

HM GREETES MALAWI AND COMOROS LEADERS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Lazarus Chakwera of the Republic of Malawi on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Chakwera and the friendly people of his country.

His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Othman Ghazali of the Union of the Comoros on his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Ghazali and the brotherly people of the Comoros further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES 3 ROYAL DECREES

SUPREME COURT CHAIRMAN APPOINTED

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued three Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 69/2020 appoints Supreme Court Chairman.

Article (1) appoints Sayyid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy as Chairman of the Supreme Court.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 70/2020 appoints Administrative Judicature Court Chairman.

Article (1) appoints Shaikh Al Mukhtar bin



Abdullah bin Issa al Harthy as Chairman of the Administrative Judicature Court.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 71/2020 appoints Finance Ministry

Under-Secretary.

Article (1) appoints Abdullah bin Salim bin Abdullah al Harthy as Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

— **ONA**

NATIONAL SURVEY TO ASSESS COVID-19 ISSUES

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As the spread of COVID-19 cases remains unabated, the Ministry of Health announced that the national survey from July 12 will assess many issues involved in the pandemic.

Covering all the governorates, the serological survey will last for a period of 10 weeks for both citizens and residents to measure the prevalence of the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the ministry, the serological survey is a means to study the immunity



of the population against the virus. It is also one of the most important elements for the evaluation and epidemiological monitoring of the spread of the microbe, as some studies have shown that resistance to the novel coronavirus is determined partly by the amount of people's immunity.

Speaking at a press conference, Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control, said last week that a research will be carried out in cooperation with the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

"A cross-sectional survey of different ages, it will cover all governorates and wilayats aimed at collecting demographic data and blood samples to examine the antibodies of COVID-19 patients," he said. **TURN TO P2**

OMAN

National survey to assess COVID-19 issues

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According to the ministry, the survey is aimed at evaluating the prevalence of COVID-19 infection with regard to age groups, and monitoring cases not diagnosed in vitro and estimating the level of

infection at the wilayat level, the rate of infection without symptoms, and the total number of cases. The survey will also estimate the impact of the standard of living on the extent of the infection, and assess the effects in enclosed areas compared

to the non-enclosed areas. In addition, it will assess the extent of infection according to age groups, monitor cases not diagnosed in the laboratory, and estimate the level of infection at the governorate level and the rate of infection without

the emergence of symptoms and the cumulative number of cases of infection. The mechanism of random selection of samples will be based on the spatial data of the population provided by the NCSI.

Omanis constitute 71% of new cases in July

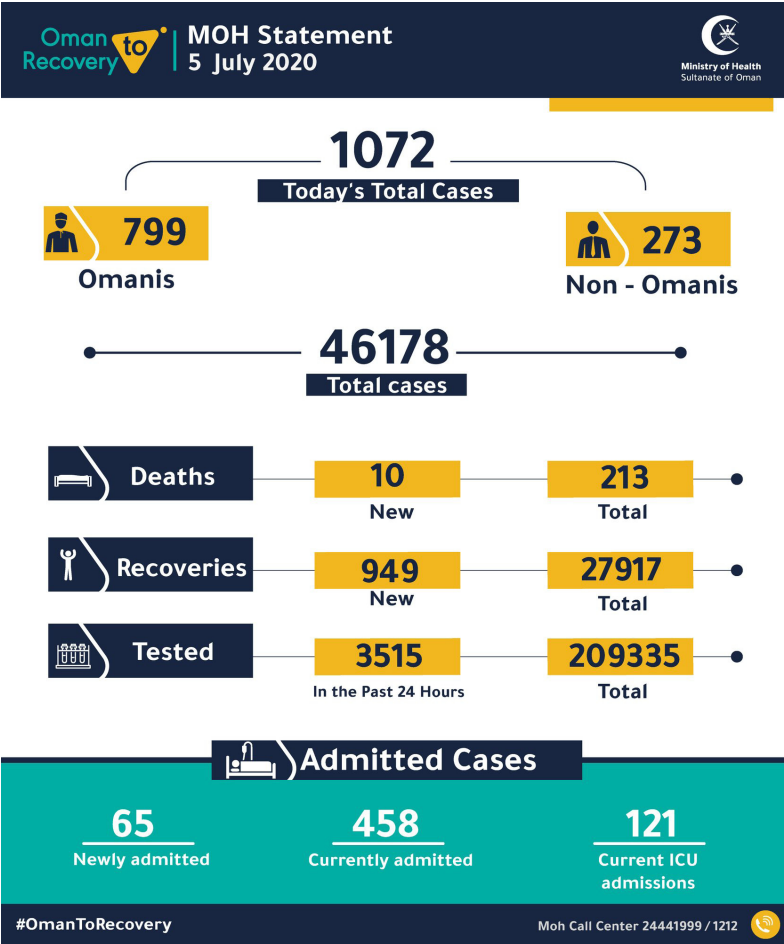
VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: For the second day in a row on Sunday, 10 people died of COVID-19 in the Sultanate, five from Muscat, two each from North and South al Batinah and one from Dhakhiliyah taking the death toll to 213.

The data reveals that 4,344 (nearly 71 per cent) of the 6,108 new cases reported in July are Omanis.

The MoH announced 1,072 new cases on Sunday, including 799 Omanis and 273 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases to 46,178.

Muscat recorded 520 new cases, taking the total to 29,366 on Sunday. Seeb once again topped the list in the governorate with 225 new cases, while Bausher recorded 106 and Muttrah registered 87 cases. Barka recorded 44 cases on Sunday, taking the total tally to 2,011. According to the MoH, a total of 3,515 people were tested in the last 24



hours, taking the total number of tests in Oman to 209,935.

The MoH said that 949 new patients recovered from Covid-19 during the past 24 hours, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 27,917 in Oman.

ODB begins emergency loan process

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Oman Development Bank (ODB) on Sunday started receiving applications from those who wish to benefit from the interest-free emergency loan programme approved by the Royal Directives of His Majesty the Sultan.

The loan is meant for the small firms which are most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The target beneficiaries include entrepreneurs; especially those holding Riyada card, self-employed, as well as beneficiaries of the ODB loans and Al Rafd Fund.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of the Oman Development Bank, revealed during a recent press conference of the Supreme Committee that interest-free emergency programme does not set any specific amount for the beneficiaries, indicating that the amount of damage determines the amount of the loan. Al Hinai expected that more than 25,000 beneficiaries will benefit from the programme.

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Strategic Alliances are Crucial for the Sustainable Growth of the Banking Sector

Rashad Al Zubair: The Sultanate is at the forefront of a promising future for the banking sector in general and particularly for Islamic banking.

Abdulaziz Al Balushi: The shares of the new entity will constitute a positive boost for the Muscat Securities Market.

Randa Sadik: We have trust in the performance of the Omani economy during the coming period.



Rashad Al Zubair
Chairman, Oman Arab Bank

After the signing of the merger agreement between Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB), the first stage of the merger was completed with the acquisition of 100% of the issued share capital of AIB by OAB. The second stage is expected to be completed shortly and includes transforming AIB into a closed joint stock company wholly owned by OAB, transferring the assets and liabilities of the Al Yusr Islamic Banking window currently affiliated with OAB to AIB, and transforming OAB into a public joint stock company (SAOG) listed on the Muscat Securities Market.

The shareholders of the new entity include Arab Bank (49%) and Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST) (31.63%), with 19.37% owned by AIB and other shareholders. On an operational level, OAB will continue its conventional banking business and activities, while AIB will remain fully Shari'a-compliant. Both banks will be separate entities, each with their own Board of Directors and Executive Management, functioning as per applicable regulatory laws.

Following the approval from the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority and relevant shareholders, this is an important strategic step that will lead to the creation of a leading and competitive banking institution at the local and regional levels.

Shedding light on these developments, Rashad Al Zubair, Chairman of the OAB Board of Directors, said, "Our beliefs stem from our vision for the future of the national economy, which is built on stability and safety, and through the efforts of both the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may his soul rest in peace, and the present leader of the Omani Renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. The merger is also in line with efforts by the private sector to support the acceleration of the local economy. This had us make the decision to invest more and create a banking entity capable of not only supporting the development process but which will also provide financing for both government and private projects. This will, directly and indirectly, contribute to the generation of new opportunities for the Omani youth. We are confident that we are on the right path towards the development of a stronger and more prosperous Oman. We believe that with the support and the efforts undertaken by the government, we will overcome our current challenges. This includes the spread of the Coronavirus and the decline in global oil prices, both of which have resulted in adverse effects on all humanity and economies across the world."

"It is common knowledge that a bank's contribution to the growth of the national economy is proportional to its size. The larger the financial institution, the better it can provide added value to the country's economy, by contributing more to the GDP and providing an increased number of job opportunities. This is mainly due to the fact that it will have the ability to expand its business, attract new clients, bring in

further investment and provide better products and services than a smaller institution. The initiative of Oman Arab Bank to merge with Alizz Islamic Bank was aimed at seeing the creation of a large-scale financial institution, comprising of a large number of assets on both the financial and human side. This will be a major step forward for the local banking sector, especially in regard to Islamic banking," Al Zubair added.

