSORS

The delay to the Games



IT IS RATHER DIFFICULT FOR US TO EXPECT THAT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS CONTAINED. BUT IF WE CAN DELIVER THE GAMES IN TOKYO WITH CORONAVIRUS, TOKYO CAN BE THE ROLE MODEL FOR THE NEXT OLYMPIC GAMES OR OTHER VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

TOSHIRO MUTO,
TOKYO 2020 CHIEF
EXECUTIVE

will incur additional costs for organisers.

The International Olympic Committee has already estimated that the postponement will cost them \$800 million but the Japanese side has been less forthcoming in giving exact figures.

Muto said the final figure wouldn't be known until December but hoped that bringing on new sponsors, despite the grim economic forecast, would help bridge the gap.

"I know that businesses are in dire circumstances because of coronavirus but still there are companies who are coming forward to say they want to sponsor the Games, which we appreciate very much," Muto said.

"It is a bright piece of news." — **Reuters**

FEATURES



GOLDEN MEMORIES OF THE GOLDEN SANDS

A holistic lifestyle coach and prominent Indian classical dancer and art curator Vasantha Vaikunth has launched an online NGO for emotional support and a platform which provides people an opportunity to discuss and debate social issues... **page 20**

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attractions



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FEATURES



Golden memories of the golden sands

LIJU CHERIAN



KHANJAR, the Omani symbol of bravery, finds a top spot at her elite residential home.

The high-rise Phoenix Kessaku home in Bengaluru, India, also displays a variety of Omani arts bringing back nostalgic memories for Vasantha Vaikunth, a prominent Indian classical dancer and art curator.

Her new online counseling platform aims towards creating a healthy society for youngsters all over the globe.

It was way back in 1976 she landed in the Sultanate, the dream land that drew her as a young bride with her family. Today, years later, after settling back in her homeland India, Vasantha recalls how she spent her life in a country that provided security, health, wealth, values, peace and above all great Omani friends on the golden sands. She loves anything and everything about Oman. Such is the bond she developed over the years.

From intricate work on silver bangles which she wears as an antique piece to ancient Nizwa fort that used to be the hub for her family with its panoramic views and stands as a landmark of Omani culture and heritage.

Vasantha recollects how she set foot on the dream land that was naturally beautiful, rustic and modern. She recollects her nostalgic moments of life which was surrounded by sea and mountains, with nothing that a modern city seems to have.

As an artist, she soon found space in her new land, the land of opportunity for Indians and the Arabs, not knowing that she would reside for over three decades. Her life as an artist took a back seat for a while until the Saud Bahwan Group of companies supported her to set up Indian art and culture platforms.

With their wholesome help, she marched forward, inviting

artists from India and created an awareness of music, dance and drama in the Sultanate. She conducted 'Festivals of India every year twice with well-known artists from India under the name of 'Raagavarsha.'

Further she also curated paintings from all South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries and brought them together on the same stage in Muscat. The Centre for Performing Arts (CPA) where she taught Indian arts and culture had great patronage from the Oman government and the local Indian Embassy.

Vasantha was pivotal towards making Muscat as the 'Mecca of culture and heritage' along with the beautiful art and craft of the Sultanate. Her residence now proudly displays arts and crafts, jewelry, hand woven rugs, precious stones, and pottery work from Muttrah souk.

Vasantha is also the first Non Resident Indian (NRI) to win awards from the Indian government and the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and came to be known as the cultural ambassador of India for the Sultanate.

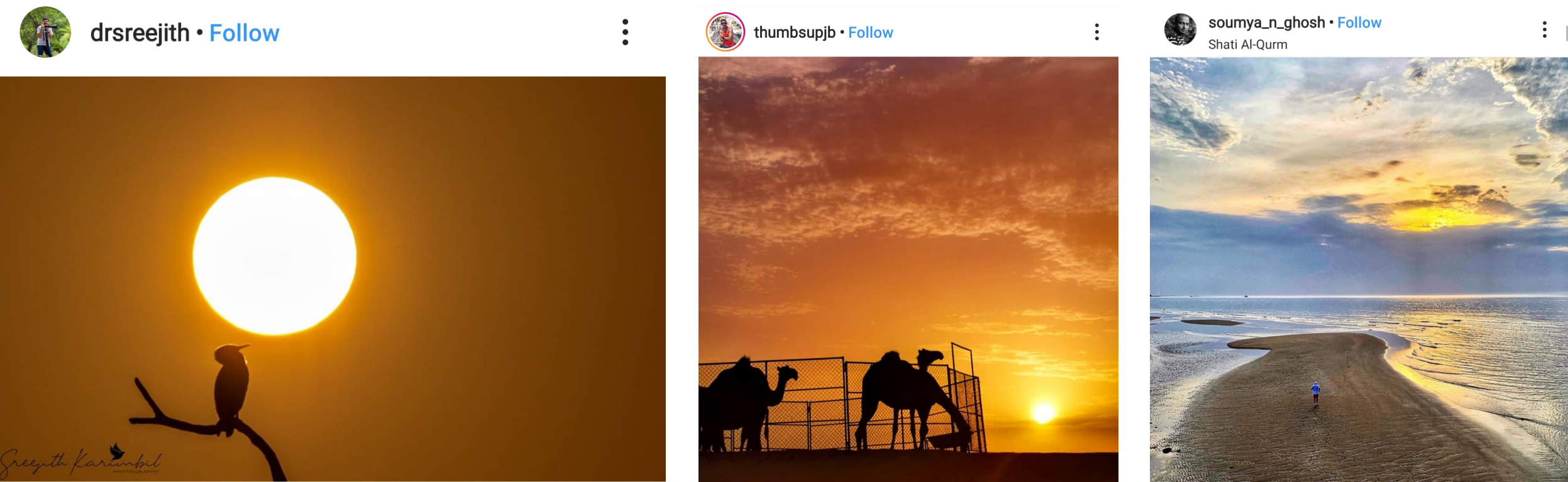
Bidding adieu to the golden sand in 2014 was no mean task though. She carried back home beautiful memories and set up an online NGO for emotional support called lifenliving.org.

