

Be Careful,
Be Responsible!

#Living_with_COVID19



www.omanobserver.om
editor@omanobserver.om

ESTABLISHED IN 1981

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUEILI

VOL. 39 NO. 241 | PAGES 22

HM SENDS GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT EVARISTO

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Evaristo Carvalho of Sao Tome and Principe, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly people of his country. — **ONA**

SECRET GATHERINGS LED TO SURGE IN CASES

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As the government is trying to control the spread of coronavirus, the infection count has spiked in the recent weeks raising an alarm in the Sultanate.

According to the Ministry of Health, the number of COVID-19 cases is shooting up just because of the unacceptable behaviour of some people who are not following preventive measures.

The ministry has blamed 'secret social' gatherings for the sharp increase in cases. The total number of positive cases in the Sultanate

COVID-19 survey begins today

The Ministry of Health will start the national survey (serological) for COVID-19 infection from Sunday.

DETAILS ON P2

now climbed to 54,697 with 1,083 new infections announced on Saturday.

Of the new cases announced on Saturday by the ministry, 786 are Omanis and 297 are residents. The death toll now stands at 248 with four more people succumbing to the virus in the last 24 hours. **TURN TO P3**



TABSEEL SEASON FOR FARMERS

The governorates of the Sultanate are witnessing one of the famous local activities associated with date-palm production known as 'Tabseel'. It is celebrated annually by Omani farmers. It is also considered one of the most important agricultural seasons due to its economic returns. It usually continues for a period ranging from two to three weeks. **DETAILS ON P5**

Oman among top 50 nations in UN e-govt survey

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The government's efforts for a digital transformation of all public services in the country seem to be paying dividends.

For the first time, Oman has made into the elite 'Very High E-Government Development Index' (EGDI) as it improved the rankings in the E-Government Survey 2020 of the United Nations.

Oman improved to 50th rank globally from 63 in 2018 with a score of 0.7749 in the overall eGovernment Index.

This is the first time in history where Oman has got an entry in the Very High EGDI group. This is an improvement of 13 positions compared to the last edition. The scores also improved from 0.6846 in 2018 to 0.7749 in 2020, which is an improvement of 13 per cent.

In the Online Service Sub

Index, Oman is ranked 24th in the world with a score of 0.8529. Oman has improved from 43rd position last year to 24th this year. The scores also improved 0.8125 in 2018 to 0.8529 in 2020 which is an improvement of 5 per cent. Oman is the second-best country among the GCC nations.

In the Human Capital Sub-Index Oman is now ranked 72nd in the world with a score of 0.7751.

In the Telecom

Infrastructure Sub Index Oman is now ranked 63rd in the world with a score of 0.6967. Oman improved from 64th position to 63rd position.

The UN report said that governments worldwide have stepped up its central role as a necessary element of communication, leadership and collaboration between policymakers and society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Salalah gets first rain of khareef

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: The plains of Salalah received the first rains of the monsoon (khareef) season even as the mountainous villages around the city have been receiving sporadic rains for the last 15 days.

As per the official calendar, the khareef season starts on June 21 and continues till September 31.

The building up humidity and off and on light drizzling was giving the hint of the arrival of rains at any moment. It started raining in most parts of Salalah at about 5 pm.