Great confidence in the future of the national economy

Randa Sadik, Member of the Board of Directors at OAB and representing the largest shareholder of the new entity, Arab Bank, said, "At Arab Bank, we have a high level of confidence in the strength of the Omani economy and its great potential to achieve sustainable growth. Ever since we established our business nearly five decades ago, we have been continuously following the economic developments of the country. Owning a significant share in Oman Arab Bank enables us to play a pivotal role in augmenting the economic and social development in the Sultanate. The enhancement of our share in Oman Arab Bank, through the merger with one of the largest Islamic banks in the Sultanate, is a significant step to support the success and achievement journey of OAB. Since we own one of the largest Arab banking networks globally, spread across five continents, we are fully prepared to put forth our extensive long-term experience at Arab Bank and its subsidiary (Islamic International Arab Bank) to ensure its success. We also hope to enable the new entity to play a greater role in supporting

the economic development efforts of the Sultanate through a large financial institution that owns two fully independent arms in the traditional and Islamic banking sector."

Diversification of investments

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al Balushi, CEO of Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST), shares his insight about the company's plans for the future, "Ominvest closely monitors developments in the region's markets to analyse performance and sets forecasts for investment movements, growth potential and sectors, and to be able to make the right decisions at the right time. As such, we expect that Islamic banking in the Sultanate will go through considerable growth in the next years. We have decided to strengthen our investment portfolio in this promising sector accordingly, forming a financial conglomerate by merging Oman Arab Bank with Alizz Islamic Bank. This way, the entity will be prominent at the sector



Abdulaziz Al Balushi
Group Chief Executive Officer, Ominvest

level and will have independent Islamic and traditional arms, in accordance with regulatory controls. Arab Bank will extend its support, looking back on an extensive experience of more than 22 years in the field of Islamic banking through its subsidiary. Additionally, the new entity will offer its shares on the Muscat Securities Market, giving it a positive boost during the next stage."

Abdulaziz added, "The success of investment activities at local, as well as international, level is based on the principle of integration, the idea to form alliances

and major partnerships. The unification of efforts between entities in a single market will positively reflect on customers and shareholders alike, while driving the economic growth of the country."

A positive step for the sector



Rashad Al Musafir
Chief Executive Officer, Oman Arab Bank

Rashad Al Musafir, CEO of OAB, said, "Our proposal to merge with Alizz Islamic Bank was a result of a comprehensive study about the future of the banking sector in the Sultanate, both traditional and Islamic. This is in line with our expectations for the future, which indicates positive growth opportunities for Islamic banking. We are absolutely confident that this step, upon the completion of all four stages, will reflect positively on all parties concerned, as well as customers and shareholders alike. Not only will the new entity be able to benefit from one of the best digital infrastructures in the Omani banking sector, currently owned by Oman Arab Bank, but it will also attract new clients looking for a high level of service. This is in line with our strategy, which focuses on enhancing the efficiency of human resources by refining their knowledge and expertise in a way that reflects positively on their career development. The idea is to enable them to take on larger tasks and be in a position to provide more professional services to clients."

Sector developments in numbers

The total assets of the traditional banking sector in the Sultanate reached approximately OMR 30 billion by the end of 2018, while the assets of the Islamic banking sector during the same period amounted to approximately OMR 4.4 billion. By the end of December 2019, data from the Central Bank of Oman indicated that the growth of assets of traditional banks increased by 2.7% (valued at approximately OMR 30.8 billion), while the assets of Islamic banks increased by 11% (recorded at approximately OMR 4.9 billion).

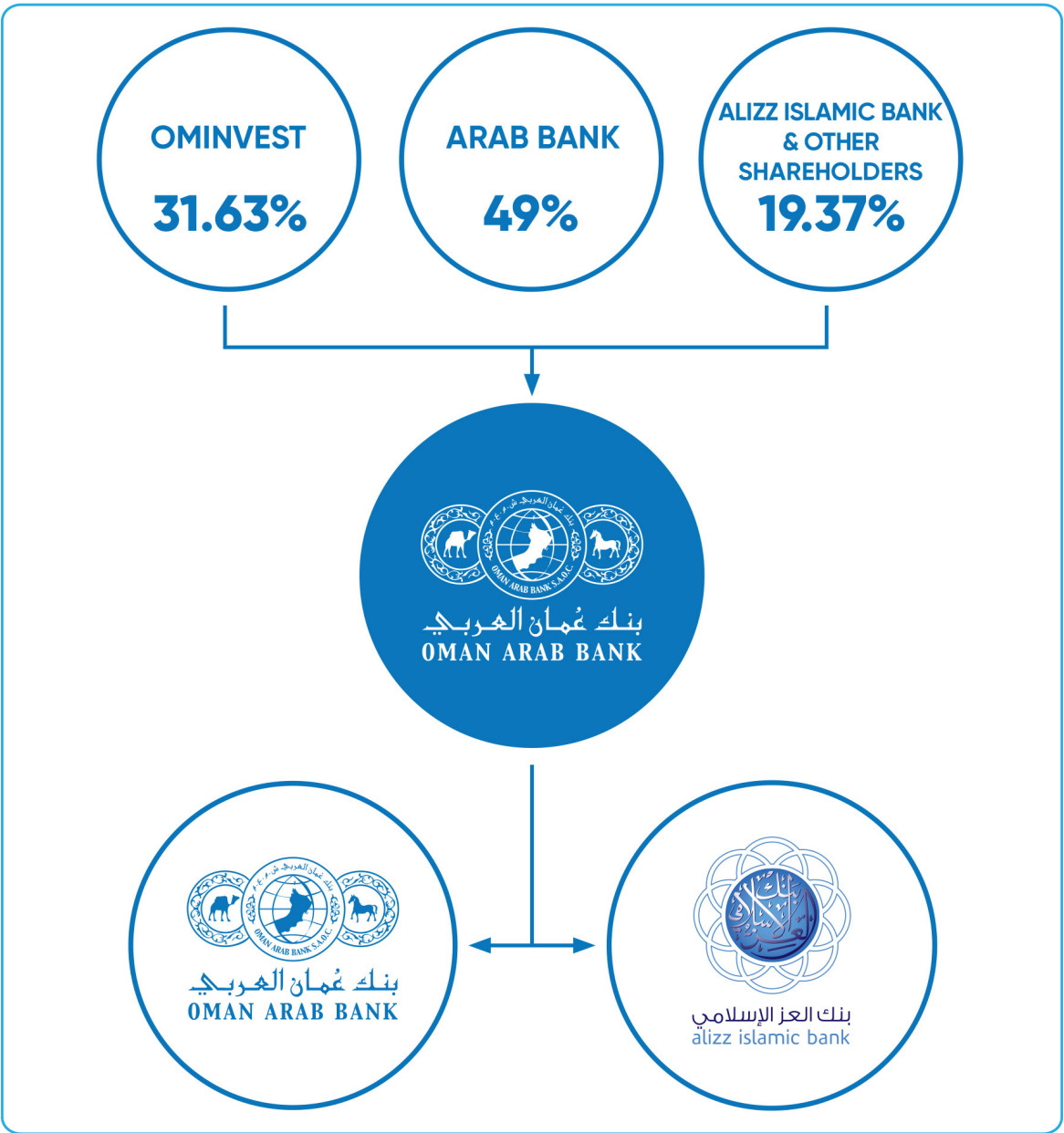
Total credit granted by traditional banks at the end of 2018 was approximately OMR 21.5 billion, which rose to approximately OMR 21.9 billion by the end of December 2019, a growth of around 1.8%. Islamic banks recorded a combined growth of 11% in the volume of credit granted during the same period, which was valued at OMR 3.97 billion by the end of December 2019. This is compared to OMR 3.57 billion over the same period in the previous year.

In terms of deposits, data from the Central Bank of Oman indicated that the total deposits in conventional banks increased by 0.3%, registering at approximately OMR 20.1 billion by the end of December 2019. In comparison, the value was OMR 20 billion a year ago.

The Islamic banking sector, on the other hand, recorded a 10.3% growth in total deposits, which rose from approximately OMR 3.3 billion at the end of 2018, to nearly OMR 3.6 billion in December 2019.



Ms. Randa Sadik
Board Member, Oman Arab Bank



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11 jobs reserved for Omanis

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Manpower has decided to Omanise 11 more specialist professions.

The decision issued by Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, was published in the official gazette on Sunday.

The professions to be reserved for the nationals are hostel supervisor, sociology specialist, social service specialist, social welfare specialist, social psychology specialist, general social worker, student activities specialist, social research technician, social service technician, assistant social service technician and social worker.