As a holistic lifestyle coach she says, "It is an initiative to help today's generation to understand and create awareness of the lifestyle that is techno infested and fast paced. We conduct workshops and interviews of university students to understand their perspective on the changing environment and enable them to form an interactive platform."

Presently the NGO completed over 500 counseling sessions online and presented 45 videos on her website for youngsters.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Greek National Opera finds post-lockdown voice



THE RICH MEZZO-soprano voice of Anita Rachvelishvili is scheduled to ring out on Saturday evening across the ancient ruins at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens.

Following long months of coronavirus lockdown that has left music venues, opera houses and concert halls silent across the globe, the Greek National Opera has invited the Georgian opera star to perform a recital to a small selected audience at

the Roman Agora, a unique archeological site dating back to 19 BC.

It will also be livestreamed on the opera house's website to music lovers around the world.

"After all these months of a pause, it's the first time that I'm singing", said Rachvelishvili, who has performed the title role of Bizet's Carmen in some of the world's leading opera houses, such as La Scala in Milan and the

Bastille Opera in Paris.

Speaking to AFP before a rehearsal on Friday, the singer said that music and the arts had been vital in helping people around the world cope with being locked indoors for months on end, isolated from friends, family and colleagues.

"When the economy goes down because everything stops, we have to remember... that we have art that gives us food for our soul".

The recital — in which Rachvelishvili will sing selected arias by Verdi, Cilea, Gounod, Saint-Saens, Cherubini and Meyerbeer accompanied by the Greek National Opera Orchestra — will also mark the re-start of cultural events in Greece following the pandemic.

Compared with other countries, Greece has escaped relatively unscathed from coronavirus, reporting only 194 deaths so far. — **AFP**

FEATURES

Visitors bypass Berlin museums despite star attractions

BERLIN MUSEUMS might house the iconic Nefertiti bust, the Ishtar gate of ancient Babylon or Rembrandt masterpieces, but they still trail global counterparts in popularity – and the coronavirus is making things worse.

Millions of euros have been poured into the institutions, yet the 19 museums managed by the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK) attracted just 4.2 million visitors last year, while the Louvre alone drew 9.6 million.

Alarmed by lacklustre public interest, Germany is planning a major shake-up after a report commissioned by Chancellor Angela Merkel's government slammed the foundation as dysfunctional, outdated and out of touch.

For Joerg Haentzschel, a culture journalist at the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper, the capital's museums are plagued by "a persistent culture of exclusivity, lack of transparency and institutional arrogance."

"Those responsible for museums are still serving their own peers first and foremost, rather than bringing everyone in – children, people with dementia, people from other origins and educational backgrounds," he said.

QUIET HALLS

Around the corner from Potsdamer Platz in the city's bustling business district, the Gemaeldegalerie sits quietly in the shadows of shiny high-rises, its exhibition halls typically dotted with just a handful of visitors.

The museum boasts world-famous masterpieces by Caravaggio, Rembrandt and Vermeer – and yet it attracted only 310,000 visitors last year. And that was before the pandemic hit.

The Gemaeldegalerie is one of 19 museums managed by the SPK, one of the most important cultural institutions in the world with 15 collections and 4.7 million items.

The SPK's most treasured possession, which has pride of place in the

Neues Museum, is a limestone bust of Nefertiti, considered by some to be the most famous depiction of a female face in the world after the Mona Lisa.

But comparisons with the Louvre end there. At the Gemaeldegalerie, there are no crowds jostling for a glimpse of the ancient Egyptian queen.

'INSTITUTIONAL ARROGANCE'

And this despite Berlin's reputation as a vibrant cultural hub, attracting artists in droves from all over the world – and a tourism industry that has exploded over the past decade, though now hobbled by COVID-19.

In the damning report, experts called for the SPK to be abolished and replaced by four separate bodies.

With around 2,000 employees and a budget of 335 million euros (\$381 million) this year, the SPK is the largest cultural sector employer in Germany.

The experts pointed in particular to failures in the digital arena, accentuated at a time when many of the world's museums are relying on the internet due to international travel restrictions.

"Many international museums have a large number of followers on social media," Marina Muenkler, who chaired the working group behind the report, told the Tagesspiegel newspaper.

"Museums need to be in contact with the public before they come to the museum ... Apps can be created for exhibitions. But this is often no longer possible in Berlin, because many museums do not have wi-fi."

The report criticised a reliance on "partly ... outdated ideas about museum work" and a failure to reflect the "diversity of the world". —AFP

