

P15

HAMILTON
SHINES IN
SPANISH
HEAT



P10

SANOFI TO
BUY PRINCIPIA
BIOPHARMA
FOR \$3.68 BN



P12

VENICE
NURTURES ITS
LAGOON BACK
TO HEALTH



The print edition of your favourite newspaper will hit the stands after 148 days. The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 on Monday gave approval to resume the printing of newspapers, magazines and publications. For the first time since it was launched in 1981, **Oman Daily Observer** suspended the printing and distribution of its print edition from March 23, 2020, in line with the measures announced by the Supreme Committee to control the spread of the virus. As we supported the decision taken in the public interest, **Oman Observer** continued with its role as a trusted source of news in the country by bringing up-to-date information via our online platforms to over 500,000 followers as news breaks in.

OUR PRINT
EDITION
IS BACK





2010000367405

OMAN

Sultanate ranks in digital quality

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has made it into the top 20 in terms of mobile Internet affordability, according to the results of the Digital Quality of Life (DQL) Index 2020. However, it occupies 29th position in the overall Internet affordability index due to low affordability of broadband. The Sultanate was ranked 52nd in the world, according to the DQL Index 2020. The DQL index is published annually based on research conducted by Surfshark, an international cyber security and private protection company designed to equip its users with a broad online security package. The study covers 81 per cent of the global population (6.3 billion people). **DETAILS ON P3**

WORLD

Egypt mediators enter Gaza City

GAZA CITY: Egyptian mediators entered Gaza on Monday seeking to calm tensions after a week of clashes in which Israel has launched military strikes in response to airborne incendiary devices that have ignited wildfires. Israel has targeted positions of Hamas and which it holds responsible for all cross-border attacks from the coastal enclave. The delegation from Egypt, which has traditionally played the role of mediator in the restive Palestinian enclave, entered Gaza at around midday, according to security sources and eyewitnesses. Israeli tanks pounded Hamas targets earlier on Monday. **DETAILS ON P6**

INSIDE



WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 38°C
MIN: 30°C

SALALAH
MAX: 26°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 45°C
MIN: 30°C

SUNRISE 05:40 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:19

DHUHR: 12:17

ASR: 15:43

MAGHRIB: 18:50

ISHA: 20:06



System of Job Security promulgated

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES FOUR ROYAL DECREES



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Monday issued four Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 82/2020 promulgates the System of Job Security.

Article (1) stipulates the enforcement of the System of Job Security attached to this Decree.

Article (2) States that the Chairman of Board of Directors of Public Authority for Social Insurance shall issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the System attached.

Article (3) states that amendment of provisions of the System attached shall be enacted through a decision to be issued by the Chairman of Board of Directors of Public Authority for Social Insurance, after the approval of the Council of Ministers.

Article (4) cancels all that contradicts this Decree and the System attached or contravenes their provisions.

Article (5) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced with effect from November 1, 2020, except the following: Article (8) of the System attached to be enforced with effect from January 1, 2021, and Article (12) to be enforced after one year from the date of enforcement of this Decree.

Royal Decree No 83/2020 on the amendment of some provisions of the

Tender Law.

Article (1) introduces the amendments attached to the Tender Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 36/2008.

Article (2) cancels all that contravenes the Amendments attached to this Decree or contradicts with their provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 84/2020 on the Secretariat General of Tender Board.

Article (1) states that the Tender Board shall have a secretariat general enjoying legal identity and financial and administrative independence.

Article (2) stipulates that the Tender Board's secretariat general shall have a Secretary General, under the Special Grade, and appointed by Royal Decree.

Article (3) states that the Secretary General of the Tender Board shall run all the administrative and financial affairs of the Secretariat General, that the Secretary General shall represent the Secretariat General in its relations with other parties and before courts, and that he shall have the powers and prerogatives stated in laws and Royal Decrees applying to units of the State's Administrative Apparatus.

TURN TO P5

New Hijri Year holiday announced

MUSCAT: Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Chairman of the Civil Service Council, on Monday issued a decision to specify the holiday of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary (PBUH) and the advent of the New Hijri year 1442 AH.

The decision said: "On the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary (PBUH) and the new Hijri year 1442 AH, it was decided that the first day of Muharram 1442 AH will be an official holiday for the employees of the ministries, public authorities and other departments of the state administrative apparatus. If the 1st of Muharram 1442 AH is on Friday, corresponding to August 21, the holiday will be on Sunday, third Muharram 1442 AH, corresponding to August 23. Muharram moon sighting will be declared by the authorities concerned."

On this great occasion, the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court extended his greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty, grant him good health, happiness and long life and for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty for many years to come, and

the Omani people and our dear country with further progress and welfare under His Majesty's wise leadership, and all Muslims with blessings and welfare.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, issued a similar decision on the occasion of the new Hijri year 1442 AH, declaring that the first day of Muharram will be an official holiday for employees in the private sector establishments. If the first of Muharram 1442 AH is on Friday, the aforementioned holiday will be on Sunday (August 23). Muharram moon sighting will be declared by the authorities concerned. The decision allows employers and employees to agree on compensating this holiday if necessity arises.

All employees in the private sector seize this blessed occasion to extend their heartfelt greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty, grant him good health, happiness and long life and for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty and the Omani people and Muslims all over the world with welfare and blessings. — ONA

AFTER A DAY'S CATCH!

Fishermen mend their nets at Al Hail beach after the day's catch.
PHOTO BY SHAMSA AL HARTHIYA



Muttrah Souq, international restaurants, gyms to open

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, AUG 17

With the two-week total ban on movement at night and travel restrictions between the governorates yielding positive results, the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 released the new or the fifth package of activities that will resume from Tuesday.

On Sunday, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Chairman of the Supreme Committee on

COVID-19, said the committee takes its decisions following a well-studied report submitted by specialists from across different sectors, with the prime aim of protecting individuals and the community from the pandemic.

Giving a boost to the hospitality sector, international and tourist restaurants will be allowed to function normally.

Gymnasiums and swimming pools in hotels will be allowed

to be used by guests.

The popular and traditional Muttrah Souq, all fish markets, commercial activities, inside traditional markets, will resume operations.

Printing of newspapers, magazines and all kinds of publications will hit the stands after nearly five months.

Special training activities will be allowed with approval from the Ministry of Manpower.

Some sports playgrounds

to train national teams for continental and international rounds, which will benefit, national juniors team, Oman National Futsal Team, Dhofar Sports Club, and tennis playgrounds for the general category.

Sale of phone SIM cards, car wash from inside, sale of tobacco and its products and camping materials (including sewing) will be allowed.

TURN TO P5



We're writing a New Chapter in Banking History

Our goal, right from the day of our inception, has been to script a worthy legacy for Islamic banking in the Sultanate and to contribute directly in making a real difference to the economy and society.

We believe that real success can be achieved through real partnership. That is why, since the very beginning we have sought to build our business as a partnership based on trust and the values we share with our customers, associates and community.

In 2020, a year of challenges, we mark a historic milestone in our journey. As an Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has recorded for the first time Retained Earnings after amortising total accumulated losses since inception and achieved the highest growth in Net Profits in the banking sector in the Sultanate.

We have reinforced our position as the leading Islamic bank in Oman – and made an imprint on Islamic banking internationally – through partnership with our customers and stakeholders, the dedication of our team and the support of a prudent strategy.

37%
growth
in net
profit

14%
growth
in total
assets

14%
growth
in funding to
customers

14%
growth
in customer
deposits

9%
growth in our
shareholders'
equity

We dedicate this achievement to our *Customers.*

Follow us on



بنك نزوى
Bank Nizwa



State Council to discuss draft VAT law today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 17

The State Council will meet on Tuesday to discuss the draft “amendment of the Income Tax Law” referred by the Council of Ministers as a matter of urgency and the report of the Council’s Economic Committee about it, as well as the draft Law on Value Added Tax (VAT) referred by the Council of Ministers.

Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council, will preside over the session

in the presence of the Council members and the Secretary-General of the Council.

In addition, the sitting will approve the minutes of the ninth ordinary sitting of the first annual session of the seventh term and review the report of the General Secretariat.

Earlier, Majlis Ash’shura transferred the Value Added Tax (VAT) Draft Law and Income Tax Draft Law to the State Council after a voting session based on the report of the Majlis’s Economic and Financial Committee.

Sulayim bin Ali al Hikmani,

Head of the Economic and Financial Committee, said that the committee unanimously okayed the two draft laws forwarded to the Shura earlier by the Council of Ministers. This took place during the 11th ordinary session of the Majlis’s First Annual Sitting (2019-2020) of the 9th Term of the Majlis Ash’shura.

The members of the committee expressed their support for the exemption of people with low income from payment of the VAT, among other solutions to assist the needy segment.



Oman ranks 52nd in the world on the digital quality of life

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 17

The Sultanate has made it into the top 20 in terms of mobile Internet affordability, according to the results of the Digital Quality of Life (DQL) Index 2020. However, it occupies 29th position in the overall Internet affordability index due to low affordability of broadband.

The Sultanate was ranked 52nd in the world, according to the DQL Index 2020.

The DQL index is published annually based on research conducted by Surfshark, an international cyber security and private protection company designed to equip its users with a broad online security package.

The study covers 81 per cent of the global population (6.3 billion people).

In terms of Internet quality, the Sultanate stood in the 45th place. Mobile Internet stability and broadband Internet speed are the areas of improvement in order to move up in the ranking.

When it comes to e-security, the Sultanate lags behind the majority of countries. Despite ranking in the 15th position globally in terms of cyber security, it has no data protection laws available in the country.

In the overall digital quality of life index, Saudi Arabia is ranked 45th



whereas the UAE is placed in the 31st position.

Researchers measure Internet quality, affordability, e-security, online government services, and e-infrastructure.

This year’s edition of the DQL research concluded that 7 out of 10 countries with the highest digital quality of life are in Europe, with

Denmark taking the global lead among 85 countries.

Also, this year Surfshark took into account the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on Internet quality, among other factors, such as Internet affordability, electronic government, e-security, and electronic infrastructure.

Regionally, Canada stands out as a

country with the highest digital quality of life in the Americas while Japan takes the leading position in Asia.

Among countries in Africa, people in South Africa enjoy the highest quality of their digital lives whereas New Zealand leads in Oceania, outperforming Australia in various digital areas.

The three key global findings of the

research are:

The COVID-19 outbreak had a significant impact on Internet stability. 49 of 85 countries experienced drops in mobile and 44 in broadband speed due to the WFH setting.

High inequality in affordability: people in 75 per cent of the researched countries have to work more than the global average to afford the Internet.

E-security, e-infrastructure, and e-government have a more significant correlation with the digital quality of life than GDP per capita.

Dom Dimas, Head of DQL research at Surfshark, explains that “any country’s digital advancement and people’s online experiences have tangible relation to its economic potential and population’s overall wellbeing. To demonstrate this coherence, we are continuing our annual Digital Quality of Life research project that investigates multiple factors influencing people’s online experiences.”

“The index aims to overlook any country’s digital preparedness’s status quo and establish a common ground for further conversation.”

The researchers found out that the best quality Internet in the world is in Singapore, followed by Sweden and the Netherlands, whereas the Internet, combining both mobile

and broadband, is most affordable in Israel, Canada and Azerbaijan.

The United Kingdom, France and Lithuania stand out globally for their e-security while Singapore, the UK and the US lead in the advancement of e-governance services.

The last pillar examining the countries by their electronic infrastructure development level ranks the UAE, Sweden and Denmark as global leaders in this area.

The DQL study showed that none of the researched countries crossed the threshold of 0.8, and no country made it to the top three in all of the pillars, reflecting room for improvement in all digital areas.

The DQL research examined a total population of more than 6.3 billion people in terms of 12 indicators grouped into five pillars.

The study is based on information provided by the United Nations, the World Bank, Freedom House, the International Communications Union, and other public data sources.

The top 20 countries in the index in the descending order are Denmark, Sweden, Canada, France, Norway, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Israel, Japan, Poland, Finland, Singapore, Estonia, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, New Zealand, Spain, Australia, and Italy.

As Khareef settles, Salalah is missing tourists

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, AUG 17

Amid perfect settling of Khareef (monsoon) season Salalah is missing the humdrum of tourists. Even though the onset of the monsoon is very late and Salalah is witnessing a below normal Khareef, the mountains have turned green. The only missing element this year is the arrival of tourists due to closure of entry points leading to Dhofar to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

Had there been no pandemic, the scene would have been entirely different. Roads would have been jam-packed with vehicles and there would have been an atmosphere of fun everywhere.

“I have never seen Salalah roads so empty during Khareef. Forget about normal, good or below normal Khareef, Salalah would always attract tourists during the season due to its charm and mood of nature which you find nowhere in the whole region,” said 80-year-old Mohammed who is born and brought up on Salalah and has seen many a Khareef in his life.

“Even though there were not many vehicles before Oman emerging as a developed country, there were celebrations everywhere in Salalah. Local people would dance, sing, and cook traditional food to welcome the season. I have never seen such gloomy Khareef in my life,” he recounts.

Mohamed agrees with the reason for having no tourists this season. “I know that a pandemic has gripped the whole world. It is better to be safe for the future than putting yourself in trouble deliberately by indulging in celebrations and gatherings.”

Even local people from Salalah are not venturing out much this season respecting the government order to maintain social



PHOTO by Sarthak Shenoy

distancing by avoiding gatherings.

“Under compulsion, on persistent request from my children, I took them out for a while. I had given them strict instructions that everyone has to be inside the car, as there should not be a plan for picnic etc.

They agreed and we came back home within two hours,” said another citizen with a request not to mention his name.

Even though local people are visiting some places, they are going only as a single-

family unlike previous years when some of the mountains would become a meeting for families and extended families and a full-scale picnic would start early afternoon till evening.

“Everyone is waiting for the pandemic to go. We are missing the nature and nature is missing us. No one in our generation witnessed such a situation when you have to stay at home even if nature is at its peak during the Khareef season,” said septuagenarian Ahmed who loves in Mirbat.