“Licences for the recruitment of non-Omani workforce, and work-permit licences issued for specified



THE PROFESSIONS TO BE RESERVED FOR THE NATIONALS ARE HOSTEL SUPERVISOR, SOCIOLOGY SPECIALIST, SOCIAL SERVICE SPECIALIST, SOCIAL WELFARE SPECIALIST, SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY SPECIALIST, GENERAL SOCIAL WORKER, STUDENT ACTIVITIES SPECIALIST, SOCIAL RESEARCH TECHNICIAN, SOCIAL SERVICE TECHNICIAN, ASSISTANT SOCIAL SERVICE TECHNICIAN AND SOCIAL WORKER

professions shall apply until the date of their expiry,” the decision added.

In April, the government ordered state-owned com-

panies to accelerate the process of replacing foreign staff with Omani nationals, especially in senior positions, to create more jobs

for its citizens.

Expatriates make up almost 40 per cent of the population of over 4.6 million in the Sultanate.

Full Moon, Jupiter and Saturn form a triangle

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: While sky gazers in the Americas and some parts of western Africa and Europe enjoyed the penumbral lunar eclipse that took place overnight from Saturday to Sunday, astro enthusiasts in Oman are excited over a celestial triangle.

Penumbral eclipses occur when the Moon passes through Earth’s penumbra the outer portion of its shadow, an important event was not visible from Oman.

“This July full moon will shine near the sky’s dome to the very bright planet Jupiter, and also to the ringed planet Saturn,” explained Omar al Hosni, member of Oman Astronomical Society. While we can see the full moon and Jupiter, the third point of triangle cannot be seen with the naked eye.

“You need a telescope to see Saturn’s rings. But you’ll get a kick out of seeing Jupiter and



Saturn close together, When the full moon rises over the southeastern horizon it will form a neat triangle bright, white Jupiter and dimmer, yellow-tinted Saturn. The moon and planets will fit within the field of view of binoculars and will produce a lovely wide field photograph when composed with interesting foreground scenery,” noted Al Hosni.

Over the course of the night, the diurnal rotation of the sky will shift the moon to the planets’ left, and the moon’s orbital motion will carry it closer to Saturn than Jupiter.

Rial exchange rate index rises

MUSCAT: The effective exchange rate index of Omani Rial rose by 1 per cent to 106.4 points in April compared to 105.3 points in the same month of 2019.

The Sultanate registered an increase in narrow money supply (M1) by 12.6 per cent to reach RO5.67 billion at the end of April 2020.

Meanwhile, broad Money Supply (M2) rose 10.9 per cent to reach RO18.93 billion during the period as against RO17.07 billion the previous year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) rose 0.1 per cent to RO6.37 billion com-

pared to the same period of 2019, when it stood at RO6.36 billion.

Private sector deposits in commercial banks and Islamic windows showed a rise of 10.5 per cent in April at RO16.17 billion against RO14.63 billion in the same month of 2019.

Total loans and financing in commercial banks rose by 3.2 per cent to RO 26.39 billion in April against RO25.57 billion in April 2019.

The average interest rate on total credit touched 1.4 per cent at the end of four-month period of 2020, recording a rise of 5.5 per cent in 2020 compared to 5.4 per cent during the same period in 2019. — **ONA**

FOLLOW SAFETY MEASURES IN OFFICES, FACTORIES

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has called upon all those working in offices, factories, and other commercial premises to follow safety precautions and adjust to the new normal situation.

Accordingly, all employees, from top management to workers need to ensure they are following the COVID-19 office safety guide to help reduce the number of cases in the country.

“Safety of staff, employees and other workers is the responsibility of not just the management but every single employee has to be committed to safety



and security at the workplace,” a municipality official said.

“As we all have started to go back to work after the COVID-19 lockdown period, a set of additional safety measures must be taken by the businesses to provide a safer work environment for the employees. It can start from the entry point and continue till they leave after work.”

Employees need to

be educated on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, and additional HR resources need to be dedicated to clarifying their doubts such as what to do if they become ill, or are exposed to someone who is sick.

Employees should be allowed to stay home if they have any doubt about their health to prevent spreading the virus. Additional policies should be in place should an employee fall sick.

Physical contact between employees should be minimal and remote work should be encouraged as far as possible. A more isolated working environment within the office can also be mulled over.

Abide by COVID-19 norms or face fine, closure

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Private sector establishments, which are not following COVID-19 precautions, will have to pay up to RO 500 penalty or may be closed depending upon the degree of non-adherence to rules.

According to the official gazette published on Sunday, Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Minister of Manpower, issued a decision regarding fines to be imposed on establishments

for lax measures to curb coronavirus infections.

A fine of RO 300 will be slapped for not leaving middle seats empty while transporting workers in a vehicle. The same amount of fine applies if workers in labour camps are not divided into groups. Each group should have separate rooms and toilets, and crowding while eating should be avoided.

The decision includes a fine of RO 100 on non-compliance on the number of workers in one room as per occupa-

tional health and safety requirements. It also includes a fine of RO 500 if a private sector facility does not provide quarantine facilities for workers.

Moreover, the employers have to ensure that the COVID-19 patients do not mix with others.

The decision added an article which enables the Ministry of Manpower and the competent authorities to shut the private sector facilities based on the recommendation of the epidemiological investigation team of the Ministry of Health.



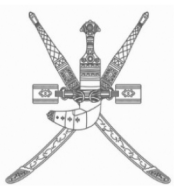
ROP arrests drug smugglers

MUSCAT: Two Asians linked to an international drug smuggling network have been arrested by the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) in Muscat Governorate.

The suspects were arrested from a house in Muttrah following continued monitoring and tracking operations by the anti-drug department. A total of 40 kg of crystal meth and 23 kg of hash were recovered from the defendants.

Meanwhile, the ROP command in Dhofar Governorate foiled an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of khat in the Wilayat of Salalah.

ROP has commended the efforts made by citizens and expatriates to combat the smuggling and trafficking of drugs by reporting activities of suspected drug dealers through the toll-free number 1444.



Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries

Tender Notice

The Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries Announces the following Tender:-

Tender no.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
187/2019-53 (Re-tender)	Maintenance of Protection Wall at Felaj Muzajib, Sur In South Sharqia Governorate	25/-	Second	Tuesday 21/7/2020	Sunday 9/8/2020

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain.
- Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries. And hard copy of the same should be submitted manually to the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries (tenders section).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24166670 or etenderhd@ita.gov.om
- Note: Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries

BLENDED LEARNING IS HERE TO STAY

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: Due to COVID-19 all higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate had to quickly plot an uncharted course to go fully online in March 2020.

A report titled ‘Lessons Learned: Higher Education’s Response to COVID-19’, by Dr Shoba Zachariah (**pictured**), CEO, Catalyst Solutions, examined the response of nine HEIs including 5 universities and 4 colleges in the Sultanate to the pandemic.

According to Dr Zachariah, all HEIs in the survey were able to switch to online teaching quickly; some within a week and a few immediately. 46 per cent of institutions were able to deliver all their modules without constraints.

The remaining HEIs postponed some or all practical modules requiring specialised settings or equipment to the later part of the next semester in the hope that they would be able to incorporate face-to-face classes.

All participants reported that students were able to adapt to the new situation quite well and their performance overall has been satisfactory. 67 per cent of institutions surveyed were quite satisfied and 22 per cent were extremely satisfied with the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities this semester.

However, the major challenge Dr Zachariah identified is the inadequacy of internet connectivity and bandwidth in some parts of the Sultanate. This negatively affected



COVID-19 PUSHED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO SWITCH TO ONLINE TEACHING

students who do not have the necessary infrastructure or support at home.

Secondly, the lack of online or technical competencies amongst faculty posed significant challenges when moving rapidly to fully online teaching.

Teaching methods, curriculum, learning materials, assessments and student support all had to be adapted for online modes.

Furthermore, these issues had to be swiftly managed through intensive online training.

Several HEIs reported that they relied mainly on projects, presentations, and assignments due to



difficulties associated with online examinations; this increased the likelihood of academic misconduct and plagiarism.

The report noted that there were several advantages resulting from the pandemic, the major one being the push to assimilate virtual technology for all core activities. This forced staff and students to adapt and improve their technology related skills exponentially.

The management of almost all institutions surveyed believe that blended learning combining both virtual and traditional delivery, has come to stay.

The report notes that most have implemented plans for fully online registration, virtual induction programmes, upgrading IT infrastructure, enhanced virtual teaching and assessment platforms and student support strategies for the next semester.

According to Dr Nasser al Maawali, Dean, College of Banking and Financial Studies, online delivery allows HEIs to offer contemporary courses at lower costs and to attract students across Oman and abroad. Dr Moosa al Kindi, VC, Arab Open University, Oman branch, emphasised the importance of including effective solutions to similar scenarios in risk management practices of HEIs in future.