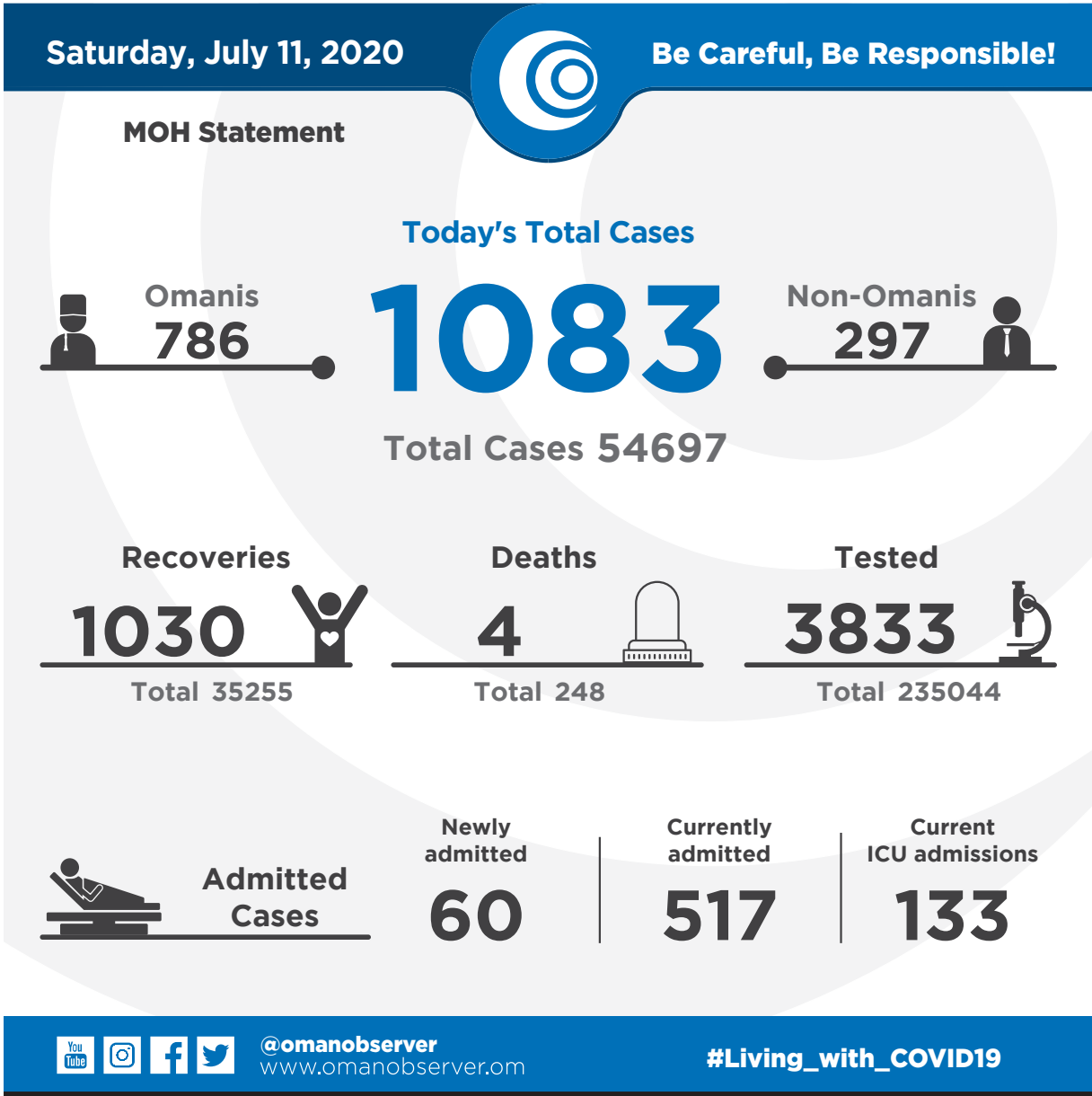
The rain, however, was not much of enthusiasm among the local people. The COVID-19 has taken away the sheen of the season. Hardly a few people ventured out to feel the rain, which oth-

erwise would have been a big crowd puller, and the Salalah roads would have full of cars all over.

The rain, however, is a big relief from humidity and temperature has also gone down by about two degrees. The temperature here is ranging between 29 and 27 degrees Celsius.

Some feeling of freshness is there but the spirit for the monsoon season is missing. This is the time when Salalah would see large scale footfall of tourists and there would have been large scale enquiries for accommodation from among the tourists.

Under lockdown over COVID-19 fears, Salalah is waiting for a time when the humdrum of the season is back and normalcy is restored everywhere.



COVID-19 survey begins today

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health will start the national COVID-19 survey from Sunday. The ministry said that it will communicate directly on phone with expatriates and citizens who will be selected for random under testing under the national survey and urged everyone to rely on official sources for information.

Over a period of 10 weeks, the survey that is expected to cover all

governorates will take samples from citizens and residents.

The survey will collect around 20,000 samples at the rate of 5,000 samples over a period of five days and 380 to 400 samples from each governorate.

It also aims to 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 symptoms.

In addition, it will assess the impact of the standard of living on the extent of the disease and the effects of lockdown on the spread of the epidemic compared to the areas that were not in lockdown.

3-D printing of face shields by start-up

MUSCAT: Atoms Lab, an emerging enterprise incubated by the National Business Centre (NBC) of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has succeeded in manufacturing antimicrobial face shields using 3-D printing.