Muscat Municipality
Announcement No. 42/2020

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below:-

Tender No	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/20/035	(2020/MM/Q5/39)	Proposed Extension to A'Seeb Municipality (E- Tender)	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	First
PRE/20/067	(2020/MM/Q5/40)	Supply and Installation of Vertulization Infrastructure (Phase Two) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	Specialist
PRE/20/070	(2020/MM/Q5/41)	Annual Contract for Supply of Traffic Signal Materials - (E- Tender)	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	First
PRE/18/063	(2020/MM/Q5/42)	Refurbishment of Existing Toilet at Souq Muttrah (E- Tender)	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	First
PRE/20/041	(2020/MM/Q5/28)	Renewal TSM Software License & Support (E- Tender) Re-call 1	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	Specialist
PRE/19/105	(2019/MM/Q5/16)	Supply of Traffic Signal Controllers (RE-TENDER) (E- Tender) Re-call 1	Rial 25	17/09/2020	29/09/2020	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the first floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).



FOR THE DAILY BREAD



Fishermen clean their nets after the day's catch at Al Hail beach. – Photo by SHAMSA AL HARTHIYA

Bid to smuggle out vehicles foiled, six held

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, AUG 17

The Royal Oman Police on Monday issued an alert, asking both citizens and residents to refrain from sharing details of their bank account or forwarding funds online to companies or people they do not know.

“Ignore all incoming social media calls and messages claiming to be from a communication company, a bank or a famous person requesting your personal data, PIN number and deceiving that you have won a prize in cash or kind or offering financial help”, the ROP posted a notice in its twitter handle.

The warning follows, busting of a gang that attempted to smuggle out vehicles from the Sultanate after signing fake sale contracts with citizens using digital platforms.

The General Department of Investigations and Criminal Investigations on Monday arrested six persons on the charges of committing electronic fraud, and managed to retrieve 38 vehicles before they were being smuggled out of the Sultanate.

According to the ROP statement, the accused, after forming a commercial establishment, signed fake agreements with a number of citizens for renting their vehicles.

“Using middlemen, the fraudsters later tried to sell the vehicles to others by signing fake sale agreements through electronic outlets in a bid to smuggle them out of the country”, the statement said.

According to the ROP statement, the accused, after forming a commercial establishment, signed fake agreements with a number of citizens for renting their vehicles.

The current alert is part of a series of warnings from the police as reports are again emerging of platforms snooping on people's online activities amid the coronavirus situation.

Fraudsters gain control of a person's bank account, in what is popularly known as phishing, by tricking people either by way of prizes that they won or attractive sale offers.

They may also convince them into forwarding some money by pretending to be from a legitimate company, government office or retailer.

While calling on citizens and residents to be careful about fraudulent companies or individual scammers, the ROP said, “do not be lured into the offers from fraudsters, but be careful when buying and selling vehicles through websites”.

It urged to call on Hotline for Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations at 800777444, if any phishing activity is noticed.

Don't share personal info, bitcoin spammers on prowl

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 17

Those who are active on social media, don't get carried away with the appreciation and praises by a stranger on your intelligence in solving a puzzle online and their invitation to invest in bitcoins. This may be a trap, which may lead you to invest in murky businesses only to find in a big trap.

Authorities have warned people not to share personal details, bank

passwords, or any other secret codes to anyone posing to be from an institution.

“Do not share personal details, birthdays, banking details, passwords, or any other even if it's posing to be a call from a bank or any authority or it is an invitation to a lucrative business,” a senior official from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has said.

This update comes in the wake of a series of attempts where social

media users have been lured to solve a seemingly difficult puzzle and inviting them to come to a personal chat room.

The user, bearing a woman's name, would then ask you if you knew what bitcoin trade, instead of telling you the answer was right or wrong.

The person would then convince you that bitcoin mining has helped a lot of people reach their financial dreams and make people reach their various business arms around the

globe with the help of their agency.

“Incidents like this seem to be a Ponzi scheme which is a fraudulent investing scam promising high rates of return with little risk to investors,” says Khalfan al Maamari, an IT professional.

“The Ponzi scheme generates returns for early investors by acquiring new investors. This kind of offer is similar to a pyramid scheme in that both are based on using new investors' funds to pay the earlier backers,” adds he.

Now, the person would ask you how much you collectively want to invest anything between \$200 and \$1,000 after convincing you of the returns that you are going to enjoy together.

“Such businesses are fake businesses from the first glance and one should either block, report spam or unfriend the person as soon as it happened,” the official further clarified.

IN BRIEF

COVID-19 cases stand at 83,226

MUSCAT: The total number of COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 83,226, while the number of recoveries stood at 77,812, comprising 93.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the total number of COVID-19 related death cases stood at 588, the Ministry of Health said.

The Ministry also pointed out that 54 patients were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised coronavirus patients stands at 460, out of which 150 are in intensive care.

Rafo evacuates citizen from Awabi

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) carried out a medical evacuation of a citizen who went into a coma while climbing up a mountain in Al Awabi. He was airlifted to Al Rustaq Hospital to receive the necessary treatment. This came as part of the RAFO's humanitarian efforts to assist citizens and residents.

Auction results of GDB Issue

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the auction results of the 65th government development bonds (GDB) issue worth RO 200 million. It has received applications worth RO 239,015,300. The average yield was 5.43 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 100.405 while the highest yield was 5.70 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 98.860 and the lowest was at 5.25 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 101.450.



ROYAL OMAN POLICE
DIRECTORATE of Public Relations
ANNOUNCEMENT

Royal Oman Police- Directorate of Public Relations - announces canceled Police vehicles will be auctioned through closed envelopes (each vehicle will be auctioned separately).

You may inspect the vehicles at the Auction Yard, Directorate General of Transports in the period from 23/8/2020 to 1/9/2020 during official duty hours. Bids are submitted in closed envelopes at the Directorate General of Logistics and Supplies starting from 2/9/2020 till 10/9/2020. Those on whom the auction shall be placed are ought to abide by the following:

- **Pay the vehicle's price online**
- **Move the vehicle no later than 3 days from the date of winning the auction. A fine amounted to RO 5 is charged per day of delay after the designated period expires.**

Webinar on effective communications

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 17

As part of the ongoing Knowledge Oman Webinar series launched to impart knowledge to society and facilitate engagement with inspiring individuals from around the globe, the award winning knowledge sharing platform is set to host the Campaign Strategist for Barack Obama and Global Communications & Marketing Strategist, Roger Fisk. Campaign Strategist of the former American President's back-to-back victories in 2008 and 2012, Roger Fisk will talk about integrating key tools of communication to create compelling marketing strategies and stay relevant during the webinar titled 'Communications in the 21st Century; Big Ideas, Millions of People'.

“We are honoured to host and bring on-board Roger Fisk along with Roy Sheppard for engaging and enriching the public in the fourth session of our virtual webinar series. These renowned, outgoing personalities will share valuable tools and lessons on effective information relationships and communications within the 21st century” said Balqees al Hassani, Knowledge Oman Webinars Leader.



Fisk played a key role in the game-changing electoral campaigns which are regarded as the best run presidential campaigns in the history of US politics. He has in-depth knowledge in the power of information, relationships and marketing. He has been instrumental in helping clients use the Internet and social media platforms effectively along with traditional communication tools for sustained marketing and promotional strategies.

The KO Webinar 'Communications in the 21st Century; Big Ideas, Millions of People' will be hosted by Roy Sheppard, former BBC New Anchor, Specialist Conference Moderator, Interviewer & Author. The webinar is being conducted in association with Oman's newest digital infotainment platform, Studio.t. Attendees of Knowledge Oman's virtual webinar will have the opportunity to interact with Roger Fisk to learn about how to use the right communication tools to reach a wider audience and stay relevant in changing times. Registration for the webinar is open at Knowledge Oman's website at www.knowledgeoman.com/register.

His Majesty issues decree on Job Security Fund

FROM PAGE 1

Article (4) stipulates that the Specialties of the Secretariat General of the Tender Board shall be defined in accordance with Annex (1) of the System Attached to this Decree.

Article (5) states that the Organisational Structure of the Tender Board's Secretariat General shall be endorsed in accordance with Annex (2) attached to this Decree.

Article (6) cancels Royal Decree No 116/2010, as well as all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (7) says that this Decree

shall be published in the Official Gazette and be enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 85/2020 on the Public Authority for Civil Aviation.

Article (1) renames "The Public Authority for Civil Aviation" as "Civil Aviation Authority".

Article (2) states that climatic affairs specialisations shall be (assigned) transferred to the Civil Aviation Authority from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs as defined in Annex (1) attached to this Decree.

Article (3) stipulates that

all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets pertaining to climatic affairs at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs shall be transferred to the Civil Aviation Authority ("Directorate General of Meteorology").

Article (4) transfers to the Civil Aviation Authority ("Directorate General of Meteorology") all climate affairs-related employees from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, along with their financial grades, in accordance with terms to be set by the Council of Ministers.

Article (5) states that the text of

Article 5 of the above-mentioned Civil Aviation System (promulgated under Royal Decree No 43/2013) shall be replaced with the following:

"The Authority's management and affairs shall be undertaken by a Board of Directors to be formed under a decision by the Council of Ministers. The term of membership of this board of directors shall be three years, extendable to one similar term."

Article (6) states that the text of Article (5) of Royal Decree No 33/2012 shall be replaced with the following:

"The Civil Aviation Authority shall

have a Head, under the Special Grade, to be appointed by Royal Decree."

Article (7) states the following:

- The phrase "Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs", wherever it occurs in laws and Royal Decrees of relevance, shall be replaced with "Civil Aviation Authority".

- The phrase "Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs", wherever it occurs in laws and Royal Decrees of relevance, shall be replaced with the two phrases "Chairman of Board of Directors of Civil Aviation Authority" or "Head of Civil Aviation Authority", where applicable.

- The two phrases "Public Authority for Civil Aviation" and "Executive President of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation", wherever they occur in laws and Royal Decrees of relevance, shall be replaced with the two phrases "Civil Aviation Authority" or "Head of Civil Aviation Authority".

Article (8) cancels Article (4) of Royal Decree No 33/2012, as well as all that contravenes this Decree or contradicts with its provisions.

Article (9) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — ONA

Souq, international restaurants, gyms to open



FROM PAGE 1

Keeping in mind that COVID-19 is far from over, the Supreme Committee has not yet announced the opening of activities and places where gathering of people or direct person to person contact cannot be ruled out.

Public parks, mosques, beaches, malls (children and elders still banned), dine-in at normal restaurants, barber shops and beauty parlours, public transport (buses) are still not allowed to from resume activities.

Another keenly-awaited decision is the opening of the aviation sector for the free movement of citizens and residents to and from the country.

Currently, residents stranded abroad, including in their home countries, are allowed to return only with a permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Dhofar Governorate is still under lockdown. Entry and exit are subject



Following the Supreme Committee's decision to ease the COVID-19 restrictions, Muscat Municipality has launched a campaign to sterilise and disinfect streets and corridors at Muttrah Souq to ensure visitors' safety.

to proper approval from competent authorities.

Meanwhile, the Oman Chamber

of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will be organising a series of meetings with business owners from various

economic sectors to study the economic effects of the COVID-19.

The meetings are aimed at

preparing an integrated report of proposals and solutions and submit them to the Supreme Committee.

Salem bin Sulayem al Junaibi, Vice-Chairman of OCCI for Economic Affairs, said, "OCCI seeks, through these meetings, to discuss the challenges faced by the various economic sectors in the various governorates of the Sultanate separately, to measure the impact of the pandemic on these sectors and suggest appropriate solutions."

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will be organising a series of meetings with business owners from various economic sectors to study the economic effects of the COVID-19 on the private sector and propose economic incentives to mitigate the effects."

The meetings aim to prepare an integrated report of proposals and solutions and submit them to the Supreme Committee.

OCCI to submit integrated economic recovery report

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will be organising a series of meetings with business owners from various economic sectors to study the impact of COVID-19 on the private sector and propose economic incentives to mitigate the effects.

The meetings aim to prepare an integrated report of proposals and solutions and submit them to the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

Salem bin Sulayem al Junaibi, the vice-chairman, OCCI, for economic affairs, said, "OCCI seeks, through these

meetings, to discuss the challenges faced by the various economic sectors in the various governorates of the Sultanate separately, to measure the impact of the pandemic on these sectors and suggest appropriate solutions."

He added, "The chamber seeks to contribute to overcoming this pandemic and mitigating its effects in a way that achieves the return of economic growth for various sectors, according to a systematic and thoughtful plan targeting specialised business owners and benefiting from their opinions and suggestions." — ONA

First phase of Job Security Fund will start in November

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
MUSCAT, AUG 17

The first phase of the Job Security Fund will start in November. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik had issued Royal Decree No. 82/2020 approving the JSF, the long-awaited system to support the laid off and those who lose their jobs for different reasons.

The JSF will be implemented in two phases, according to the Government Communication Center. The second phase will start after three years of establishing the Fund

The system is supervised by the Public Authority for Social Insurance, the Ministry of Manpower, and the National Employment Center.

The system is financed from the salary of government and the private sector employees where RO 1 out of every RO 100 is added to the social insurance.

His Majesty the Sultan donated RO 10 million to the fund as seed money.

The National Employment Center will find jobs for the laid off employees, while the JSF will disburse 60 per cent of the monthly salary that the person used to receive until they join the new employment, provided that the period does not exceed six months.

Impact of pandemic on autistic kids discussed

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Family Affairs held a virtual videoconference meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Shaikh Mohammed bin Said al Kalbani, Minister of Social Development.

The meeting reviewed a number of topics, including recommendations of the first GCC Autism Conference's recommendations and the role of family and community in accommodating this segment of students in schools and society. The meeting also discussed the return of students to schools and social and psychological problems of autistic children at home for a long time, in addition to the impact of lockdown of parks and public play areas due to coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Committee also discussed means of facilitating marriages and encouraging youth to form families through marriage. In this context, the Committee looked into the setting up of marital counselling and reconciliation offices to help avert negative impacts of married life and find ways to tackle youth disinterest in marriage.





IN BRIEF

Abe visits hospital amid health rumours

TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose first term in office ended in part for health reasons, sparked fresh speculation on Monday about his well-being with an unexpected, hours-long hospital visit.

Abe emerged from the Tokyo hospital where he was previously treated for ulcerative colitis more than seven hours after he entered, and left by car without saying anything, according to TV footage of local media.