People follow social distancing markings as they cross Lambeth Bridge in London. — Reuters

Britain puts \$10m to study effects of COVID-19

LONDON: Britain is putting 8.4 million pounds (\$10.49 million) into a new study to examine the long-term effects of COVID-19 on patients, the health ministry said on Sunday.

The novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19 has been observed to cause many health impacts for some patients beyond immediate respiratory issues, but with other infected people asymptomatic, the workings of the virus are not fully understood.

“As we continue our fight against this global pandemic, we are learning more and more about the impact the disease can have, not only on immediate health, but longer-term physical and mental health too,” Health Minister Matt Hancock said.

The Department of Health said 10,000 people would take part



As we continue our fight against this global pandemic, we are learning more and more about the impact the disease can have, not only on immediate health, but longer-term physical and mental health too.

MATT HANCOCK,
HEALTH MINISTER

in the study, which is being led by the University of Leicester and hospitals in the city.

Lung and blood samples of the patients will be taken and they will also be assessed by advanced imaging, and the findings will be used to develop new

forms of personalised treatment.

Meanwhile, Britain is close to a 500 million pound (\$624 million) supply deal with Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline for 60 million doses of a potential COVID-19 vaccine, the Sunday Times reported.

Clinical trials are due to start in September and Sanofi has said it expects to get approval by the first half of next year, sooner than previously anticipated.

More than 100 vaccines are being developed and tested around the world to stop the COVID-19 pandemic and governments are racing to secure supplies of vaccines even before their efficacy is proven.

A supply agreement with Sanofi and GSK would be Britain's second such deal, after it said it would buy 100 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

— Agencies

IN BRIEF

IRAN RECORDS HIGHEST DAILY DEATH TOLL FROM COVID-19

TEHRAN: Iran recorded its highest number of deaths from COVID-19 within a 24-hour period, official health ministry figures showed on Sunday. The 163 deaths reported on Sunday exceed the previous record from last Monday, when the health ministry reported 162 deaths in a day. The Islamic Republic has recorded a total of 11,571 deaths and 240,438 infections from the coronavirus, health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said in a statement on state TV. There have been 201,330 recoveries, she said.

FRESH OUTBREAK SEES 70,000 LOCKED DOWN IN SPAIN

MADRID: Spain's northwestern Galicia region on Sunday ordered the lockdown of 70,000 people amid fears of a fresh coronavirus outbreak, following a larger one in the northeast. All residents of the town of La Marina, 140 km east of La Coruna, will be unable to leave the vicinity and gatherings of more than ten people will be banned to limit the possibility of contagion. The move came only a day after regional officials put 200,000 people back in confinement following a “sharp rise” in infections near the northeastern town of Lerida some 150 km west of Catalan regional capital Barcelona. Spaniards endured one of the world's toughest lockdowns for three months from March as the country suffered one of Europe's worst coronavirus death tolls — at least 28,385 — and more than 250,000 cases.

GREECE SHUTS BORDER TO SERBIANS AFTER VIRUS SPIKE

ATHENS: Greece announced on Sunday the closure of its frontier for Serbian nationals until July 15 because of a coronavirus spike. Serbia declared a state of emergency on Friday in the capital Belgrade because of the highest rise of coronavirus cases since April. Greece had made its decision after analysing the epidemiological data, said government spokeswoman Aristotelia Pelsoni. Greece, which has suffered fewer than 200 virus deaths, has launched a promotional campaign to revive tourism, which accounts for a quarter of its gross domestic product. — Agencies

WORLD

IN FOURTH OF JULY MESSAGE, BIDEN VOWS TO UPROOT SYSTEMIC RACISM

LOS ANGELES: Former vice-president Joe Biden vowed to “rip the roots of systemic racism out of this country” in a Fourth of July message that contrasted sharply with President Donald Trump’s warning at a Mount Rushmore fireworks display that “angry mobs” at protests against racism were assaulting America’s history and culture.

In a video posted on Twitter, Biden, Trump’s presumed Democratic challenger, said the United States had never lived up to the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.” That phrase has “gnawed at our conscience” through more than 200 years of institutionalised racism, including the recent police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, he said.

“America is no fairy tale,” Biden said. “It’s been a constant push and pull between the two parts of our character, the idea that all men and women — all people — are created equal, and the racism that has torn us apart. We have a chance



now to give the marginalised, the demonised, the isolated, the oppressed, a full share of the American dream.”

Biden’s remarks came hours after Trump told a crowd of mainly white supporters on Friday night at Mount Rushmore that America was facing a growing danger from anti-racism protesters’ “merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values and indoctrinate our children.” He

accused them of promoting what he labelled a “new far-left fascism.”

At another Fourth of July celebration on Saturday on the South Lawn of the White House, Trump hammered away at the same theme, underscoring how appeals to racial resentments are at the heart of his reelection campaign.

“We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchists, the agitators, the looters and people who in

many instances have absolutely no clue what they are doing,” Trump said.

Trump’s combative response to the Black Lives Matter protests that have swept the nation for weeks comes despite polls indicating most Americans support the movement. When New York City recently announced it would paint “Black Lives Matter” on Fifth Avenue outside Trump Tower, the president denounced it as a “symbol of hate.” — dpa

India to reopen Taj Mahal with social distancing

NEW DELHI: Visitors to the Taj Mahal will have to wear masks at all times, keep their distance and not touch its glistening marble surfaces when India’s 17th-century monument to love reopens on Monday after a three-month COVID-19 shutdown. Only 5,000 tourists will be allowed in a day, split into two groups, a far cry from peak levels of 80,000 a day who would swarm the mausoleum built in the northern city of Agra by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his wife, in a 22-year effort. “All centrally protected monuments and sites shall be bound by the protocols like sanitisation, social distancing & other health protocols,” the federal tourism ministry said in a tweet.

18 dead after heavy rain hits south-western Japan

TOKYO: At least 18 people were dead and around a dozen unaccounted for while rescuers were rushing to find survivors in south-western Japan, where record-breaking torrential rains triggered landslides and flooding, local media reported on Sunday. Seventeen others were feared dead a day after flooding hit a nursing home in a rural area of Kumamoto prefecture, broadcaster NHK reported. About 50 people were rescued from the home in Kuma Village, some 950 km south-west of Tokyo, Kyodo News reported on Sunday, citing Kumamoto prefectural officials. Authorities in Kumamoto ordered about 200,000 residents to flee their homes as they were still warning of torrential rains, mudslides, flooding and swollen rivers in the region.

Celebrated Egyptian actress dies of coronavirus

CAIRO: Celebrated Egyptian actress Ragaa el Gedawi died aged 81 on Sunday in a quarantine hospital weeks after testing positive for the new coronavirus, state media reported. In late May, El Gedawi, a former model, was transferred to a hospital in the coastal city of Ismailia, north east of Cairo, after displaying symptoms of the virus. She was quarantined in the hospital until her death early on Sunday, the online edition of state-owned newspaper *Al Ahram* reported. Several days ago El Gedawi was placed on a ventilator at an intensive care unit in the hospital due to her old age and her deteriorating health. Egypt, the Arab world’s most populous country of nearly 100 million people, recently loosened virus-related restrictions to boost its economy.

— Agencies



Opposition Malawi Congress Party leader Lazarus Chakwera addresses supporters after a court annulled the May 2019 presidential vote. — Reuters

COULD MALAWI'S RE-RUN ELECTION INSPIRE AFRICA?

JACK MCBRAMS

The opposition triumph in Malawi's recent landmark election re-run after last year's fraudulent polls were overturned could spur similar democratic change across the continent, analysts and historians say.

Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party comfortably won the June 23 election with 58.5 per cent of the vote — beating Peter Mutharika, whose re-election last year was nullified by the courts over “widespread and systematic” irregularities.

Chakwera's official inauguration is set for Monday, to coincide with the country's 56th anniversary of independence from Britain.

The election set the African country apart from many on the continent, making it only the second sub-Saharan African coun-

try to have presidential election results overturned in court, after Kenya in 2017.

It was also the first time in Africa that an election re-run has led to the defeat of an incumbent.

The unprecedented political feat was credited to a cohesion of several powerful forces —including the resilience of the judiciary that handed down the historic judgement.

In extraordinary scenes, Constitutional Court judges came sporting bullet-proof jackets and under military escort to deliver the ruling on February 3 overturning Mutharika's re-election.

That was after six months of hearing evidence during a groundswell of civic society-led street protests.

“For a year they persevered with mass demonstrations against the wanton theft of their votes despite threats and repression by the beleaguered and discredited government,” said historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza.

— AFP

Dancing with ill-composed note



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

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Life overall is gradually returning back as people and businesses have started recovering from the aftershocks of coronavirus. Back to normal daily life is taking place slowly with a thoughtful step forward. This is a positive sign as the sun is shining again after the storm! The lesson is learned, experience has gained and force has geared up for a better future. The best is yet to come regardless of what all has happened to individuals, societies, nations and the whole world.