Yumna al Sharji, CEO of Atoms Lab, (pictured), said



the company mixed polymer and copper to obtain the microbial resistance quality on the shield.

During the first months that followed the outbreak of the COVID-19, the company manufactured more than 1,000 shields which were sold in the Sultanate and



exported to GCC countries.

Besides, the company provided 3-D printers for enterprises that have undertaken the manufacturing of personal protective equipment (PPE), with the Sultanate producing more PPE than any other country in the

GCC region, Al Sharji said. The sale volume of 3-D printers in the Sultanate was the highest among the GCC states. The National Business Centre, established by Madayn in 2013, is the key incubator of small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate and offers technical, managerial and logistic support to entrepreneurs and innovators to help them set up economically viable ventures. Besides, NBC plays a big role in accelerating the economy by encouraging and inspiring young Omanis to uncover their entrepreneurial potentials. — ONA

Expats need not visit civil status office to renew resident cards

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Expatriate employees and their family members are not required to visit the Directorate General of Passport and Civil Status to renew their resident cards.

Speaking to the Observer, Maj.Mudhar al Mazrui, Directorate of Development, Royal Oman Police said, "As the fingerprints are already stored in the system, the PRO of the organisations can finalise the documentation of residence cards for expatriates."

Al Mazrui added that fines for the delays have been postponed until July 15. "So there won't be any fine for



delay or for not possessing any of the documentation."

At the same time, ROP has opened service centres in Muscat in Al Khoud, Al Amerat, Maabela, Qurayat police stations, apart from new ones at Al Athaiba, Al Hamra Police Station in the

Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah and Marmul in the Dhofar Governorate.

These centres are providing all the services that are given by ROP such as renewal of a driving licence, vehicle registration, renewal of passports,

and ID/residence cards. "So, people do not have to go directly to the Directorates of Traffic, Passports, and Civil Affairs. This is not the case in Muscat alone but all the governorates of the Sultanate," he said.

SECRET GATHERINGS LED TO SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

FROM PAGE 1

The data released by the ministry also shows that 60 people were admitted to hospitals on Saturday, taking the number of people in different hospitals to 517, including 133 in the Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

"People need to be responsible if we need to get the infected numbers down. It is just common sense to follow guidelines to protect

ourselves", said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

While ruling out possibility that reopening of commercial establishments led to the spike in infections, the minister said that people are still meeting in homes to celebrate weddings or organise birthday parties.

"We must always be disciplined to ensure that

we remain safe. For this, we must wear mask, must not go out if not necessary and practice social distancing", the minister urged.

Echoing the same tone, Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary for Health Affairs, said that there have been serious lapses in the behaviour of some people that led to the escalation in COVID-19 cases.

TECS

TECHNICAL SUPPLIES INTERNATIONAL CO. LLC

Wanted Urgently

A/C Technician & Cook

A/C Technician

- 5 Years Experience in Oman
- Ready to join Immediately (with NOC)
- Experience in Split & Cassette A/C

Cook

- 5 Years Experience in Hotels and Restaurants
- Ready to Join Immediately with NOC
- Specialist in Indian (preference will be given to Mughlai) & Chinese foods

Email your CV:

tools.recruit1@gmail.com

Contact us by Whatsapp

OMAN

Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team

Mohd Al Rashdi : Head Office

99841230

m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari : Head Office

99639264

wadialmeeh@yahoo.com

Bakhit Al Shihri : Salalah Office

92998577

bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Abdullah Al Abri : Nizwa Office

99429094

nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Musalam Al Saidi : Suhar Office

99429192

sohardaily@outlook.com

OMAN

E-education taxing for teachers, kids

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Online education is a taxing challenge for everyone — teachers, students and parents.

Teachers are exerting more due to enhanced workload of planning, preparation, implementation, correction, clarification, virtual evaluation and assessment. Experts say that increased digital use can affect a student's physical and mental health development.

"Online teaching post-COVID-19 is entirely different from what we are trained to. No teacher can control the children online for more than 45 minutes, and preparation for teaching without becoming self-conscious in front of mobile cameras is a daunting task," Omani teacher Huzaim al Balushi said.

Today most of the children have iPads, laptops and tabs and they are using technology all the more. They have access to almost all apps and they can be exposed to both good and bad elements without our knowledge, according to Huzaim.

"There is a big difference between teaching online and in the classroom as different skills are required for a digit-



al classroom," says a teacher from an expatriate school.