His previously unannounced arrival on Monday morning prompted a local media frenzy and comes after weeks of speculation about his health.

A weekly magazine report in July claimed Abe had been vomiting blood, but government spokesman Yoshihide Suga insisted the prime minister was healthy.

More recently, questions have been raised about the prime minister's decision to avoid holding any press conferences, despite rising criticism over the government's handling of the coronavirus outbreak domestically, where infections are increasing.

Local media said on Monday that Abe completed his regular annual health check-up in June but cited an aide as saying he was now undergoing an additional "one-day regular health check-up". — AFP

Philippine minister tests positive

MANILA: A Philippine government minister has tested positive for coronavirus five months after an initial diagnosis, authorities said on Monday, as experts investigate whether he had been re-infected.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Ano, who is helping to spearhead the country's virus response, said he returned a positive test on Saturday after experiencing flu-like symptoms last week.

He was first diagnosed with COVID-19 in March, but did not show any signs of the disease at the time.

People infected with coronavirus build up antibodies starting about a week after infection or the onset of symptoms, research has shown.

But scientists are still unsure whether the body systematically builds up enough immunity to ward off a new attack by the virus or, if it does, how long such immunity lasts.

Some studies have shown that patients who recover from coronavirus may lose their immunity within months, or even weeks. — AFP

Virus forces NZ election delay

WELLINGTON: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on Monday postponed the nation's election to focus on fighting a coronavirus second wave, as data showed Japan's economy had endured a historic contraction.

With more than 21.5 million cases worldwide, a second wave of infections is also threatening further disruption in Europe where summer holiday-makers are helping fuel a resurgence of COVID-19.

The disease has killed more than 766,000 people globally, and the number of deaths hit 50,000 in India, which is still battling its first wave with 2.5 million infections -- the third-highest in the world.

The postponement of New Zealand's election to October 17 came after the shock discovery of COVID-19 in Auckland last week, ending the nation's 102-day streak without community transmission.

"This decision gives all parties time over the next nine weeks to campaign and the Electoral Commission enough time to ensure an election can go ahead," Ardern said.

She said the return of the virus -- which sent New Zealand's largest city into lockdown -- had rattled Kiwis and could have discouraged some from voting in a September election. — AFP

BACK TO SEA



A large cruise ship MSC Grandiosa set sail from Genoa on Sunday night in a first test of prospects for the Mediterranean cruise market since the coronavirus pandemic forced a worldwide halt to operations six months ago. — AFP

Angry pupils challenge UK govt over virus-hit exams

LONDON: After months of criticism over its response to coronavirus, the British government is facing a new battle -- from students in revolt over the grading of cancelled exams.

Pupils have taken to the streets and threatened legal action over the decision to downgrade around 280,000 A-level results obtained by 17- and 18-year-olds in England.

The main opposition Labour party has demanded a re-think, and even some members of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives have condemned the "shambles".

Spring exams were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, so teachers were asked to make an assessment of their students' grades.

These were then modified using an algorithm based on a school's past performance, in order to prevent widespread grade inflation.

But critics say the process penalised bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds, while benefiting private school pupils.

More than 250,000 people have signed a petition demanding a change, and two legal groups representing students are threatening to take the government



Students protest outside of the constituency office for Gavin Williamson, Conservative MP for South Staffordshire and Britain's current Education Secretary, in Codsall near Wolverhampton, central England on Monday. — AFP

to court. The director of one of them, Good Law Project's Jolyon Maugham, said pupils had missed out on places at university, medical school and employer training, which all rely on final A-level grades.

"It's also affecting those students who are leaving school to enter the jobs market, the most difficult jobs market in the UK for many generations," he said.

He added: "That's desperately, desperately unfair."

Britain has been badly hit by

coronavirus, recording the highest death toll in Europe -- more than 41,000 -- and the largest second-quarter economic contraction among the so-called Group of Seven major industrial democracies.

Johnson's Conservatives continue to lead opinion polls, but Labour leader Keir Starmer has edged ahead of the prime minister in personal popularity.

The government has shrugged off much of the criticism over its response to the pandemic, from the late imposition of a lockdown

to a lack of testing and protective equipment.

But the exam chaos has made many Conservative MPs anxious as angry students and parents bombard them with complaints.

"This is not just one of these bubble issues. This is something that cuts through everything," former Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson told Times Radio.

Starmer has sought to capitalise on the row, demanding Johnson interrupt his holiday in Scotland to take personal charge.

"The Tories' chaotic and incompetent handling of this year's exams is robbing a generation of their future," the Labour leader said.

Many of the government's critics question why it did not anticipate the problem.

The devolved Scottish government had to abandon its policy of grade moderation earlier this month following an outcry, restoring initial teacher assessments for around 75,000 pupils.

Following that U-turn, London said English students unhappy with their A-level grades could appeal on the basis of their preparatory mock results or sit new tests in the autumn. — AFP

India COVID-19 deaths hit 50,000

NEW DELHI: India's death toll from the coronavirus hit 50,000 on Monday, with more than 900 new fatalities reported in 24 hours, health ministry data showed.

The country last week overtook Britain with the world's fourth-highest number of deaths, behind the United States, Brazil and Mexico, and has recorded 2.6 million infections.

India's death toll from the pandemic now stands at 50,921, an increase of 941 from the previous day, according to the health ministry's website.

The world's second-most populated country, home to some of the world's biggest cities and largest slums, is already the third-most infected nation behind the US and Brazil.

Many experts however say the real numbers may be far higher due to low levels of testing and because deaths are often not properly recorded in India's chronically under-funded health system.

Despite the rising death toll, the health ministry tweeted on Sunday that India's virus mortality rate was "one of the lowest globally" at below two per cent.

"Successful implementation of testing aggressively, tracking comprehensively and treating efficiently through a plethora of measures have contributed to the existing high level of recoveries," the ministry said in a statement.

Experts say India needs to ramp up testing further to get the virus under control as it spreads to rural and regional areas where healthcare systems are particularly fragile or not easily accessible.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said trials and tests on three potential vaccine candidates were being carried out in India and that his government was preparing to produce huge numbers of doses if any are found to be viable. — AFP



Commuters are seen along a road in the old neighbourhood of Chowk in Allahabad on Monday. People walk and shop at a market in old neighbourhood of Chowk in Allahabad. With a total of 50,921 deaths, India has the fourth-highest tally in the world, behind the US, Brazil and Mexico. — AFP

Egypt mediators enter Gaza after week of clashes

GAZA CITY: Egyptian mediators entered Gaza on Monday seeking to calm tensions after a week of clashes in which Israel has launched military strikes in response to airborne incendiary devices that have ignited wildfires.

The delegation from Egypt, which has traditionally played the role of mediator in the restive Palestinian enclave, entered Gaza, according to security sources and eyewitnesses said.

Israeli tanks pounded Hamas targets on Monday in what has become a daily response to Palestinian rockets, firebombs that are carried by bunches of balloons into southern Israel, and more recently to clashes on the border.

Israel has said that since August



Israeli infantry soldiers gather next to tanks and an armoured personnel carrier near the Israeli border with the Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

6, fire-scene investigators have identified 149 blazes in southern Israel caused by incendiary balloons floating across from Gaza.

The army also reported violent protests on Saturday, as "rioters burned tyres, hurled explosive devices and grenades towards the security fence and attempted to approach it".

There were more frontier riots on Sunday, the army said.

Israel has also closed the Kerem Shalom goods crossing to Gaza and shut the strip's fishing zone.

With fuel imports blocked, Gaza's electricity authority announced that more service cuts would be implemented from Monday, adding to frustrations for Gazans who already endure irregular power

supply.

Hamas and Israel have fought three wars since 2008, but an uneasy truce brokered last year helped curb the violence.

The informal truce between Israel and Hamas also includes provisions on developing Gaza's economy and curbing rampant unemployment.

A source familiar with Israel-Hamas affairs, who requested anonymity, said that there "seems to be a block" on these other issues and that Hamas wants to see progress.

The poverty rate in the strip is above 50 per cent, according to the World Bank, and is expected to climb higher because of the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Eyes that speak... with masks on our faces!

H

ave we been smiling less since we had begun to wear mask?

Being masked for more than five months mean that we have had to rely more on our eyes to express our eagerness, happiness, sadness and kindness.

It has been harder to detect people's true moods as you cannot see whether there is a smile underneath the mask. Is it not interesting how eyes have become the focal point and now we have realised how much the eyes can express.

You detect hesitation in the eyes and assurance all in the way the eyes move and focus. It is harder to hide pain and sadness now but in the past a bright smile could have easily distracted.

Eyes can be overpowering, yet vulnerable. The confident ones speak looking into the eyes. However in some

cultures it is considered disrespectful to look into the eyes of the elders as we speak. Yet, a person looking away while speaking is a sign of lack of confidence or can even be understood as hiding something. Body language is reaching a new dimension at present because now people are told not to touch their face at all.

Touching face could be a habit, automatic reflex, but according to psychologists the gesture can be a self soothing technique. However it is an established thought that touching the face especially the nose implies an indication of deception and covering up the mouth is a sign of lying.

According to study findings from researcher Robert Feldman at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, people meeting for the first time will lie to each other at a rate two

or three times for every 10 minutes of the conversation.

How often have we replied in truth to the question, "How are you?" For that matter how genuine are we with the question when we ask as, 'How do you do?' when we do not even bother to give the person enough time to think and answer. If this question was genuine then we would have detected all the people suffering from depression.

The very reason the question has come about must have been to actually check on the other person, but now it is a mere courtesy. It used to be even considered not so acceptable to talk about oneself let alone express one's fears and thoughts. During the pandemic era more and more mental health experts are recommending to ventilate our thoughts with a family member or friends and I would add —

whom you can trust.

Having said so much about touching the face, it is a fact that one of the most relaxing techniques is to cup over your eyes with your palm — surely your eyes will sparkle. Just make sure you have washed your hands well and you are at home.

As for ventilating find an anchor, or even better be the anchor for someone else. With positive thoughts go on to beam! Beaming we have been ever since we heard the news of bringing into action more businesses into operations and that includes printing.

So print is back, and so is Muttrah Souq! Of course there are the restaurants and gyms and many more facilities. Oh yes we are going to see a lot of eyes twinkling. For more than five months, especially the employees at Muttrah Souq have been patiently

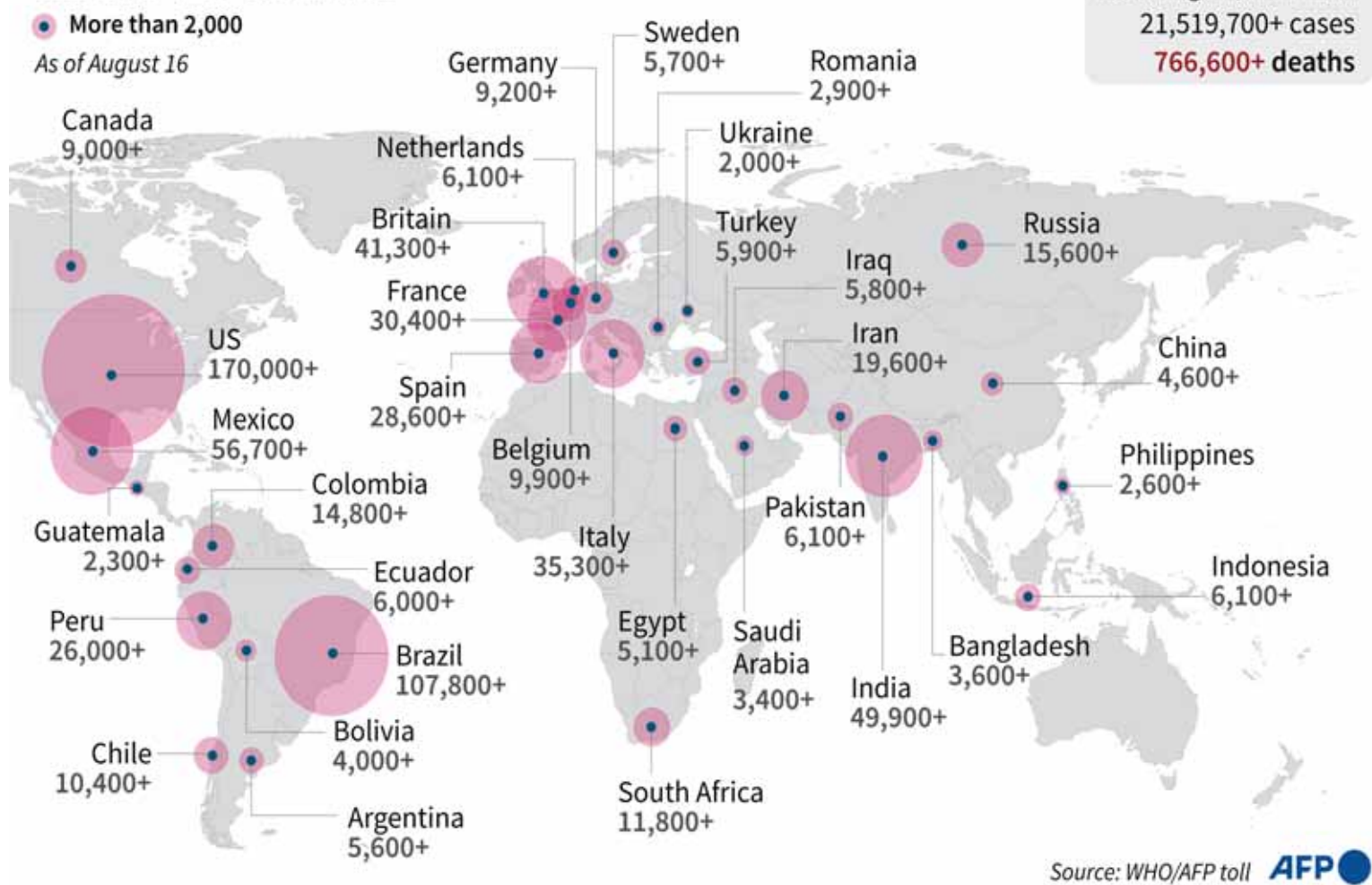
waiting for it. It is now time for us to support them. But we have to keep in mind the new norms — the masks, gloves and the physical distancing. If a shop already has customers it is our responsibility to wait patiently for our turn. For sure the authorities will have the measures in place on August 18, which is turning out to be an important date in the history of the Muttrah Souq.