There is no doubt that coronavirus pandemic has changed people's lifestyle and attitude too. However, what matters is the change that will last with them! How will people live when it is all over? Perhaps many futurists have their particular visions of life once the coronavirus battle is over. They have come out with different assumptions based on intuition, rulebooks, legends or probably past incidents and similar historical phenomena. However, all of this might be just thoughts and expectations.

Predicting the future is not a piece of cake that anyone can try out! As they say it takes the finest, bravest minds to dare. The world is witnessing massive and rapid change in most spheres of life. Although this change is inspired by the push in science or technology, and bumped by the worldwide health emergency, it is hard to find a sound forecast. Coronavirus will fast-forward the fourth industrial revolution and digitalisation of most services in town if not all.

In view of that, governments and people are luckily getting their strength back to return to normalcy. Employees of many government entities have come back on full board resuming work from office. Some corporates have started partial boarding of employees, while some are still maintaining work from home approach. Every organisation works based on what best serves them in the current diverse circumstances. Nevertheless, all have taken a step forward towards readjusting to the new normal and reviving the spirit of their employees.

With this positive move on the way to recovery, all should be on a standby mode as life is still limping and gently navigating the right direction. After the lockdown of most businesses and activities, life has steadily started dancing back! It is somehow struggling with a shaky dance like a dancer with a high heel; nervous and afraid of falling down.

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OMAN AWARDS BLOCK 58 TO TETHYS OIL

MUSCAT: The Omani government signed on Sunday an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with Tethys Oil Qatbeet Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Swedish energy firm Tethys Oil, for Block 58 onshore Oman.

The agreement was signed by Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas, with Hussain bin Ahmed al Lawati, Executive Director of External and Corporate Affairs for Tethys Oil.

The block is located in the southern part of the Sultanate adjacent to Tethys Oil's operated exploration licence Block 49. Tethys Oil will through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Qatbeet Limited be the operator of the block and hold a 100 per cent license interest.

Block 58 is located in



the Dhofar Governorate in the southern part of Oman and covers an area of 4,557 km². Block 58 straddles the western flank of the South Oman Salt Basin and the Western Deformation Front. A total of 7,600 km of 2D seismic and 1,100 km² of 3D seismic data acquired by previous operators has been made available to Tethys Oil as well as raw logs and well reports from two wells drilled within the block

boundaries. Both wells encountered hydrocarbon shows. Multiple play concepts are believed to exist within the block boundaries, including plays familiar to Tethys, with several leads identified.

The EPSA for Block 58 covers an initial exploration period of three years with an optional extension period of another three years. In case of a commercial oil or gas discovery, the EPSA will be transformed in to a

15-year production license which can be extended for another five years. In case of a commercial discovery, an Oman Government Company has a right to acquire up to a 30 per cent interest in Block 58 against refunding of past expenditure. The initial work commitments during the first period include a 3D seismic campaign and drilling of two exploration wells.

"We are very happy to have been given the opportunity to explore for hydrocarbons on Block 58. The signing of this EPSA represents another step in Tethys Oil's strategy in Sultanate of Oman. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for this exciting opportunity," says Tethys Managing Director Magnus Nordin.

Galfar wins \$297 million road dualisation contract

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT: Galfar Engineering & Contracting, a publicly listed Omani firm, has announced that it's been awarded a contract valued at nearly \$297 million for the dualisation of a key stretch of the highway linking the northern and southern parts of the Sultanate.

The contract, awarded by the Ministry of Transport via the Government Tender Board, grants Section 4 of the Adam -



Thamrait road project to Galfar for a value of RO 115 million, the company said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Sunday.

Section 4, covering a 135-kilometre length from Maqshan to Dawka, will be implemented in 36 months, said the company. "We expect this contract to be

important in underpinning the company's revenues and in boosting its capabilities in such projects," Dr Hamoud bin Rashid al Toobi, CEO – Galfar, stated.

In all, contracts totalling around \$655 million were awarded by the Tender Board recently for the dualisation of a 717-kilometre stretch of the Adam - Thamrait carriageway.

It was tendered out in roughly three equal sections: 3, 4 and 5. A formal announcement for Sections 3 and 5 is still awaited.



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: For the third consecutive year, Oman maintained its dominant position as the world's biggest exporter of gypsum – shipping an approximately 9.01 million tons of the commodity last year primarily to the ASEAN countries, Japan, India, Bangladesh and South/East African countries.

The Sultanate outperformed Thailand – long the leading exporter of gypsum globally – which saw its tally slump to 6.40 million tonnes last year. Iran with exports of 5.31 million tonnes, was the next big player, while Pakistan, Bhutan, Australia, and Mexico accounted for around 0.99 million tonnes between themselves.

But with demand soaring from Asia and South/East African countries for gypsum – a key raw material in cement production as well as gypsum plaster-board – the Sultanate is well-placed to capitalise on this demand growth by harnessing its prodigious deposits of this industrial mineral, according to a Muscat-based industry expert.

Ramachandran, CEO – Zawawi Minerals LLC, a leading Omani exporter of gypsum, said the Sultanate's geostrategic

location, coupled with its superior port and logistics infrastructure, gives Oman an unrivalled advantage in plugging a global supply deficit estimated at over 230 million tonnes during 2020 – 2034.

“Oman is emerging as the single most important source for natural gypsum for across Asia and South/East Africa,” said Ramachandran.

India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Japan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, UAE and Qatar, among other South/East African countries. Asian cement and gypsum board manufacturers are likely to face issues regarding its availability and cost in the near future. Identifying and ensuring a consistent supply of gypsum has become a challenge for many of these countries.”

PREEMINENT POSITION:

The Sultanate is emerging as the single most important supplier for Asia and South/East African countries, with almost no competitors.

“The tightening demand-supply scenario will be reflected in an upward trend in Omani gypsum export volumes and FOB prices and this dominant position will also give Oman major leverage in controlling the imported gypsum market in the regions.”

Last year, the Sultanate accounted for around 42 per cent of total exports of gypsum into the Asian and South / East African markets, aggregating around 21.71 million tonnes, says the industry expert.

“The race is on to secure long term sources of natural gypsum, especially in regions of the world that have growing demand for imported gypsum, such as

Gypsum imports by Asian and South/East African countries are projected to grow at a CAGR of around 6 – 7 per cent during the 2020 – 2034 timeframe, cumulatively aggregating to nearly 525 million tonnes. Much of this demand will come from India, one of the world's largest gypsum importers, which has seen its dependence on overseas producers burgeon on the back of soaring domestic demand. Much of this growth is fuelled by expanding cement demand, which is projected to rise at the rate of 7 per cent CAGR over the long term to reach 550 – 600 million tonnes per annum by 2025.

With leading exporters Thailand facing severe constraints on its export volumes, and Iran the subject of recent US sanctions on mineral industries, the only other country in a unique position to address the supply deficit is the Sultanate, Ramachandran points out.

Also boding well for Oman as the world's preeminent source market for gypsum are domestic policy initiatives that support investment in gypsum mining and processing activities. The National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh), for example, has identified gypsum as an important mineral that can add value to the country's non-oil exports revenue. Likewise, the Public Authority for Mining (PAM) has set a minimum FOB selling price (presently \$12.50 per MT) for gypsum aimed at enhancing non-oil exports revenue.

Depending on Asian demand and supply trends, the FOB price can be increased to maximise country's non-oil export earnings in the coming years. The Sultanate of Oman can build on this landmark achievement and enhance non-oil export revenue growth from this promising economic industry, Ramachandran adds.

BUSINESS

Madinat Al Irfan begins construction of Customer Experience Centre

MUSCAT: Madinat Al Irfan Development Company SAOC, the partnership between Omran and Majid Al Futtaim Properties, today announced the contract award for construction of its Customer Experience Centre. The Centre will be the headquarters and sales hub for the joint venture company and will include interactive displays and a covered open-air plaza for project events.

The Customer Experience Centre is set amongst a range of premium commercial office buildings, central marketplace, health care district, hotel, residential and serviced apartment buildings and a central park forming part of the future central district.

This initial phase also includes master planned single-family residential neighbourhoods, with school, community recre-



ation centre, masjid, extensive community gardens and bikeways.

Talal al Rahbi, Chairman of Madinat Al Irfan Development Company, said: "The iconic Customer Experience Centre will be a flagship feature of the Sultanate's largest urban development project, and is set to be completed by Q1 2021. It follows the launch of the initial phase of the mixed-use development, and will be undertaken by the Joint Venture Company within Madinat

Al Irfan, on a 550,000 sqm site. This represents around 11 per cent of the overall site development which will be rolled out in numerous phases."

The Customer Experience Centre is designed to reflect a modern, forward-thinking architectural approach in line with the project's vision of sustainability, innovation and community connectivity.

Features include an impressive floating roof, which forms the base for

a Solar Farm and will power most of the building. The roof will cast gentle shadows over the grand open-air plaza, which will be used for corporate and community events.

Hawazen Esber, Chief Executive Officer, Majid Al Futtaim – Communities and Deputy Chair of Madinat Al Irfan Development Company's Board said: "The project will provide a new benchmark in terms of place-making, creating a vibrant community as well as a showcase for leading-edge design.

The Customer Experience Centre will incorporate balanced land uses, implement timeless urban design, adopt smart city practices and sustainable infrastructures as well as provide the opportunity to discover more about what destination will inspire."

DIGITISATION OF OMAN'S ELECTRICITY GRID BEGINS



MUSCAT: GE Renewable Energy's Grid Solutions has announced a partnership with Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) to drive the digitisation of Oman's power grid, starting with the implementation of an asset performance management solution covering six key 400 kV substations under OETC.

GE's Grid Solutions is supplying a central condition monitoring platform at

OETC's headquarters, consolidating the off-line inspections and the online monitoring data into one single place. GE's Asset Performance Management (APM) solution will help the OETC reliability team better orient their maintenance strategy from time-based to condition-based strategy - using automatic recommendations, asset health index, asset maintenance and risk indexes.

KEY INITIATIVE:

GE's Grid Solutions established a National Condition Monitoring Centre integrated with OETC's operations, to prioritise maintenance strategy for six key 400 kV substations

The critical power transformers and gas-insulated substations will be equipped with online monitoring systems that will collect the partial discharge and oil gas data, and automatically transmit them to the central platform.

For the remaining 2,000 High-Voltage assets, which will not be equipped with online monitoring devices, GE's Grid Solutions will perform scheduled inspections during the three-year con-

tract, to enrich the APM analytics with the most accurate and updated electrical data. GE's solution has been selected for its capability to help substation operators achieve 50 per cent failure rates reduction, 25 per cent maintenance costs reduction and a 20 per cent savings in replacement costs.

GE's Grid Solutions Oman's team will support OETC reaching the required levels of substations operational efficiency and productivity, with a high-level view on the critical assets' health – anticipating asset failures before they occur and thereby proposing an efficient replacement strategy.

The ultimate objective of OETC's project is to cover the full national transmission fleet composed of 85 High Voltage substations.

Bank Muscat support reaches 175 families

MUSCAT: The 7th edition of Bank Muscat's annual Tadamun programme, which is being organised by the bank in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and Sawa Nabni, has completed its activities in Muscat Governorate. The team also distributed household appliances in North and South Al Sharqiyah as well as North and South Al Batinah.

The programme, which is part of the bank's CSR programme and supports social welfare families across the Sultanate with essential household appliances, will now focus its attention on other governorates. The Tadamun programme mainly focuses on the distribution of essential home appliances,

including air-conditioners and refrigerators, to beneficiary families. This year, the Tadamun programme will benefit a total of 175 beneficiary families across the Sultanate.

The Tadamun programme has assisted over 1,100 social welfare families over the past seven years since its inception in 2013.

The CSR and sustainability strategy pursued by Bank Muscat focuses on delivering long-term benefits to the community and the nation.

Bank Muscat has extended its thanks and appreciation to the officials of the Ministry of Social Development and members of the Sawa Nabni team for their cooperation in the success of the programme.



METCO installs Hikvision thermal camera at OEPPA

MUSCAT: With the primary objective and vision of maintaining a safer work environment for all the employees, Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising (OEPPA), publishers of **Oman Observer**, recently installed Hikvision Temperature Screening Thermal Camera in Madinat Al Ilam office with support of METCO (Middle East Technology Company LLC).

Hikvision's Temperature Screening Thermographic Cameras are designed to detect elevated skin-surface temperatures, and can thus be used for rapid and preliminary temperature screening in office buildings, shopping malls, factories, hospitals, schools and other public places.

This technology aids in mitigating some of the danger and uncertainty surrounding the easing of lockdown and must be a part of the return to work strategies deployed in business across Muscat and other



regions. It is a critical tool in limiting the exposure of a potentially infected individual to others, thereby limiting the risk of a local epidemic resulting from an isolated case.

"We would like to appreciate the contribution from Hikvision and METCO Team for their support in installing the temperature screening camera. Our employees feel much safer and are able to report to work in normal manner to some extent with the help of this solution," said a representative of OEPPA.

Brexit to hold back UK economy's recovery from virus



ANDY JALIL

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Prolonged social distancing stipulated by the government with some easing of restrictions during the pandemic, and Brexit, will hold the UK economy's recovery from coronavirus, according to S&P credit rating agency. The agency disagrees with the Bank of England's (BoE) optimistic view about a sharp rebound.

S&P Global Ratings said it expects the UK economy to shrink by an enormous 8.1 per cent this year. And it said the economic rebound would take longer than expected, with growth next year of 6.5 per cent. Recent figures showed that UK GDP suffered a 2.2 per cent drop in the first quarter of 2020 – the worst fall since 1979. The BoE chief economist Andy Haldane had previously said UK economic outlook looked less grim but "considerable" risks remained.

This pessimistic view stands in contrast to the much rosier picture painted by him. In an online talk he said: "Both the UK and the global economies are already well into the recovery phase. The UK's recovery is more than two months old."

He said the UK's recovery could well be 'V-shaped' – a rapid fall in GDP followed by a quick bounce back. "It is early days, but my reading of the evidence is so far, so V". He said the UK and global economies were "already well into the recovery phase", but said both economies were recovering "from an exceptionally low starting point" following an unprecedented drop in GDP in the first quarter.

However, S&P were clearly not convinced by Haldane's argument. In a report, S&P senior economist Boris Glass said the company is "now more pessimistic" about "the pace at which the economy, and society, will return to a semblance of normal".

In particular, S&P said Brexit would act as a drag on growth. The ratings agency said it now thinks the UK will not extend the Brexit negotiations deadline after the end of this year. It said the UK is now likely to switch to a limited free trade regime at the end of December, causing problems for the economy.

"The switch to the new regime will come at an inopportune time, when the recovery is still fragile. It will dampen the rebound in 2021 and also slow growth in the following years," S&P said. The agency has long been wary of Brexit, handing the UK a double-notch credit rating downgrade after the referendum of 2016.

The report predicted the recovery will also take longer than initially expected because businesses and consumers must adjust to the "new normal". It said that some degree of social distancing may persist, even if it is not imposed for long.

"We now forecast the economy will still be around three per cent smaller by 2023 than we had expected prior to the pandemic and under the assumption of an extension of the transition period," Glass said.

BUSINESS

A China National Offshore Oil Corporation's (CNOOC) oil rig is seen in this image. — Reuters

Big Oil confronts possibility of terminal demand decline

PARIS: Although crude prices have rebounded from coronavirus crisis lows, oil execs and experts are starting to ask if the industry has crossed the Rubicon of peak demand.

The plunge in the price of crude oil during the first wave of coronavirus lockdowns — futures prices briefly turned negative — was due to the drop in global demand as planes were parked on tarmacs and cars in garages.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast that average daily oil demand will drop by eight million barrels per day this year, a decline of around eight per cent from last year.

While the agency expects an unprecedented rebound of 5.7 million barrels per day next year, it still forecasts overall demand will be lower than in 2019 owing to ongoing uncertainty in the airline sector.

Some are questioning whether demand will ever get back to 2019 levels.

"I don't think we know how this is going to play out. I certainly don't know," BP's new chief executive Bernard Looney said in May.

The COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing then with most planes grounded and white-collar workers giving up the commute to work from home.

"Could it be peak oil? Possibly. I would

THE PLUNGE IN THE PRICE OF CRUDE OIL DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWNS — FUTURES PRICES BRIEFLY TURNED NEGATIVE — WAS DUE TO THE DROP IN GLOBAL DEMAND AS PLANES WERE PARKED ON TARMACS AND CARS IN GARAGES

not write that off," Looney told the *Financial Times*.

The concept of peak oil has long generated speculation.

Mostly, it has been focused on peak production, with experts forecasting that prices would reach astronomical levels as recoverable oil in the ground runs out.

But in recent months, the concept of peak demand has come into vogue, with the coronavirus landing an uppercut into fuel demand for the transportation sector followed by a knock-out punch from the transition to cleaner fuels.

Michael Bradshaw, professor at Warwick business School, said environmental groups are already lobbying to prevent the Paris agreements becoming another casualty of the pan-

demic, stressing the need for a Green New deal for the recovery.

"If they are successful, demand for oil might never return to the peak we saw prior to COVID-19," he said in comments to journalists.

The transport sector may never fully recover, Bradshaw posited.

"After the pandemic, we might have a different attitude to international air travel or physically going into work," he said.

Other experts say we haven't reached the tipping point yet, and might not for a while.

"Many people have said, including some CEOs of some major companies, with the lifestyle changes now to teleworking and others we may well see oil demand has peaked, and oil demand will go down," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said recently.

"I don't agree with that. Teleconferencing alone will not help us to reach our energy and climate goals, they can only make a small dent," Birol added while unveiling a recent IEA report.