Let us not rush in but give them the shop owners and keepers the time to get into the flow and let us not at any point forget the safety measures.

Let us join the celebration of opening this historical market, but remember no handshakes. Yes the body language once again, but these are the traditional norms which would have to take back seat, nevertheless enjoy the fact that the irresistible Muttrah Souq is back in action! Dear Muttrah, here I come!

COVID-19 deaths

More than 2,000
As of August 16



Venezuelan Americans get political in US

SONIA OSORIO & MIAMI HERALD

Venezuelans in the United States, many of whom for years clung to the belief that they would return to their lives in their homeland, have unpacked their suitcases, acquired US citizenship and begun to participate more actively in the American political landscape, seeking to raise their voices to an influential decibel, much like Cuban Americans, according to experts.

The Venezuelan community has more candidates taking part in the 2020 elections, compared to previous races, who are seeking mayoral or commission seats in various cities not just in South Florida but also in Texas and other places in the United States. The community also has established a number of organisations to flex its political muscle.

Political strategist Evelyn Perez-Verdia said that the so-called "packed suitcase" mentality among Venezuelans has for years kept many from getting involved with politics because they fully expected to return to their country.

That has changed. "Cubans have already gone through that," said Perez-Verdia. "Many Venezuelan Americans have begun to unpack their suitcases and realise— just like the Cubans and many Venezuelan-American strategists involved with the Democratic and Republican parties — that it is important have a voice."

The Cuban-American community has voted in members of Congress from both parties who are influential in US policy towards Cuba. That community also is represented by legislators at both the state and local levels.

Perez-Verdia said it is important for Venezuelans to raise their political profile especially in cities where the vote can have an impact. Florida, for example, is home to about 200,000 residents who emigrated from Venezuela, including about 50,000 who are US citizens and

The Cuban-American community has voted in members of Congress from both parties who are influential in US policy towards Cuba. That community also is represented by legislators at both the state and local levels

can cast a ballot.

Between 2000 and 2017, the Venezuelan population in the United States increased a whopping 352 per cent, largely due to a mass exodus out of a country in the midst of an economic meltdown and continuing political turmoil. The population increased from 93,000 to 421,000 during that period and 34 per cent are US citizens, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of the US Community Survey conducted by the Census Bureau.

An estimated 52 per cent of Venezuelan nationals live in Florida, 11 per cent in Texas and 4 per cent in New York, according to the Pew report.

"When you see that a presidential election can be lost or won by more than about 100,000 votes," Perez-Verdia said, "Venezuelans know that they can have great influence. I think they have taken a lot of lessons from Cubans, from their participation in politics, and realise that they, too, have a voice."

President Donald Trump, who is seeking reelection, and Democratic candidate Joe Biden, seem to know it, too. They spend considerable time wooing Venezuelan Americans from South Florida when they travel through the region. Some Cuban-American politicians also pursue the Venezuelan American vote.

Ernesto Ackerman, president of the Miami-based Independent Venezuelan-American Citizens (IVAC), said the organisation determined in the 2004-2005 election cycle that Venezuelans had to follow in the same path as Cubans by participating in US politics so that the community also could benefit from having elected representatives in office.

"I think that at last the Venezuelan community is realising that we live here in the United States and that we have to worry, in addition to our country, about the situation and what is happening in the US with taxes, the price of gasoline, our children's education," Ackerman said. "It is important and it is very good that there are people in the community who are seeking political seats."

In South Florida, actor Victor Camara is running for mayor of Doral and Oscar Puig and Juan Carlos Esquivel are competing for city council seats. Doral already had the first Venezuelan American mayor, Luigi Boria (2012-2016).

Oscar Ganem, an attorney, had tried to run for a Republican seat in the Florida Legislature but was disqualified because he could not raise enough funds for the campaign.

"The fundraising could not be done due to the coronavirus pandemic and that is a very important factor in an election campaign," Ganem told el Nuevo Herald. "Another reason was that a lobbying office filed a complaint about one of the documents that I sent to Tallahassee. They called me on the last day of registration on July 12, with three hours remaining to close the process." — dpa

Gabon still a 'home' for many French nationals

CAMILLE MALPLAT

Gabon on Monday marked 60 years since it gained independence from France, and yet a glance around the capital Libreville begs the question whether it has ever made a clean break from the former colonial ruler.

The French influence still permeates every crack and crevice of Gabonese life from the language to the waft of fresh croissants in the bakeries and the horse races in Paris playing out on television.

"The French are at home in Gabon, they have their shops, their restaurants," laughed Annie, the Gabonese manager of a hotel who is dismissive of the Gabonese who frequent the same places. "They think they are in France," she said.

France officially colonised Gabon in 1885 and it became part of French Equatorial Guinea. When independence came, France treated Gabon kindly, motivated partly by its uranium wealth which was key to France's nuclear programme.

As part of that kid-gloves approach, France tolerated and upheld a series of authoritarian leaders, starting with the first president Leon Mba. Just off Boulevard de l'Indépendance, lies the residence of the French ambassador, nestled on the heights of an immense wooded park overlooking Libreville.

In this tropical French garden, a grandiose ball is held every July 14 to fête Bastille Day.

Ministers and opponents of the Gabonese political hierarchy momentarily lay aside their differences to toast the Franco-Gabonese friendship.

The estate is grand in all senses and almost eclipses the golden presidential palace, five kilometres down the road built by Omar Bongo, the second president of Gabon.

Placed in power by France in 1967, Bongo went on to rule the country for 42 years.

"The Gabonese have a homeland, Gabon, and a friend, France," he had said.

Until his death in 2009, Omar Bongo was one of the symbols of "Francafrique", the network of political relations and schemes forged by France with its former sub-Saharan colonies — all too many of which were marred by scandal.

Rich in oil and uranium, Gabon, with two million inhabitants, has long been a key country for France in Africa.

The idea that it is impossible to become president without French approval is still widespread here.

"And when opponents have to go into exile, it is in France that they find refuge," said academic Joseph Tonda.

The French presence is perhaps most obvious behind a long grey wall bristling with barbed wire.

Welcome to Camp de Gaulle, one of the four French military bases in Africa, with nearly 400 soldiers. When Omar died in 2009, his son Ali Bongo succeeded him and promised to end the almost exclusive relationship with France. — AFP

OMAN OMAN DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563, 24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303,
P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman

Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444

DIRECT: 24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

AL OMANEYA for Distribution & Marketing, P.O. Box 974,
P.C. 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

Website: omanobserver.om

e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
subscribe@oeppa.om

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3,551.35



CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$ 44.12
Brent Crude \$ 45.22
Light Crude \$ 42.62



follow us @oman.biz
www.omanobserver.om
editor@omanobserver.om



Achieve your children's dreams & education with our **long term deposit account**
It is time for you to apply for a long term deposit account that is customized to guarantee the future of your children

• Specific deposit periods (Till beneficiary reaches 18 years old). • Interest rate up to 5.5%. • Enjoy additional credit facilities.

Monthly Deposited Amount	Years	Total amount at maturity
25 (OMR)	10 Years	3,621,286 (OMR)
50 (OMR)	10 Years	7,642,571 (OMR)
100 (OMR)	10 Years	15,285,142 (OMR)

Example:

For More Information: https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/Long_Term_Deposit_Education.aspx

The best bank for you

Al Jifnain Terminal handles 70pc of Oman’s domestic fuel demand

STRATEGIC PROJECT: Performance of Sultanate’s flagship transportation fuels depot “exceeds forecasts” in 2019



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 17

Al Jifnain Terminal — the Sultanate’s principal complex for the storage and distribution of transportation fuels — handled over 70 per cent of the country’s fuel requirements in 2019, underscoring its importance as the hub of Oman’s expanding fuel logistics infrastructure.

According to OQ Logistics, a joint venture of Spanish-based international fuel logistics giant Compañía Logística de Hidrocarburos (CLH) with a 40 per cent stake and Omani refining and petrochemicals conglomerate OQ (formerly Oman Oil and Orpic Group) with a 60 per cent interest), Al Jifnain Terminal performed well beyond its remit as the country’s fuel distribution hub.

The 170,000 cubic-metre-capacity terminal located at Al Jifnain in the Wilayat of Seeb forms the centerpiece of a \$336 million investment spearheaded by OQ in the development of Oman’s maiden fuel logistics infrastructure project. A roughly 300km-long bidirectional pipeline system connects the terminal with OQ’s two refineries in Suhar and Mina Al Fahal, as well as supplies jet fuel to Muscat International Airport.

“In 2019, which was the first full year that all (OQ Logistics) assets were fully operational, the company managed almost 5 million cubic metres of gasoline, diesel oil and kerosene, which represents more than 70 per cent of total domestic demand for these fuels,” said OQ Logistics in its newly published 2019 Annual Report.

“The Al Jifnain terminal managed by OQ Logistics LLC, in which CLH has a 40 per cent stake, is now meeting more than 70 per cent of domestic product demand, thus exceeding forecasts,” it further noted.

Formally unveiled in March 2018, the terminal and the associated Muscat-Suhar Product Pipeline network were one of three strategic growth projects implemented by OQ in recent years at a total cost of over \$10 billion. Together with the Suhar Refinery Improvement Project (\$2.7 billion) and Liwa Plastics

The 170,000 cubic-metre-capacity terminal located at Al Jifnain in the Wilayat of Seeb forms the centerpiece of a \$336 million investment spearheaded by OQ in the development of Oman’s maiden fuel logistics infrastructure project

(\$6.7 billion), the three big-ticket ventures were part of the government’s vision to maximise value creation from Oman’s crude output, as well as strengthen the country’s fuel security.

To help in the delivery of the Sultanate’s first dedicated fuel logistics hub, OQ roped in CLH Group — billed as one of the world’s largest privately owned providers of fuel logistics services - to assist in the design, construction and operation of a major fuel depot on the outskirts of the capital city.

Besides Oman, CLH Group also has operations in the UK, Ireland, Panama and Ecuador, in addition to Spain where it owns and operates much of the country’s fuel distribution networks.

Equipped with 16 loading bays, the state of the art terminal can to load up to 700 tanker trucks per day with motor fuels for transportation to fuel stations across the country. A dedicated pipeline also supplies aviation fuel to Muscat International Airport around 25km away, thus dispensing with potentially hazardous tanker-supplied deliveries.

Furthermore, following the commissioning and launch of the terminal at Al Jifnain, tanker trucks that once served as the principal lifeline connecting the Mina Al Fahal and Suhar refineries with filling stations have all but disappeared from the capital city, thereby easing road congestion and carbon emissions as well.

2.4pc growth in banking sector credit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 17

Total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banking institutions — collectively known as other depository corporations (ODCs) — grew 2.4 per cent to RO 26.3 billion by the end of June 2020, according to the Central Bank of

Oman (CBO).

Credit to the private sector rose by 2.2 per cent to RO 23 billion, the apex bank stated in the monthly review of banking and monetary developments for June 2020.

Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household

sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 47.1 per cent and 44.4 per cent, respectively, while the financial corporations received 5.3 per cent and other sectors the remaining 3.2 per cent. Total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 23.9 billion at the end of June 2020,

TO PAGE 10

OMAN CHLORINE S.A.O.G. عمان كلورين ش.م.ع.م.
P.O. BOX 193, POSTAL CODE 134, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN TEL: 24695839 - FAX: 24695768

Chairman’s Report For the six months period ended June 30, 2020

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the unaudited result of parent and group for the six months period ended June 30, 2020.

The summarized operating result for the above period is as under:

Details	Parent			Group		
	Six months period ended June 2020	Six months period ended June 2019	Variance % YOY	Six months period ended June 2020	Six months period ended June 2019	Variance % YOY
Sales	3,495	3,822	(8.56)	7,963	7,460	6.74
Cost of Sales	(1,938)	(1,870)	(3.64)	(5,436)	(4,567)	(19.03)
Gross Profit	(1,557)	1,952	(20.24)	2,527	2,893	(12.65)
Selling & Distribution expenses	(404)	(420)	3.81	(730)	(775)	5.81
General & Admin expenses	(442)	(477)	7.34	(834)	(869)	4.03
Operating Profit	711	1,055	(32.61)	963	1,249	(22.90)
Finance Charges	(35)	(33)	(6.06)	(1,574)	(1,261)	(24.82)
Other Income	142	102	39.22	230	202	13.86
Share of loss of JV	-	-	-	(7)	(14)	50.00
Profit before tax	818	1,124	(27.22)	(388)	176	(320.45)
Tax including deferred tax	(123)	(175)	29.71	(123)	(175)	(29.71)
Profit after tax	695	949	(26.77)	(511)	1	-
Profit attributable to parent co. shareholders				48	433	(88.91)
Share of profit/(loss) attributable to minority shareholders				(559)	(432)	(18.29)

Parent Company

The challenging environment due to COVID 19 and reduction in Oil price has led to lower profitability as compared to corresponding period of the previous year. The lower volume

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 30 June 2020

	Parent		Consolidated	
	30/06/2020 RO'000	31/12/2019 RO'000	30/06/2020 RO'000	31/12/2019 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Goodwill	-	-	74	74
Property, plant and equipment	10,125	8,445	74,272	73,472
Investment in subsidiaries	13,692	13,431	-	-
Investment in Joint Venture	-	-	2,974	2,981
Right of use assets	658	672	2,268	2,315
Total non-current assets	24,475	22,548	79,588	78,842
Current assets				
Inventories and consumables	896	1,003	2,115	2,644
Trade and other receivables	3,149	2,687	6,188	4,487
Cash and bank balances	2,435	4,377	3,263	6,087
Total current assets	6,480	8,067	11,566	13,218
Total assets	30,955	30,615	91,154	92,060
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810
Statutory reserve	2,848	2,848	2,848	2,848
General reserve	750	750	750	750
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	(203)	(223)
Retained earnings	16,027	16,013	12,090	12,723
Equity attributable to the Parent Company's shareholders	26,435	26,421	22,295	22,908
Capital contribution from Non-controlling interest	-	-	6,355	6,355
Non-controlling interest	-	-	627	1,172
Total equity	26,435	26,421	29,277	30,435
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	165	367	44,456	39,813
Liability on land lease non current	657	638	2,227	2,192
End of service benefits	175	170	272	249
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	-
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	339	260
Deferred tax liability	654	670	654	670
Total non-current liabilities	1,651	1,845	47,948	43,184
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	2,416	1,597	7,589	4,949
Liability on land lease current	11	9	51	48
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	1,494
Current portion – Term Loan	245	350	3,493	8,365
Short term borrowings	-	-	2,599	3,079
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	-	113
Provision for income tax	197	393	197	393
Total current liabilities	2,869	2,349	13,929	18,441
Total liabilities	4,520	4,194	61,877	61,625
Total equity and liabilities	30,955	30,615	91,154	92,060
Net asset per share	0.388	0.388	0.327	0.336

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the 6 months period ended 30 June 2020

	Parent		Consolidated	
	30/06/2020 RO'000	30/06/2019 RO'000	30/06/2020 RO'000	30/06/2019 RO'000
Revenue	3,495	3,822	7,963	7,460
Cost of sales	(1,938)	(1,870)	(5,436)	(4,567)
Gross profit	1,557	1,952	2,527	2,893
Selling and distribution expenses	(404)	(420)	(730)	(775)
General and administrative expenses	(442)	(477)	(834)	(869)
Operating profit	711	1,055	963	1,249
Finance charges	(35)	(33)	(1,574)	(1,261)
Other income	142	102	230	202
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	(7)	(14)
Profit before taxation	818	1,124	(388)	176
Current tax	(139)	(190)	(139)	(190)
Deferred tax	16	15	16	15
Profit for the period	695	949	(511)	1
Other comprehensive income: Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss:				
Currency translation difference of foreign subsidiaries	-	-	-	-
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	34	(82)
Total comprehensive income	695	949	(477)	(81)
Results attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	48	433
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(559)	(432)
Total comprehensive income attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	68	384
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(545)	(465)
Earnings per share on profit attributable to the Parent Company shareholders – Basic and diluted	0.0102	0.0139	0.0007	0.0064

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of a written request.