Moez al Ajmi at consulting and auditing firm E&Y dismissed as "science fiction" the idea that a definitive drop in oil demand could suddenly emerge.

He expects a slow recovery in demand even if the coronavirus leaves the global economy weakened. — AFP



‘Lack of focus in junior level hurts basketball’

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: Experienced national basketball coach Mohammed al Qusaimi opined that lack of focus in junior level has stopped the Sultanate teams in achieving top spots in the last years.

The head coach of Nizwa club added in his exclusive statements to *Oman Daily Observer* that the cadet and junior competitions were completed within a very short period that did not exceed two months. “The junior players should play for more than eight to nine months to develop and shape their technical and tactical skills. Having more games, getting better exposure and being more at the competition zone will help in improvement of the basketball player,” he said.

“Basketball is a special sport as it requires dedicated technical characteristics in the player. The overall height, length of the legs and arms and big foot sizes are some



of the main technical aspects preferred in each basketball player,” he added.

The former coach of the national team in 2012 explained that some of the talent centres are implementing wrong methodology in selecting the players. “Unfortunately, I have noticed that many of the junior development centres are applying the wrong process for selecting the players. After four to five years, the selected players’ technical

performances drop and they miss out on the national teams.

There are different reasons including the improper selection of the players.

As coaches we should not focus on short term gains only. Our target should be long term and the player should possess the technical standards taking into consideration the continuous training programmes,” the coach said.

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) launched its e-learning portals last month. The training and development committee at the association has a weekly schedule for the remote courses through ‘Zoom’ application. Al Qusaimi presented the third week of an online course on ‘Proper selection of potential players and long-term planning’ for the national coaches.

“I appreciate the OBA for this wonderful initiative at the right time as all the sporting activities are stopped due to the ongoing pandemic. I focused during the webinar on different significant tools for best practices on proper selection of players including the height and other essential technical aspects of the body. My advice to all the national coaches is to keep developing themselves in coaching and learning from different resources. There is no end for learning,” he concluded.

SPORTS

KIPSANG GETS 4-YEAR BAN

NAIROBI: Former marathon world record holder Wilson Kipsang of Kenya has been handed a four-year ban for anti-doping rule violations (ADRVs) that included using a fake photo of a traffic accident to justify one of four missed whereabouts appointments, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said on Friday.

World Athletics said Kipsang, a bronze medalist at the 2012 Olympics, had four whereabouts failures between April 2018 and May 2019. Three such failures within 12 months leads to an automatic ban.

Kipsang, 38, said he missed a test on May 17, 2019 due to a traffic accident involving an overturned lorry and also provided a photo of the crash. However, the image was found to be from an accident recorded on August 19, 2019.

"The World Athletics Disciplinary Tribunal has banned long-dis-

KENYAN MARATHON STAR GIVES FAKE-PHOTO EVIDENCE FOR MISSED TEST

tance runner Wilson Kipsang of Kenya for four years with effect from January 10, 2020 for whereabouts failures and tampering by providing false evidence and witness testimony," the AIU said.

"The athlete engaged in fraudulent and deceitful conduct by providing deliberately misleading and false information to the AIU in an attempt to obstruct and delay the investigation into his explanation and/or prevent normal procedures from occurring, namely the recording of a Missed Test against him," it added in its ruling.

Kipsang had been provisionally suspended in January. His competitive results from April 12, 2019 to January 10, 2020 were also disquali-

fied. He has the right to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

His management company said that "no prohibited substance was ever found" and confirmed they would study the decision and consider an appeal.

"We emphasise that there is no case of use of doping," the company said.

"The decision is not final and conclusive yet. Wilson has the opportunity to appeal the decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport."

Tampering or attempted tampering with any part of doping control results in a mandatory four-year ban.

The AIU said the ADRVs committed by Kipsang were treated as one single ADRV and the more severe sanction

was imposed.

Athletics Kenya President Jackson Tuwei said it was very sad news.

"Athletes should learn from such consequences because these are the things that we keep talking about every day. And unfortunately we still continue getting these kinds of results," he said.

"It affects everybody. It demoralises even ourselves. Why do they continue getting into that, particularly top athletes, elite athletes, who should be role models?... They are giving a bad example."

Kipsang joins a list of compatriots who have been sanctioned in recent years, including 2008 Olympic 1,500m champion Asbel Kiprop, former Boston and Chicago Marathon winner Rita Jeptoo and 2016 Olympic marathon champion Jemimah Sumgong.

Kenya was among the countries placed on the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) compliance watch list in 2016.

— Reuters





Juventus' Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon concedes a penalty against Torino. — AFP

BUFFON BREAKS SERIE A APPEARANCES RECORD

MILAN: Gianluigi Buffon set a new Serie A appearances record on Saturday as Juventus beat Torino 4-1 in the Turin derby to move seven points clear at the top of the table after nearest challengers Lazio lost to a Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired AC Milan.

The 42-year-old goalkeeper passed the previous record of 647 appearances he jointly held with AC Milan great Paolo Maldini as he started the game at the Allianz Stadium.

"Maybe... He definitely won't beat the record for scoring goals, though," coach Maurizio Sarri told Sky Sport Italia when asked if Buffon could still play the 35 games he needs to equal Alessandro Del Piero's overall record total of Juventus appearances.

Cristiano Ronaldo was among the scorers, becoming the first Juve player to score 25 Serie A goals in a season in 59



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo (R) celebrates with teammates. — AFP

years, as Sarri's men moved further clear of second-placed Lazio, who were beaten 3-0 by Milan at the Stadio Olimpico.

"We were a bit chaotic at the start of the second half, but when fatigue set in, that's when our quality emerged," added Sarri.

Buffon, who spent last season at French club Paris Saint-Germain before rejoining Juve this term, signed a one-year contract extension earlier this week.

The record comes 25 years after Buffon made

his Serie A debut for Parma and 19 years after he first signed for Juventus.

RONALDO BREAKS FREE-KICK DUCK

The hosts wasted little time in taking the lead as Paulo Dybala scored in the third minute with an excellent individual goal, collecting Juan Cuadrado's pass before jinking past two defenders and firing a left-footed shot into the roof of the net.

Juventus doubled the

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Juventus 4 (Dybala 3, Cuadrado 29, Ronaldo 61, Djidji 87-og) Torino 1 (Belotti 45+6-pen)

Sassuolo 4 (Caputo 5, Berardi 63-pen, Boga 77, Muldur 83) Lecce 2 (Lucioni 27, Mancosu 67-pen)

Lazio 0 AC Milan 3 (Calhanoglu 23, Ibrahimovic 34-pen, Rebic 59)

advantage just before the half hour as Ronaldo charged forward before laying the ball off for Cuadrado to drive low into the corner of the net.

Torino gave themselves hope when Andrea Belotti scored a penalty past Buffon in the sixth minute of first-half injury-time.

Simone Verdi was denied an equaliser early in the second half by the linesman's flag, but Ronaldo put the game to bed in the 61st minute with a brilliant free-kick. — AFP

SPORTS



Chelsea's Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Kepa Arrizabalaga in action with Watford's Will Hughes. — Reuters

CHELSEA WIN HOLDS OFF RAMPANT MAN UTD

LONDON: Chelsea held on to their place in the Premier League's top four by bouncing back to beat Watford 3-0 on Saturday after Manchester United briefly powered past with a 5-2 rout of struggling Bournemouth.

Third-placed Leicester also got back on track with Jamie Vardy reaching 100 top-flight goals in a comfortable 3-0 win against Crystal Palace, while Arsenal dealt a blow to Wolves' Champions League chase by winning 2-0 at Molineux on Saturday.

United's fearsome front four of Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial, Bruno Fernandes and Mason Greenwood, who netted twice, were all on the scoresheet as Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men hit five goals in a home Premier League game for the first time since 2011.

"Confidence is sky high. You get energy and confidence by performances and results and we are getting that at the minute," said Solskjaer, who is feeling the benefits of a 16-match unbeaten run.

"I have enjoyed the last few games to be honest and it is healthy. You don't



Chelsea's Ross Barkley celebrates scoring their third goal. — Reuters

age as quickly!" Bournemouth are moving fast in the other direction as they remain second bottom and the Cherries' defensive problems were quickly

exposed after they took a shock 16th-minute lead through Junior Stanislas. Greenwood got the comeback started as he smashed home from Fernandes's pass before

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Leicester 3 (Iheanacho 49, Vardy 77, 90) Crystal Palace 0

Manchester United 5 (Greenwood 29, 54, Rashford 35-pen, Martial 45, Fernandes 59) Bournemouth 2 (Stanislas 16, King 49-pen)

Norwich 0 Brighton 1 (Trossard 25)

Wolves 0 Arsenal 2 (Saka 43, Lacazette 86)

Chelsea 3 (Giroud 28, Willian 43-pen, Barkley 90+1) Watford 0

Rashford, from the penalty spot and Martial, with a stunning shot into the top corner, scored their 20th goals of the season.