	Parent		Consolidated	
	30/06/2020	30/06/2019	30/06/2020	30/06/2019
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Revenue	3,495	3,822	7,963	7,460
Cost of sales	(1,938)	(1,870)	(5,436)	(4,567)
Gross profit	1,557	1,952	2,527	2,893
Selling and distribution expenses	(404)	(420)	(730)	(775)
General and administrative expenses	(442)	(477)	(834)	(869)
Operating profit	711	1,055	963	1,249
Finance charges	(35)	(33)	(1,574)	(1,261)
Other income	142	102	230	202
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	(7)	(14)
Profit before taxation	818	1,124	(388)	176
Current tax	(139)	(190)	(139)	(190)
Deferred tax	16	15	16	15
Profit for the period	695	949	(511)	1
Other comprehensive income: Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss:				
Currency translation difference of foreign subsidiaries	-	-	-	-
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	34	(82)
Total comprehensive income	695	949	(477)	(81)
Results attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	48	433
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(559)	(432)
Total comprehensive income attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	68	384
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(545)	(465)
Earnings per share on profit attributable to the Parent Company shareholders – Basic and diluted	0.0102	0.0139	0.0007	0.0064

Win prizes via Maisarah's Mobile Banking App

As part of its efforts to encourage customers to conduct their transactions through Mobile Banking App, Maisarah provides the chance for its mobile banking users to win cash prizes worth RO 150 for two winners per month.

Maisarah had launched the competition on May 1, 2020 which will continue till November 30, 2020, and it is open for all Maisarah Retail customers including minor and joint accounts. Winners will be selected based on highest utilization

of services including; Instant transfer to any bank in the Sultanate anytime, anywhere, transfer to any bank in the Sultanate, bill payments, mobile top-up, cheque book request and cardless cash. Maisarah will select two winners on a monthly basis; where customer with highest monthly number of transactions will receive cash prize of RO 100, and customer with second highest monthly number of transactions will receive cash prize of RO 50. In case there are more than one winner in the same month (more than

one customer having same number of transactions) then, a draw will be conducted to select one winner.

Offering smart banking at the fingertips, customers can benefit from our Cardless cash feature where they can withdraw cash from an ATM without their card. Customers have to simply place a request through their mobile banking app and creating a four-digit cash code. A unique reference of six digits will be generated and sent to the customer to collect the money.



GFH REPORTS FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR FIRST HALF 2020



Manama – 17 August 2020 – GFH Financial Group B.S.C ("GFH" or "the Group") (Bahrain Bourse: GFH) today announced its financial results for the first six months of the year ended 30 June 2020 ("the period").

Net profit attributable to shareholders was US\$15.05 million for the six month period compared with US\$49.13 million in the first half of 2019, a decrease of 69.4%. This was attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and slower markets, which impacted the Group's investment banking, commercial banking, real estate and treasury business lines. Earnings per share for the period was US cents 0.45 compared to US cents 1.45 for the first six months of 2019. Consolidated net profits for the Group were US\$20.39 million for the six month period compared to US\$48.43 million in the first half of 2019, a decrease of 57.9%.

Total equity attributable to shareholders was US\$0.85 billion at 30 June 2020 from US\$1.00 billion at year-end 2019, a decrease of 15.0% due to the financial impact of COVID-19 resulting in modification losses, commercial banking restructuring activities and recognition of fair value losses and foreign currency translation differences at the Group level. Total assets of the Group were US\$6.13 billion at 30 June 2020 compared with US\$5.95 billion at 31 December 2019, an increase of 3.1%.

Total Income for the first six months of the year was



US\$146.53 million versus US\$163.55 million for the 2019 period, a decrease of 10.4%. Given challenging market conditions, these results nevertheless reflect the resilient nature of the diverse business model of the Group where every business line has contributed to the operating income. Total Expenses for the period were US\$126.14 million versus US\$114.65 million for the first six months of 2019, an increase of 10.0%, due to costs associated with the issuance of the Group's Sukuks during the first half of the year.

Commenting on the results, Mr. Jassim



Alseddiqi, Chairman of GFH, said, "For the first six months of 2020, the Group is pleased, despite the current challenges and the impact of COVID-19 on our business and global markets, to make steady progress. While net profit for the first six months of the year was impacted by the current conditions, the Group's achievements and underlying strong financial health and operational performance was reflected in ongoing investor and market confidence. For the period, the Group successfully placed more than US\$120 million in investments with clients, issued Sukuk to regional and international investors and had its ratings reaffirmed by

Fitch. Building on our strong momentum and liquidity, the remainder of 2020 will see the Group focus on continued value creation through further growth and diversification of our operations and investment portfolios."

Mr. Hisham Alrayes, CEO of GFH, added, "We are pleased to continue to report strong revenue generation especially from our core investment banking activities and from the strategic and resilient portfolio of investments we have built. Despite the daunting challenges presented by COVID-19, we have seen our investments continue to perform well. With the issuance of Sukuks in the first half of the year, our liquidity position has been even further enhanced and our ability to continue to effectively implement of our strategy reinforced. That said, during this period, we have worked to restructure our commercial banking business via a Tier 1 Sukuk issuance and realigned their activities to result in strong positive contribution to the Group. While market conditions remain challenging, we see opportunities to undertake promising investments and to restructure businesses to deliver strong returns and value to our investors and shareholders. This includes continuing our focus on investing in defensive sectors such as education, healthcare, technology and other income generating assets. We remain grateful for the support we have received from the Central Bank of Bahrain and our investors in these extraordinary times and look forward to steady progress throughout the remainder of the year and beyond."

The Group's financial results in full can be found at <https://www.bahrainbourse.com/>. Shares of GFH are traded under the ticker "GFH" on the Bahrain Bourse, Boursa Kuwait and Dubai Financial Market.



CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED INTERIM FINANCIAL INFORMATION for the six months ended 30 June 2020

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION As at 30 June 2020 / US\$ 000's	30 June 2020 (reviewed)	31 December 2019 (audited) (restated)	30 June 2019 (reviewed) (restated)
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances:			
Treasury portfolio	598,969	364,398	371,805
Financing assets	1,275,822	1,272,277	1,082,475
Real estate investments	180,634	180,600	1,821,444
Proprietary investments	261,326	268,175	279,048
Co-investments	98,558	96,507	77,048
Receivables and prepayments	399,555	444,689	502,877
Property and equipment	50,743	103,852	103,116
Total	6,134,771	5,945,273	6,137,974
LIABILITIES			
Client funds	134,383	70,858	60,097
Placements from financial, non-financial institutions and individuals	2,296,798	2,447,249	2,789,757
Customer current accounts	121,994	147,487	93,683
Term financing	9,753,333	9,014,411	22,093
Payables and accruals	194,175	446,863	525,896
Total	1,854,572	3,433,857	3,762,386
Equity of investment account holders	1,098,723	1,248,545	995,837
OWNERS' EQUITY			
Share capital	975,638	975,638	975,638
Treasury shares	(76,800)	(73,419)	(58,893)
Statutory reserve	125,312	125,312	117,301
Investment fair value reserve	(12,966)	7737	(5,640)
Foreign currency translation reserve	148,929	(29,425)	(4,350)
Retained earnings	(110,273)	(2,498)	50,298
Share grant reserve	1198	1198	1198
Total equity attributable to shareholders of Bank	853,239	1,004,543	1,016,754
Non-controlling interests	239,237	243,938	343,027
Total owners' equity	1,092,476	1,248,481	1,359,781
Total liabilities, equity of investment account holders and owners' equity	6,134,771	5,945,273	6,137,974

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN OWNERS' EQUITY for the six months ended 30 June 2020 / US\$ 000's	Share capital	Treasury shares	Statutory reserve	Investment fair value reserve	Foreign currency translation reserve	Retained earnings	Share grant reserve	Total	Non-controlling interests	Total owners' equity
30 June 2020 (reviewed)										
Balance at 1 January 2020	975,638	(73,418)	125,312	7737	(29,425)	(2,498)	1198	1,004,543	243,938	1,248,481
Profit for the period	-	-	-	-	-	15,054	-	15,054	5,832	20,886
Fair value changes during the period	-	-	-	(20,643)	-	-	-	(20,643)	(267)	(20,910)
Total recognised income and expense	-	-	-	(20,643)	-	15,054	-	(5,589)	5,065	(524)
Additional capital contribution to subsidiary	-	-	-	-	-	(59,893)	-	(59,893)	(4,311)	(64,204)
Modification loss on financing assets	-	-	-	-	-	(14,292)	-	(14,292)	(11,279)	(25,571)
Government grant	-	-	-	-	-	318	-	318	936	4,054
Dividends declared	-	-	-	-	-	(30,000)	-	(30,000)	-	(30,000)
Transfer to zakat and charity fund	-	-	-	-	-	(1,388)	-	(1,388)	(258)	(1,646)
Purchase of treasury shares	-	(48,237)	-	-	-	-	-	(48,237)	-	(48,237)
Sale of treasury shares	-	69,907	-	-	-	(20,650)	-	49,257	-	28,607
Treasury shares acquired for share incentive scheme	-	(25,063)	-	-	-	-	-	(25,063)	-	(25,063)
Foreign currency translation differences	-	-	-	-	(29,504)	-	-	(29,504)	(3,991)	(33,495)
NCI arising from acquisition of a subsidiary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	63,747	63,747
Balance at 30 June 2020	975,638	(76,800)	125,312	(12,966)	(48,929)	(110,273)	1198	853,239	328,237	1,181,476

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN OWNERS' EQUITY for the six months ended 30 June 2019 / US\$ 000's	Share capital	Treasury shares	Statutory reserve	Investment fair value reserve	Foreign currency translation reserve	Retained earnings	Share grant reserve	Total	Non-controlling interests	Total owners' equity
30 June 2019 (reviewed)										
Balance at 1 January 2019 (as previously reported)	975,638	(95,434)	117,301	(4,729)	(43,380)	98,318	1,086	1,058,834	323,408	1,382,242
Reclassification of subsidiary held-for-sale to held-for-use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25,396	25,396
Balance at 1 January 2019 (restated)	975,638	(95,434)	117,301	(4,729)	(43,380)	98,318	1,086	1,058,834	348,804	1,407,638
Profit for the period	-	-	-	-	-	49,134	-	49,134	(708)	48,426
Fair value changes during the period	-	-	-	(996)	-	(996)	-	(1,992)	-	(1,992)
Total recognised income and expense	-	-	-	(996)	-	49,134	-	48,138	(708)	47,530
Bonus shares issued	55,000	-	-	-	(55,000)	-	-	-	-	-
Extinguishment of treasury shares	(55,000)	50,549	-	-	-	4,451	-	4,451	-	4,451
Dividends declared	-	-	-	-	(30,000)	-	-	(30,000)	-	(30,000)
Transfer to zakat and charity fund	-	-	-	-	(2,218)	-	-	(2,218)	(223)	(2,441)
Issue of shares under incentive scheme	-	-	-	-	-	-	112	112	-	112
Purchase of treasury shares	-	(109,627)	-	-	-	(109,627)	-	(219,254)	-	(219,254)
Sale of treasury shares	-	85,612	-	-	-	(14,877)	-	70,735	-	55,858
Foreign currency translation differences	-	-	-	-	230	-	-	230	(4,856)	(4,626)
Acquisition of NCI without a change in control	-	-	-	-	-	431	-	431	15,860	16,291
Balance at 30 June 2019	975,638	(58,893)	117,301	(5,845)	(43,350)	50,298	1198	1,036,754	343,027	1,379,781

* The Bank used to recognise gain / (loss) on sale of treasury shares in statutory reserve. The Bank has regrouped the losses on sale of treasury shares of US\$ 24,818 thousand for the year ended 31 December 2019 to retained earnings.

The Board of Directors approved the condensed consolidated interim financial information on 17 August 2020 and signed on its behalf by:

Jassim Alseddiqi
Chairman

Hisham Alrayes
Chief Executive Officer & Board Member

"The above Condensed Consolidated Statement of Financial Position, Income Statement, Statement of Cash Flow and the Changes in Owners' Equity have been extracted from Condensed Consolidated Financial Statements of GFH Financial Group B.S.C. for the six months ended 30 June 2020, which were reviewed by KPMG, who have expressed an Unqualified Opinion on 17 August 2020."

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED INCOME STATEMENT for the six months ended 30 June 2020 / US\$ 000's	30 June 2020 (reviewed)	30 June 2019 (reviewed) (restated)
Continuing operations		
Investment banking income		
Asset management	2,727	1,858
Deal related income	38,237	42,089
Commercial banking income	40,964	43,447
Income from financing	41,268	38,762
Treasury and investment income	13,572	17,130
Fee and other income	3,206	10,745
Less: Return to investment account holders	(6,938)	(19,130)
Less: Finance expense	(13,494)	(9,788)
Income from proprietary and co-investments	32,374	37,989
Direct investment income, net	19,333	10,086
Restructuring related income	-	29,406
Dividend from co-investments	4,339	507
Real estate income	23,409	39,999
Development and sale	8,296	13,517
Rental and operating income	1127	1,248
Treasury and other income	30,413	34,765
Finance income	18,240	25,459
Fair value loss on treasury investments, net	(10,818)	-
Other income, net	5,059	1566
Total income	39,366	27,415
Operating expenses	146,526	163,545
Finance expense	5,764	48,783
Impairment allowances	66,944	53,705
Total expenses	219,140	266,033
Profit from continuing operations	20,386	48,426
Loss from discontinued operations, net	-	(1407)
Profit for the period	20,386	48,426
Attributable to:		
Shareholders of Bank	15,054	49,134
Non-controlling interests	5,332	(708)
Earnings per share	0.45	1.45
Basic and diluted earnings per share (US cents)		
Earnings per share - continuing operations	0.45	1.47
Basic and diluted earnings per share (US cents)		

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS for the six months ended 30 June 2020 / US\$ 000's	30 June 2020 (reviewed)	30 June 2019 (reviewed)
OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Profit for the period	20,386	48,426
Adjustments for:		
Income from commercial banking	(16,473)	(13,560)
Income from proprietary investments	(23,408)	(10,482)
Income from dividend and gain / (loss) on treasury investments	86,621	(65,300)
Foreign exchange gain / (loss)	(1,041)	423
Restructuring related income	-	(29,406)
Finance expense	80,403	(5,459)
Impairment allowances	(1,547)	(2,364)
Depreciation and amortisation	1,326	1,097
Net cash generated from operating activities	51,973	55,825
CHANGES IN:		
Placements with financial institutions (maturities of more than 3 months)	446,762	(280,537)
Financing assets	(2,849)	(9,284)
Other assets	(7,581)	(19,915)
CBB Reserve and restricted bank balance	44,145	(5,783)
Client funds	31,575	14,458
Placements from financial and non-financial institutions	(50,463)	163,368
Customer current accounts	(51,793)	(14,233)
Equity of investment account holders	(18,823)	98,927
Payables and accruals	(51,731)	(48,042)
Net cash generated from operating activities	164,335	201,194
INVESTING ACTIVITIES		
Payments for purchase of equipment	(231)	(273)
Proceeds from sale of proprietary investment securities, net	1,026	2,554
Purchase of treasury portfolio, net	(248,797)	(387,748)
Cash acquired on acquisition of a subsidiary	30,896	-
Proceeds from sale of investment in real estate	342	38,118
Dividends received from proprietary investments and co-investments	7138	3,065
Advance paid for development of real estate	(12,187)	(11,734)
Net cash used in investing activities	(236,891)	(230,416)
FINANCING ACTIVITIES		
Financing facilities, net	(60,040)	(59,028)
Finance expense paid	(80,595)	(25,794)
Dividend paid	(13,187)	(77,829)
Acquisition of NCI	-	(60,261)
Purchase of treasury shares, net	(214,141)	(219,252)
Net cash used in financing activities	509,924	(160,859)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents during the period	434,366	309,919
Cash and cash equivalents at 1 January *	307,533	397,620
Cash and cash equivalents at 30 June	801,899	707,539
Cash and cash equivalents comprise: *		
Cash and balances with banks (including CBB Reserve balance and restricted cash)	590,032	298,544
Placements with financial institutions (less than 3 months)	242,877	408,995
Total	801,899	707,539

* Net of expected credit loss of US\$ 612 thousand (31 December 2019: US\$ 1,098 thousand)

Local solutions key to tackling challenges of doing business

D

oing business is never easy, especially in the current situation where the effects of COVID-19 are having a negative impact on businessmen and women. It takes prudent planning and feasibility studies to start any business amid such challenges facing economies around the world.

Market experts offer advice on the steps to be taken when conducting business in these difficult circumstances. According to Khalid Ansari, CEO of Oman-based Al Anwar Holding Company, business entrepreneurs must keep in mind a number of imperatives: prudent management of cash and working capital, work to establish lean and effective organisations, create an environment that conserves spending, and carefully evaluate and understand the risks when pursuing opportunities.

As we know, the total Omani population numbers approximately 4.5 million people today, and the challenges

facing the country stem from the decline in world oil prices, on the one hand, and the spread of the coronavirus, as has occurred across much of the world, on the other hand. The decline in oil prices is a major challenge that needs a long time to address. This has led to many losses in commercial business as well as in the real estate sector. Experts believe that the economy will continue to face over the foreseeable future in the form of, among other developments, layoffs involving both nationals and expatriates. People believe that without government support, businesses will continue to suffer from the impacts of the pandemic, resulting in the closure of some institutions and their activities.

Among the organisations that are particularly hard hit are hotels, restaurants, shops, airlines, travel agencies and so on. Unless rescued, some of these service providers will eventually close their operations, thereby impacting other businesses dependent on them for

their revenue.

Since the beginning of 2020, the decline in world oil prices has impacted the state budget. As businesses endure the effects of the pandemic, they may not be in a position to shoulder the taxes liable to be paid by them. On the contrary, they may need more government support and incentives.

Therefore, it is very important for businesses to adapt to the present reality and focus on locally available resources and opportunities, dispense with some products that need to be imported, and support the Omani economy through value-addition. It is also necessary to explore new ideas in partnership with government institutions, the private sector, universities and scientific research centres and industrial hubs, and come up with local solutions to these challenges. We need to support the growth of productive institutions that can provide robust solutions to drive Oman's economic growth.

2.4pc growth in banking sector credit

FROM PAGE 8

increasing by 3.9 per cent from June 2019. Total private sector deposits increased by 9.6 per cent to RO 16.3 billion.

Looking at the sectorwise analysis of private sector deposits, the share of households was largest at 50.7 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 31.8 per cent, financial corporations at 15.1 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks indicates an annual growth of 1.5 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-June 2020. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector increased by 1 per cent to RO 19.1 billion. Conventional banks' overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.9 billion.

Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 24.5 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion. Banks also invested RO 264.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1.1 billion at

the end of June 2020, the CBO report stated.

Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.4 billion in June 2020, registering a growth of 3.4 per cent over the level a year ago. Government deposits with conventional banks decreased by 9.8 per cent to RO 4.9 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased by 5.4 per cent to RO 1.1 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 68.9 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 8.8 per cent to RO 14.1 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.1 billion by the end of June 2020, recording a growth of 7.4 per cent over the corresponding figure for 2019. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 7.2 per cent to RO 3.5 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows stood at RO 4.9 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-June 2020.



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

Sanofi to buy Principia Biopharma for \$3.68 bn



A man wearing a protective face mask walks past the logo of Sanofi at the company's headquarters in Paris. — Reuters

PARIS: French pharma giant Sanofi said on Monday it will buy US group Principia Biopharma for \$3.68 billion in a deal that will boost its research and development into autoimmune and allergic diseases.

The deal will see Sanofi "acquire all of the outstanding shares of Principia for \$100 per share in cash, which represents an aggregate equity value of approximately \$3.68 billion", Sanofi said in a statement.

Sanofi had been cooperating with San Francisco-based Principia since 2017, securing a global exclusive licence to develop and market its drug for treating multiple sclerosis and other

central nervous system illnesses known as BTK168.

"Full ownership... removes complexities for this priority development programme and simplifies future commercialisation," chief executive Paul Hudson said.

Beyond diseases of the nervous system, Principia hopes to develop "a whole portfolio" of similar drugs that could target different organ systems in patients suffering from "immune-mediated" diseases after the Sanofi merger, chief executive Martin Babler said.

The French company said it aims to complete the acquisition between October and December 2020. — AFP

US expands sanctions on China's Huawei to limit technology access

WASHINGTON: The US administration on Monday expanded its sanctions on China's Huawei, a move aimed at further limiting the tech giant's access to computer chips and other technology.

A commerce Department statement added 38 Huawei affiliates around the world to the "entity list", claiming that the company was using international subsidiaries to circumvent the sanctions which prevent export of US-based technology.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said Huawei and its affiliates "have worked through third parties to harness US technology in a manner that undermines US national security and foreign policy interests".

US officials have argued Huawei poses a security risk because of its links to the Beijing government, a claim denied by the company.

The toughening of sanctions comes amid heightened US-China tensions and claims by Washington that Chinese firms are being used for spying, despite repeated denials.

President Donald Trump has sought to ban the wildly popular mobile application TikTok if it is not divested by its Chinese parent firm ByteDance.

Speaking on Fox News Monday, Trump claimed that Huawei "comes out and they spy on our country — this is very intricate stuff, you have microchips, you have things that you can't even see."

The Trump administration has banned Huawei from 5G wireless networks in the United States and has pressed allies to do the same.

In the meantime, Huawei became the largest global smartphone manufacturer in the past quarter, largely due to sales in the Chinese market, even as Washington moves to deny the company access to much of the Google Android system. — AFP

Ryanair cuts flights as virus hits demand

DUBLIN: Ryanair will cut its September and October timetable by "20 per cent" on weaker-than-expected demand following renewed virus-linked travel restrictions in some European countries, the Irish airline said Monday.

"These capacity cuts and frequency reductions for the months of September and October are unavoidable given the recent weakness in forward bookings due to COVID restrictions in a number of EU countries," the no-frills carrier said in a statement.

Ryanair said the cuts to flights "will be heavily focused on those countries such as Spain, France and Sweden, where rising recent COVID case rates have led to increased travel restrictions".

The reduction will also hit Ireland,



A pilot disembarks a Ryanair flight at Stansted airport in London, in this file photo. — Reuters

as the country has imposed 14-day quarantines on visitors from most other EU countries, notably Germany and the UK, Ryanair added.

"Over the past two weeks as a number of EU countries have raised

travel restrictions, forward bookings especially for business travel... have been negatively affected, and it makes sense to reduce frequencies so that we tailor our capacity to demand," the statement said. — AFP

UK sees 'post-lockdown mini-boom' in housing



A man looks in the window of real estate agents in Hale, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Hale, Britain. — Reuters

ONDON: Britain saw the highest number of monthly housing sales agreed in more than a decade in July as coronavirus restrictions were eased, according to research published Monday.

Rightmove said a "post-lockdown mini-boom" saw sales soar 20 per cent above the previous high in March 2017, with a record total value of more than £37 billion (\$48 billion).

The online property site said the increase was driven by an exodus from London, which saw a 2.0 per cent drop in prices, and a rise almost everywhere else.

Record sales were registered in

seven regions outside the capital, including Devon and Cornwall in southwest England, it said in its monthly survey.

Britain was locked down in late March as the virus took hold, forcing many people to work from home.

Rightmove said the restrictions forced many homeowners and buyers to look for a better quality of life, more space and less commuting, particularly in London.

"Rather than just a release of existing pent-up demand due to the suspension of the housing market during lockdown, there's an added layer of additional demand due to

people's changed housing priorities after the experience of lockdown," said Rightmove director Miles Shipside.

"This is also keeping up the momentum of the unexpected mini-boom, which is now going longer and faster."

Britain's housing market is also being boosted by a temporary suspension on transaction tax for properties under £500,000 as part of a government stimulus package.

Uncertainty associated with Britain's departure from the European Union have hit the housing market in recent years, leading to homeowners and buyers postponing decisions. — AFP

ANNOUNCEMENT

SHARIKAT FANNIYA OMANIYA LLC hereby announces that MR.SUDERSHAN SINGH, holder of Indian Passport No. M6623693, Residency Card No. 60697879 is no longer working with us with effect from 1st Aug 2020.

He is not authorized to represent our Company in any deal. The Company shall not bear any responsibility for any dealings with him with effect from 01.08.2020.

ANNOUNCEMENT

SHANFARI & PARTNERS CO. LLC hereby announces that MR. K. S. PARTHASARATHY, holder of Indian Passport No. J5407796, Residency Card No. 61097791 is no longer working with us with effect from 1st August 2020.

He is not authorized to represent our Company in any deal. The Company shall not bear any responsibility for any dealings with him with effect from 01.08.2020.

features

Twitter Facebook Instagram YouTube | follow us @omanobserver | www.omanobserver.om | observerfeatures@gmail.com

The joy of reuniting families

KABEER YOUSUF

Muscat International Airport has been a witness to many scenes of hellos and goodbyes. Most recently, however, there had been more stories told by people with joy in their eyes. This gateway to Oman has seen children excitedly running towards the waiting embrace of their fathers and mothers and many, finally able to give a sigh of relief as the feeling that uncertainty in their journey back was finally over and they are finally on the path of recovery. The moments are so powerful it made most of them cry.

Reuniting with one's family after some six months being away due to the lockdown is indeed a matter of immense joy for those who have been subjected to this temporary detachment from family.

Volunteer groups are helping Omani residents who have been stuck abroad to come back by completing all the formalities as well as arranging travel for them.

"We have so far managed to bring in more than 300 people from Indian states," says Kintu Shah, member of a volunteer group which help stranded Indians return to the Sultanate of Oman.

"No effort would have borne fruits without the support from Oman's authorities, the MoFA, the ROP the Airports Authority, and special thanks go to my team members, Nidhi Kaur and Aazad Krishan who have helped tirelessly and selflessly. Also, Mahendar Pillay,

Sales Manager of Oman Air, Arun Verma and all friends who helped and supported you," she added.

She has never imagined that an effort to come back to Oman would lead her to touch so many lives and it would help so many people.

"Every moment and the tireless days and nights that I and my team have worked hard to complete the

Reuniting with one's family after some six months being away due to the lockdown is indeed a matter of immense joy for those who have been subjected to this temporary detachment from family

endless paperwork was worth it when we see the smiles and the happy tears we have seen on the people's faces who could board those flights and reunite with their families.