"Mason is one of the best if not the best finisher I have worked with and seen," added Solskjaer. "He is so calm. He knows where to finish if it is on the training ground, here or in his garden at home."

Bournemouth were given hope when Josh King scored from the spot after Eric Bailly handled inside his own box just four minutes after coming on as a half-time substitute.

— AFP

FEATURES

IT'S LASORA SEASON IN BAHLA

Oman is a major exporter of a large variety of natural crops to neighbouring countries and beyond, thanks to the constant attention paid by the Sultanate to its agricultural sector. In Bahla this month, farmers are celebrating the harvest of Lasora, which is known as 'Mabu' or 'Khau' or 'Bamirah' in Arabic. Get to know more about this fruit crops... **page 20**

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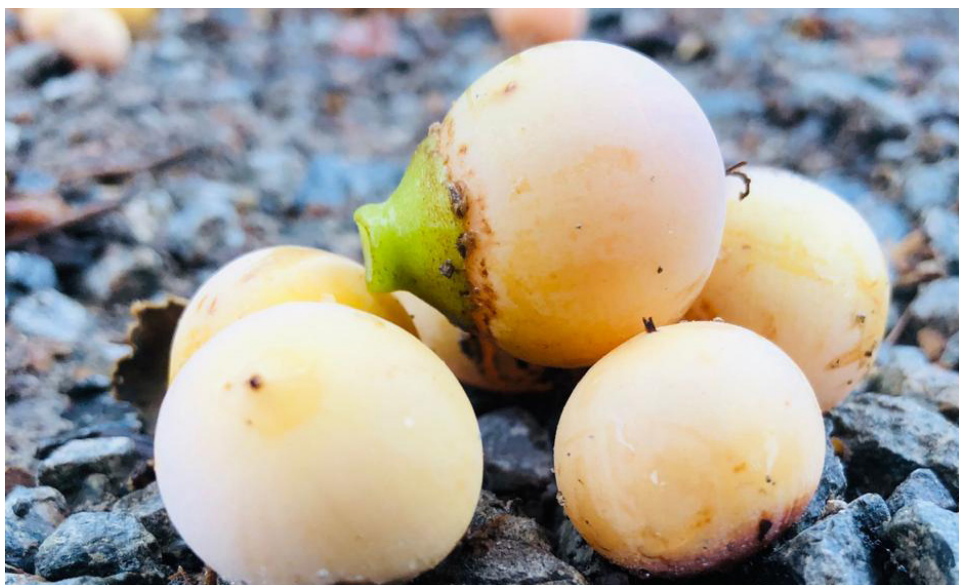
Koalas may be extinct in
an Australian state before
2050, study finds



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IT'S LASORA SEASON IN BAHILA



KABEER YOUSUF

Once an arid land, the Sultanate of Oman today is home for numerous indigenous fruits and vegetables, plants, flora and fauna that is unique to this country.

It's no wonder the country is a major exporter of a large variety of natural crops to neighbouring countries and beyond, thanks to the constant attention paid by the State that made the soil even more fertile and awakened farming conducive to the growth of several fruits and vegetables.

From Dhofar region's vast collection of crops starting with coconut, banana, papaya and the like, to Bahla's assortment of delicious fruits which have a steady stream of followers across the country, the people focus on agriculture is thriving.

While the COVID-19 lockdown period kept everyone away from their workplaces, Bahla's traditional farmers were busy cultivating Lasora, among other fruits.

Lasora, which is known as 'Mabu' or 'Khau' or 'Bamirah' in Arabic, is scientifically referred to its binomial name Cordia Myxa.

"Lasora is a fruit variety that we grew up seeing its different seasons, such as from small pit or seed stage to a small plant and then to a full bloom tree carrying this sweet fruit all over," Fatma al Shuraiqi, an airline official who has a vast collection of Lasora trees said.

Although a lot of Lasora trees adorn Bahla and the adjacent wilayats of Oman, most GCC countries have similar plants and they call it in dif-

ferent names.

Lasora is used for the treatment of delaying ageing of the human skin. It is also useful in treating cough, chest diseases, congestions, and the like. For various respiratory issues, our previous generation has taught us to turn to Lasora.

It grows few but people wait for it to bloom from small flower to fully grown fruit during June or July every year. It's a tropical fruit and requires a good amount of sunlight.

Just like coconut, Lasora is a multi-purpose tree, harvested from the wild for local use as a food, medicine and source of materials. It has been cultivated for its many uses since the time of the ancient Egyptians and is still sometimes cultivated nowadays for its edible and medicinal fruit in many areas of the tropics and subtopics.

The sticky, mucilaginous pulp of the fruit is the source of a well-known medicine in the Near and Middle East. Called 'sapistan', it is useful in the treatment of coughs, sore throats and chest-complaints on account of its demulcent property.

Lasora, aka gum berries, is fairly a fast-growing plant and can begin to flower when it is 3 to 5 years old and each fruit is about 35 mm in diameter. An average individual tree fruits would weigh about 5 kilos.

While the ripe fruit has a sweet, sticky, mucilaginous flesh which can be mixed with honey to make a sweetmeat or to sweeten gruels and porridges, the unripe fruits are eaten as a vegetable.

"The medicinal values of Lasora is aplenty. From anti-ageing to simple cough and cold and fever, each part of the plant is really useful", adds Fatma.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



How do you create dance in the age of coronavirus?

HOW DO YOU create dance in the age of coronavirus, when dancers are not supposed to touch each other and stay one or two metres apart? All across the world choreographers are grappling with the challenge of coming up with safe, socially distanced pieces that still set the heart aflutter. It may be completely counter-intuitive, but the very

rigidity of the restrictions has been liberating for some — allowing them to play on the new taboos and the dramatic tension around personal space the virus has brought with it. “It unleashed spontaneity!” declared the great German choreographer John Neumeier, the artistic director of the Hamburg Ballet. “In ballet, we are so used to

being free in the way we touch,” he told AFP. “Sometimes we take this for granted, because we touch everybody almost everywhere in doing pas de deux, in doing a lift. And now we have a situation where we cannot touch, where there is a distance, which immediately gives a new sense of tension.” With all the usual advance

planning thrown to the wind, Neumeier said the virus has allowed him to create without thinking about what the costumes or sets would look like. “I was working with the purest material — just dancers in an empty space,” he said. The restrictions have forced him to “concentrate much more on the art of the solo” for his new work, “Ghost Light”, which will premiere — virus permitting — on September 6. Neumeier is using 57 dancers, but he can’t bring them all together for now. “It is a kind of mosaic,” he told AFP. “I work with six dancers, then I work with eight dancers, then with two — but I don’t know what it will be like when we put it all together.”

ZOOM REHEARSALS

Annabelle Ochoa Lopez has become dance’s queen of Zoom over the last few months, making a series of short pieces on the teleconferencing app. Like so much else in the lockdown, it happened by accident, said the Belgian-Colombian choreographer. “Two French dancers who were retiring from the Norwegian Ballet approached me because they couldn’t do their farewell show. They asked if I could make something for them on Zoom. “I thought, ‘OK, that will be very awkward but let’s do it,” said the Netherlands-based creator.

“They had three children... and sometimes the children would be there saying hello from the couch.” In the work they made together, “Where do the birds go?”, which is now on YouTube, the couple — Julie Gardette and Francois Rousseau — actually dance on their sofa. Creating online has changed the way Ochoa Lopez works. —AFP

FEATURES

A close-up photograph of a koala clinging to a tree trunk. The koala's eyes are closed, and it has a peaceful expression. Its thick, grey fur is clearly visible. The tree trunk is brown and textured. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

Koalas may be extinct in an Australian state before 2050, study finds

KOALAS WILL BECOME extinct in the Australian state of New South Wales before 2050 unless there is "urgent government intervention," a parliamentary inquiry has found.

The report into the cuddly marsupials was released on Tuesday after a year-long study by a committee of the Upper House of New South Wales (NSW) parliament.

Experts told the inquiry that the recent bush fires that burned more than 5.5 million hectares of land in NSW killed at least 5,000 koalas, while the blazes destroyed almost a quarter of the koala habitat on public land.

In NSW, where koalas are designated as threatened species, populations were already in trouble before the bush fires, suffering from habitat loss, road kills, dog attacks, climate change, and diseases.

"The ongoing destruction of koala habitat

through the clearing of land for agriculture, development, mining and forestry has severely impacted most koala populations in the state over many decades," the committee's chair Cate Faehrmann said in the report.

The committee also found that climate change was severely impacting koalas, their food, and their habitat, as it was exacerbating the threat from other natural disasters such as droughts and bush fires.

The report said the state government's current estimate of 36,000 koalas living in the wild was "outdated and unreliable."

It is "deeply distressing but extremely important for committee members to agree to the finding that koalas will become extinct in NSW before 2050 without urgent government intervention," the report said.

Beyond NSW, koalas are also found in Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland.— dpa