The words of appreciation and gratitude that the team received have overwhelmed them with joy and inspired them to do more, work

harder and help out more people.

Those who have managed to come back to Oman are helping others who are stranded too.

Kaushik Gupta, Rinky Kanabar and Lalit Mulani who got approved through these WhatsApp groups are now helping and advising other groups too.

According to Kintu, the idea of helping others separated from their beloved ones and stuck in India as the flights were grounded in March this year came to her when she herself was found in such a situation. She really had struggled to return to Oman without any source or help after she was stuck in India since March. She later came along with other 180 passengers on Oman Air.

"After I succeeded in coming back to Oman, I helped many such stranded Indians. We are making sure to bring back every resident who seeks our help," she said.

Her next group is scheduled to come on August 20, followed by a couple more flights full of expats scheduled to arrive.

She further said that all those arrive through her WhatsApp group are strongly advised to undergo quarantine, isolation if proved positive, and to obey all COVID-19 rules and regulations once their return flight is confirmed.



INSIDE OMAN

Make life a little suite-r with a staycation



MUSCAT: Embrace life's suite-r side with JW Marriott Muscat. The luxury hotel is inviting guests to make meaningful memories with an exclusive offer the whole family will love. Relax in spacious surroundings overlooking the hotel's landscaped gardens, complemented by a full range of amenities for adults and children alike. Making it all the sweeter, JW Marriott's legendary cheesecake will be ready to welcome each guest on arrival. Choose from the JW signature classic, a perfect balance of buttery crust and soft, creamy filling. Or be among the first to try one of the hotel's new and exclusive Omani-inspired Qahwa cheesecake, hand-crafted using fresh ingredients and the finest local flavors. With nourishing cuisines, beautiful and uplifting spaces,

and warm, heart-felt service, a stay at JW Marriott Muscat is the perfect place to celebrate with loved ones.

Until September 30th 2020, Omani Nationals and Residents can experience mindful luxury in a Junior Suite for just OMR 69 per night, including taxes and service charge, as well as a complimentary breakfast for two and 20% savings for all food and beverages. Guests will also be able to savor the famous JW Cheesecake duo and save 50% on a second connecting room in addition to other benefits.

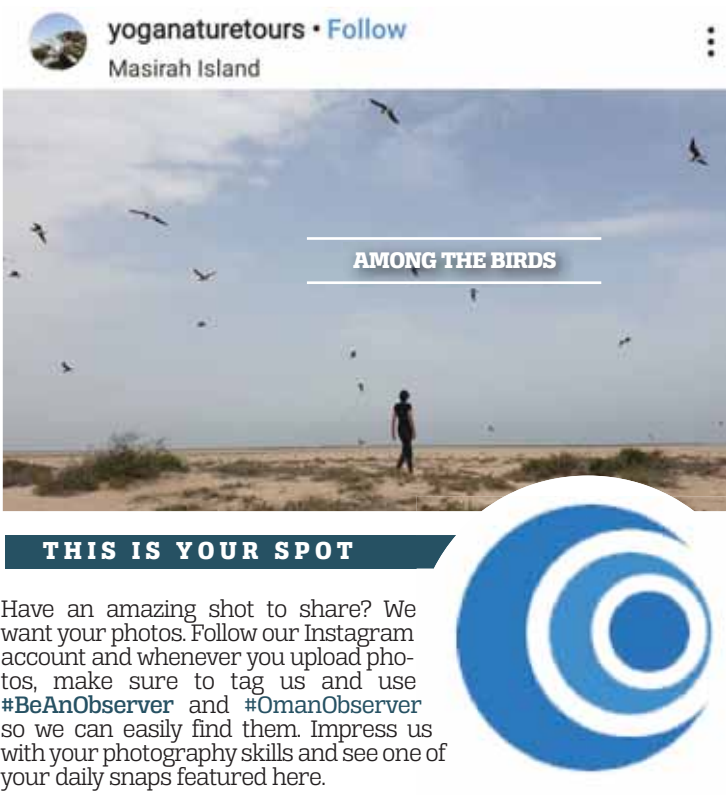
"At JW Marriott Muscat we are constantly cultivating more ways to elevate our guests' experiences with a desire to make their lives richer," said Giuseppe Ressa, General Manager. "We would like to welcome guests for a tai-

lored experience the whole family will love, with fun activities for the kids and a chance for parents to replenish too. It is also the perfect opportunity for us to introduce Muscat to the brand's world-famous cheesecake. Shareable and irresistible, let's just say it's the icing on the cake!"

Based on a 'Mindful and Present' philosophy, JW Marriott Muscat creates enriching experiences, while nurturing its guests' overall happiness and well-being. With 304 well-appointed rooms and suites, world-class facilities, and a variety of cuisines, JW Marriott Muscat ensures guests leave feeling fulfilled and with a deep sense that "all is well". For reservations, please call +968 2492 0000 or email Reservations. jwmarriottmuscat@marriott.com.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Have an amazing shot to share? We want your photos. Follow our Instagram account and whenever you upload photos, make sure to tag us and use #BeAnObserver and #OmanObserver so we can easily find them. Impress us with your photography skills and see one of your daily snaps featured here.



TRAVEL TALES

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.com



Venice nurtures its lagoon back to health

Venice may be famed for Saint Mark's Square or the Bridge of Sighs, but the Italian city has another jewel that is often overlooked: its lagoon. Once home to a rich variety of fish and birds, mankind's meddling has raised the water's salt content dramatically. However, an environmental project aims to restore it to its former glory, by introducing more fresh water. "The idea is to recreate an environment that has been lost over time, because rivers were diverted out of the lagoon," Rossella Boscolo Brusa, the project's leader, said. The diversions were done to clean up swampy areas and combat malaria, said Brusa, a researcher at the Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (Ispra). But the move had an unforeseen consequence. "It led to increasingly salty water and drop in the number of reeds, a very precious habitat for protected species, or species of commercial interest," she said. It is peaceful out on the lagoon — the only noise comes from the occasional tourist boat or the calls of a lapwing, sandpiper or egret. Expert Adriano Sfriso, of the Ca Foscari University in Venice, said that over half the lagoon used to be reedbeds and salt marshes — some 17,000 hectares (around 42,000 acres). The city's Cannaregio district

was even named after the plants — "canna" being the Italian for "reed". Today, only 34 hectares remain, he said. **'REFRESH'** The reeds tolerate some salinity. But in the inner part of the lagoon, where the water should be between zero and 15 on the salinity scale, it is 30 — not far off the amount found in seawater. Dubbed "Life Lagoon Refresh", the project, launched in 2017, diverts a freshwater flow from the Sile River into the lagoon. A man-made canal, operational since May, allows the flow of water to be modulated according to the project's needs or high tides. Barriers made of biodegradable coconut fibres contain the fresh water in the target area and help the reeds develop. In total, the project aims to restore about 20 hectares of reeds, Sfriso said. Replanters Carlo Marchesi and Adriano Croitoru meticulously uproot reeds, taking care not to disturb the birds, before punting a few kilometres away to replant the clods. "We're going to rebuild the lagoon as our great-grandfathers knew it, much richer in fish and birds," says Marchesi, 56. Local fishermen and bird hunters are also roped in to help transplant seagrasses that will speed up the return of aquatic plants.



'OUR WORLD' "The lagoon is our life, our world," said Massimo Parravicini, head of the main amateur fishermen and hunters' association. "If we preserve it, we will be able to enjoy it as much as possible, and pass it on to our sons," said the 58-year old, who regularly volunteers with the project, which he describes as "fundamental to the ecosystem". The salinity is continuously monitored, as is the water quality, vegetation and fauna. A large net is dragged vertically through the water as per the seine fishing method.

A team is tasked with tallying the species. Some, such as the grass goby, are protected, while others, including the sea bream, mullet, flounder or branzino, are important for small-scale fishing. Luca Scapin, also a researcher at the Ca Foscari University, said. The project, supported by the European Commission, also aims to draw birds such as the purple heron. The results will be shared with sites with similar issues, from Hyeres in France, to Albufera in Spain, and the Nestos Delta and Porto Lagos in Greece. — AFP

CONSERVATION



Singapore crushes ivory from around 300 elephants to deter illegal trade

SINGAPORE STARTED crushing nine tonnes worth of elephant ivory on Tuesday, in what authorities said was the biggest such event globally in recent years and signalled the island nation's fight against illegal trade in wildlife. The city-state, a nautical way point in shipments of banned animal products between Africa and Asia, is destroying tusks worth an estimated S\$ 18 million (\$13 million) including a record 8.8 tonne seizure last year which authorities said came from nearly 300

of Wednesday's World Elephant Day. An estimated 100 African elephants are killed every day by poachers seeking ivory, meat and body parts, leaving only 400,000 remaining, environmentalists estimate. A large chunk of the demand for ivory comes from Asian countries such as China and Vietnam, where it is turned into jewels and ornaments. As well as taking a tough stance on transited products, Singapore said last year it would ban the domestic trade in ivory



African elephants. In the event, streamed online, workers in hard hats were seen emptying trolley-loads of tusks into a skip where they were then pulverised by an industrial rock crusher. The crushing process may take several days and the fragments will then be incinerated. "The destruction of the ivory... will prevent it from re-entering the market and will disrupt the global supply chain of illegally traded ivory," the National Parks Board said of the event, which comes ahead

from September 2021. "Elephant poaching is at crisis levels in Asia and Africa due to the illegal trade," said R Raghunathan, CEO of World Wide Fund for nature Singapore. Raghunathan said the city-state's ivory crush and other initiatives underlined its determination to "stamp out the illicit transit of wildlife products through Singapore". Neighbouring Malaysia destroyed 9.55 tonnes of seized elephant tusks in 2016. (\$1 = 1.3721 Singapore dollars). —Reuters

BUCKS, LAKERS LEAD WAY INTO PLAY-OFFS



Carmelo Anthony #00 of the Portland Trail Blazers hits a three-point shot against the Memphis Grizzlies during the fourth quarter at The Field House. – USA Today Sports

MIAMI: An NBA season unlike any other shifts into high gear on Monday with the start of the play-offs in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

In a season reshaped by the coronavirus pandemic, home court advantage is just a memory.

Fans are banned from the campus where the league has so far successfully operated without a positive COVID-19 test. But the price is that players know that the deeper their teams' play-off run the longer they remain isolated from their families and friends.

"This is going to be the toughest championship you could ever win," Milwaukee Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, the reigning Most Valuable Player, said as the NBA assembled in Orlando in July to resume a season halted in March.

Houston Rockets guard Austin Rivers agreed.

"Whoever wins this year really had to go get it and earn it, and had guys who took time off seriously and still stayed in shape, and was able to get back the chemistry, true chemistry," Rivers said.

Antetokounmpo's Bucks arrived at the bubble virtually assured of the top seed in the Eastern Conference and own the best record in the league as they head into a first-round meeting with the Orlando Magic.

The Bucks beat the Magic in all four of their regular season games, but they've produced a lacklustre 3-5 record in the restart — an admitted frustration for Antetokounmpo, who still believes Milwaukee can return to their dominant form.

"Now it's play-off time," Antetokounmpo said. "I definitely don't believe in the turn-on switch that everybody talks about, like we can turn on the switch and be great, but I do believe that if everybody is on the same page and if everyone is focused and get together ... I believe we can play way, way better."

The Western Conference-leading Los Angeles Lakers, back in the play-offs for the first time in seven seasons, have also gone an unimpressive 3-5 in seeding games.

LeBron James, Anthony Davis and company — inspired this season by the memory of Lakers great Kobe Bryant who died in a helicopter crash in January — will be up against battle-hardened Portland.

The Trail Blazers won four straight down-to-the wire games — including an extra play-in game against the Memphis Grizzlies — to seize the final play-off berth in the West.

CHAMPION RAPTORS TAKE ON NETS

The reigning champion Toronto Raptors are back in the play-offs despite losing Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard and starter Danny Green after their title run.

They'll be taking on a Brooklyn Nets team that has gone 5-3 in the bubble and notched wins over the Bucks and the West's second-seeded Los Angeles Clippers.

"They've got a lot of guys who are playing with a lot of energy and a lot of confidence right now," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said. "We will have to play really well to beat them."

Other Eastern Conference matchups pit the Philadelphia 76ers against the Boston Celtics and the Indiana Pacers against the Miami Heat — both rivalries with the potential for fireworks.

The 76ers beat the Celtics in three of four regular-season games, but with Aussie star Ben Simmons sidelined with a knee injury and Cameroonian big man Embiid looking less than his best so far in the bubble the Celtics could have an opening.

In the West, the Clippers have Leonard trying to follow up his title run with Toronto with another championship campaign.

Leonard, Paul George and a talented surrounding cast will have their work cut out to contain the Mavericks' potentially explosive offense led by Luka Doncic and Kristaps Porzingis.

The clash between division rivals Denver and Utah could well go the seven-game distance, as evidenced by the closely-matched teams' double-overtime thriller during the seeding games that was finally won by Denver.

HISTORIC SITUATION

With the San Antonio Spurs missing the play-offs for the first time since 1997, the Houston Rockets' eighth straight post-season appearance gives them the longest active streak in the NBA.

In the first round they'll face an Oklahoma City Thunder team that appeared headed for a lacklustre rebuilding phase when it traded Russell Westbrook to Houston for veteran point guard Chris Paul.

But Paul has helped the Thunder to the same record as the Rockets, who could find the going rough in the first round with prolific point guard Westbrook out indefinitely with a right quadriceps strain, likely leaving star James Harden to shoulder the offensive load.

— AFP

Oman handball coaches take part in virtual Asian coaching programme



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Oman Handball Association (OHA) said it is committed in development of domestic personnel including coaches, referees, and players. As part of OHA's relationship with the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) and Korean Handball Federation (KHF), Oman's coaches Adil al Hasani (pictured) and Ahmed Ambosaidi took part at the virtual coaching course Level B which is organised by the AHF in coordination with the KHF.

The online coaching programme aimed to generate top and well developed handball coaches, started in July 26 and will conclude on August 24. The OHA nominated Al Hasani and Ambosaidi for this course after they showed top coaching performances with their junior teams in Muscat and Nizwa teams respectively. The OHA appointed earlier this year Adil al Hasani as head coach of the national U-19 team. This course is expected to serve both coaches to raise their technical experience and exposure.

Adil al Hasani, national head coach of U-19 team, commented on his participation in the coaching course: "It is a golden opportunity for us as national coaches to learn from the top Asian professional and experienced coaches. We are moving in the course as the planned schedule. The programme commenced with some basic introduction and followed by some technical sessions. In the earlier days, we had learned about the Korean handball development ways and the best results registered by the Korean

teams in different international events. Later, we studied the best implementation of defending and attacking plans," he added. The national head coach added that the programme featured many videos about the top teams at the last two edition of IHF Handball World Championship. "We have gone through the technical and tactical techniques used by the top teams in the World Championship. The technical analysis included the scoring tactics and plans by the coaching staff," he ended.





BRADY CLAIMS FIRST WTA TITLE AT LEXINGTON

WASHINGTON: American Jen Brady captured her first WTA title on Sunday, defeating Swiss left-hander Jil Teichmann 6-3, 6-4 in the Top Seed Open final.

Brady did not drop a set all week on the way to her first WTA final and wore down Teichmann to claim the crown in a US Open tune-up event without spectators at Lexington, Kentucky.

“The sky is the limit so let’s keep going,” Brady said.

“There’s nothing better than playing at home in America, especially to win the title on home

soil is a great achievement and something I’m going to be very happy about.”

The tournament was established in the wake of COVID-19 rescheduling issues as the first WTA event in the United States since the season was halted.

Brady, set to rise nine spots to a career-high 40th in Monday’s rankings, delivered the first finals defeat for 63rd-ranked Teichmann, who had won titles in 2019 at Prague and Palermo. The two had split two prior matches, Teichmann winning in 2019 at Limoges and Brady

winning last year at Cincinnati.

“Great battle as always,” Teichmann said. “Hopefully we’ll have many more in the future.”

Brady squandered a break chance in the fourth game with a backhand beyond the baseline and three more in the sixth game, twice on errant backhands.

Teichmann was denied on four break points in the seventh game, Brady saving with an ace, service winner and serve and volley winner and the Swiss hitting a forehand crosscourt return wide in the nine-minute game.

Brady, 25, finally struck for the break in the eighth game when Teichmann sent a forehand long, seizing a 5-3 lead, but the American squandered four set points in the ninth game before the 23-year-old Swiss netted a forehand to surrender the set after 55 minutes.

Teichmann, in her first WTA hardcourt final, sent a forehand long to give up a break in the opening game of the second set and Brady held six times for the triumph, ending matters after an hour and 42 minutes on a forehand winner. — **AFP**

Halep latest to skip US Open

PARIS: World number two Simona Halep joined a growing list of tennis stars when she said on Monday that she would skip the US Open over coronavirus fears.

“After weighing up all the factors involved and with the exceptional circumstances in which we are living, I have decided that I will not travel to New York to play the @usopen,” tweeted Halep, the current Wimbledon champion.

“I always said I would put my health at the heart of my decision and I therefore prefer to stay and train in Europe.”

The Romanian added: “I know the @usta and @WTA have worked tirelessly to put on a safe event and I wish everyone there a successful tournament.”

Halep joins a host of top players who are passing on playing at Flushing Meadows when the next Grand Slam tournament begins on August 31.

Reigning US Open champion Bianca Andreescu of Canada will not play, joining men’s 2019 winner Rafael Nadal in skipping the tournament.

Also absent from this year’s US Open will be Australia’s top-ranked Ashleigh Barty, Ukraine’s fifth-ranked Elina Svitolina, number seven Kiki Bertens, eighth-ranked Swiss Belinda Bencic — whom Andreescu beat in the semi-finals last year — and past winner Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia, currently ranked 32nd in the world. Serena Williams, seeking a 24th career Grand Slam title to match Margaret Court’s all-time record, will compete, as will men’s world number one Novak Djokovic.

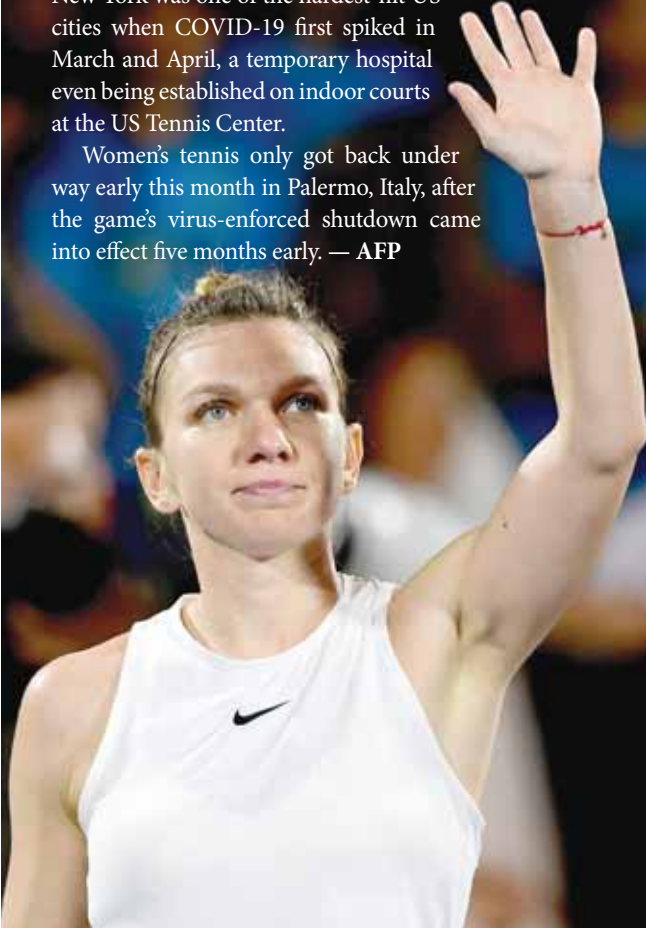
The only other players from the WTA top 10 remaining in the tournament are world number three Karolina Pliskova, reigning Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin, who is ranked fourth in the world, and Naomi Osaka, who sits in 10th place.

That leaves 38-year-old Williams with a golden opportunity to equal Court’s Slam record, which has been in her sights since she won her last major tournament — the 2017 Australian Open.

Williams, who suffered a shock quarter-final defeat by Shelby Rogers at the recent WTA tournament in Lexington, Kentucky, has lost four Grand Slam finals since then, including last year’s US Open final to Andreescu.

New York was one of the hardest-hit US cities when COVID-19 first spiked in March and April, a temporary hospital even being established on indoor courts at the US Tennis Center.

Women’s tennis only got back under way early this month in Palermo, Italy, after the game’s virus-enforced shutdown came into effect five months early. — **AFP**



Halep beats Mertens to win Prague title

PRAGUE: Top seed Simona Halep claimed her second successive title, albeit six months apart, as she comfortably beat Elise Mertens to win the Prague Open on Sunday.

The Romanian world number two, playing her first event since winning in Dubai in February, shortly before the coronavirus pandemic forced tennis to shutdown, won 6-2 7-5.

Halep had struggled to shake off the rust throughout the week and came close to a first-round defeat by Polona Hercog before struggling past Barbora Krejčíková and compatriot Irina-Camelia Begu, but she was in the groove against Mertens.

Victory in one hour 33 minutes over Belgian Mertens earned her a 21st career WTA trophy — the fifth-highest tally of active players behind only Serena Williams, Venus Williams, Kim Clijsters and Petra Kvitová.

Mertens blazed into a 2-0 lead with a flurry of winners, but Halep responded by reeling off seven successive games to take control.

Halep did not have things all her own way though and was broken back early in the second set as Mertens again went on the attack. A wobbly service game allowed Halep to move a break ahead again in the fifth game, although Mertens retaliated again to level the second set at 4-4.

Halep broke to lead 6-5 though and finished it off with a heavy forehand. — **Reuters**



Winner Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium Pool. – Reuters



HAMILTON SHINES IN SPANISH HEAT

- MERCEDES DRIVER TAKES 88TH CAREER WIN
- BRITON NOW ONLY THREE SHORT OF SCHUMACHER'S RECORD
- VERSTAPPEN SECOND FOR RED BULL, BOTTAS THIRD
- HAMILTON NOW 37 POINTS CLEAR AFTER SIX RACES



I was in a different zone – I didn't even realise it was the last lap. I was just in a daze out there...I was ready to keep going

LEWIS HAMILTON, MERCEDES DRIVER

BARCELONA: Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton won in Spain for the fourth year in a row on Sunday to celebrate a record 156th podium finish and stretch his already commanding lead to 37 points.

The victory from pole position on a sweltering afternoon at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya, in a race without spectators due to the pandemic, was the 88th of the Mercedes driver's career, and one of the more straightforward.

The six-time champion lapped all but the top three in a race that offered few thrills other than for fans of tyre management.

"I was in a different zone — I didn't even realise it was the last lap," said Hamilton, who described the race as one of his best in terms of how he drove.

"I was just in a daze out there...I was ready to keep going," he added, speaking of how he felt completely at one with the car.

Hamilton is now just three wins short of Ferrari great Michael Schumacher's unmatched 91, and the podium ended another of the German's records that he had shared with the Briton since last Sunday at Silverstone.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen, Hamilton's closest challenger after six races and winner a week ago of the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix, finished runner-up but a massive 24.177 seconds behind.

Valtteri Bottas was third for Mercedes, having taken the fastest lap after a late stop for fresh tyres, in another big setback for the Finn.

Verstappen has now beaten Bottas in the last four races and been second to Hamilton in three of them. Hamilton has 132 points to Verstappen's 95, with Bottas falling further behind on 89.

"The weakness for Valtteri today was the start. He caught up to Max but he couldn't overtake as the soft tyres didn't work as expected," commented Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

WARNING FLAGS

Verstappen had lined up third on the grid but grabbed second at the start as Bottas was squeezed on both sides and dropped to fourth, taking back third place four laps later.

Canadian Lance Stroll took fourth place for Racing Point with Mexican teammate Sergio Perez ahead of him at the finish, on a one-stop strategy, but with a five-second penalty for ignoring blue warning flags.

Stroll had seized third at the start with an impressive surge past his team-mate, who was returning from two weeks in quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19.

"I saw a gap on the inside went for it, and it really set me up," said the Canadian, whose team were again protested by Renault afterwards as at the previous four races. Stewards applied a reprimand, as before.

Racing Point have already been docked 15 points and fined 400,000 euros for a breach of the sporting regulations with a car that is a close copy of last year's Mercedes but Renault are appealing for a heavier punishment.

Spaniard Carlos Sainz was sixth for McLaren and Sebastian Vettel seventh for Ferrari, after doing close to 40 laps on one set of soft tyres, with Red Bull's Alexander Albon eighth for Red Bull.

AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly was ninth and Lando Norris took the final point for McLaren.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was the sole retirement of the afternoon, having spun off after an engine cut-out due to an electrical problem, possibly caused by a kerb.

The Monegasque got the car started again but headed straight to the pits and retired from last place.

— Reuters

Spanish Grand Prix			Aug 16	
Catalunya circuit, Barcelona				
1	L. Hamilton (GBR)	1h31:45.279	25	
		Mercedes		
2	M. Verstappen (NED) at 24.177 secs	18		
		Red Bull		
3	V. Bottas (FIN) at 44.752 secs	16		
		Mercedes		
4	L. Stroll (CAN) at 1 lap	12		
		Racing Point		
5	S. Perez (MEX) at 1 lap	10		
		Racing Point		
Driver standings				
Lewis Hamilton (GBR)			132	
Max Verstappen (NED)			95	
Valtteri Bottas (FIN)			89	
Charles Leclerc (MON)			45	
Lance Stroll (CAN)			40	
Teams				
Mercedes			221	
Red Bull			135	
Racing Point			63	
McLaren			62	



sport



NATIONAL TEAMS WITH EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION TO START TRAINING

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Supreme Committee for dealing with COVID-19 announced on Monday new set of commercial and industrial activities which featured resumption of some sporting activities as well. The committee agreed on opening some of the sporting venues for specific teams to resume their trainings as they have some external participations including: Oman national football team, Oman junior football team, Oman national futsal team, Dhofar team and tennis courts for senior players.

Oman's national football technical manager, Branko Ivankovic, arrived in Muscat earlier on Saturday and he is on home quarantine for 14 days. It is expected that the coaching staff of the national football team and junior team will announce a revised preparatory plan soon. Coach Branko and his technical staff will be back to the on-field training sessions soon despite the new decision by FIFA and AFC to postpone the World Cup and Asian Cup joint qualifiers to 2021.

Hilal al Oufi, national head coach of U-16 football team, said recently to *Oman Daily Observer* that the team is awaiting the decision from the government entities to resume the training from ground as most of the teams began their training. Oman will play against Tajikistan, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates teams in Group B in the AFC U-16 Championship which is scheduled to be held in Bahrain from November 25 to December 12.

Dhofar team is gearing up for the 2020 AFC Cup as the Asian Football Association (AFC) announced earlier this month on the venues for the 2020 AFC Cup West Zone matches in Groups A, B and C. Jordan will host the matches of Groups C which feature Oman's representatives Dhofar besides Qadsia of Kuwait, Riffa of Bahrain and hosts Al Jazeera of Jordan. AFC had confirmed in the previous month that the 2020 AFC Cup group matches will be held from October 23 to November 4. Oman national futsal team will take part at the 2020 AFC Futsal Championship during November 4 to 15.



Branko Ivankovic



Younis al Fahdi

Oman is placed in group A besides Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Vietnam. Younis al Fahdi, head coach of Oman futsal national team, said earlier this month that the detailed preparatory plan for team's participation at the AFC Asian Futsal Championship is submitted to the national team's committee at Oman Football Association (OFA) for approval. Coach Younis added in his statements to *Oman Daily Observer* that the team will have 13 friendly games during September and October as part of the preparation schedule. After the new decision, the coaching staff will announce revised plan.

With the above decision, the sportsmen in the Sultanate are optimistic as it is a positive indication for the full resumption of the sporting activities soon. At least 155 days are completed without any external sport events since mid March.