"First, we were not used to it and we had to get accustomed to the system with lots of persistence. Secondly, we are losing close contact with the children since they are not taught in a classroom atmosphere. Thirdly, looking at 25 to 30 children's faces is a strenuous task and the communication is often missing," another teacher said, adding that yet another challenge is some children playing with the microphone and camera, sending a chat message to one another.

Parents are also equipping themselves with the technical know-how of digital training, the new normal for the education sector.

"Children are being introduced to a system which they were never used to and it is just a matter of time before they get used to it. Gone are the days when parents had better control over kids wasting time over technical gizmos whereas we are asking them to use phones, tabs and laptops for studies," said Azra Aleem, a parent.

However, increased usage of digital mediums is not without drawbacks, according to health experts. Their concerns about online education range from brain development to postural issues.

"Millions of children are at increased risk of harm as their lives move increasingly online during the lockdown



No teacher can control the children online for more than 45 minutes, and preparation for teaching without becoming self-conscious in front of mobile cameras is a daunting task

**HUZAIM
AL BALUSHI**

in the COVID-19 pandemic," said a report from UNICEF published in April.

"Attending school on a computer or coaching poses a lot of mental and physical problems," says Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist Internal Medicine.

"Students have to constantly concentrate which needs mental strain and sitting long hours on chairs may give body ache, eye problems, headache, etc. Younger children need to be trained specially as most of them may not be used to sitting for such long hours."

HYPERLOCAL E-COMMERCE PLATFORM LAUNCHED

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: TawseelOnline and Catseye Systems and Solutions Pvt Ltd have come together to launch a unique hyperlocal e-commerce and logistics ecosystem for the Sultanate and the whole of GCC region.

This is the result of a joint venture between Overseas Treasures LLC, Muscat, and Mumbai-based Catseye Systems and Solutions Pvt Ltd.

Alok Kumar, Chief Technology Officer, OT-Oman, told the Observer that the venture would herald a supply chain revolution in the Sultanate as it is a multi-lingual round-the-clock hyperlocal platform for e-commerce and logistics, bringing



Alok Kumar,
Chief Technology Officer, OT-Oman

its customers all they need to their doorstep.

Launched recently in April 2020, the platform aims to serve the local businesses by generating jobs and providing opportunities to sell their products and services online and reach out to a larger audience.

Retailers, logistics companies, suppliers and manufac-



Said Al Harthi,
Chairman, OT-Oman

turers would be the primary stakeholders who would greatly benefit from this platform.

The hyperlocal e-commerce platform consists of two responsive and progressive mobile/web applications namely TawseelOnline and TawseelOnline Store.

TawseelOnline is the customer-facing application with

which customers can place the orders from their local and favourite stores.

TawseelOnline Store is for the local businesses selling on the platform to quickly view and process their orders.

Said al Harthi, Chairman, OT-Oman, says TawseelOnline Logistics is the logistics aggregator platform with which they provide courier management services in a C2C, B2C and B2B model to the subscribers all over the Sultanate.

"We are delivery aggregators and have been getting our delivery orders from individual customers, business customers and online stores, which we provide to our logistics and last mile delivery partners to fulfil," he says.

DATES GET READY FOR SALE AND EXPORT

MUSCAT: Several governorates of the Sultanate witnessed Tabseel, which involves high-temperature boiling of certain types of dates like Al Mabsali, Al Madlouki and Abu Naranja in copper pots.

Tabseel begins after the dates have ripened and turned yellow or Busoor. They are cooked and boiled for between 15 and 20 minutes. Then it is left in the sun to get dried for 5 to 10 days. This period varies depending on weather and temperature. Once dried, dates are packed in bags for sale or export.

Farmers sell their Busoor to the government represented by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The ministry receives the crop every year in its stores in Al Wadi Al Kabir from the various governorates



of the Sultanate. It provides subsidy to farmers who supply their Busoor to the ministry. It also pays subsidies to farmers who directly export their Busoor to foreign markets to encourage them to find new markets.

The ministry starts the process of dates procurement by cleaning the Busoor stores in Al Wadi Al Kabir. The ministry also awarded a tender for handling and supplying of Busoor, as well as an auction for the sale of Busoor for the Oman Date



Production and Packaging Company.

In 2019, large quantities of Busoor were exported directly by farmers without supplying them to the ministry's stores. The ministry provides a subsidy of RO 62,500 per tonne to encourage farmers to increase the direct delivery of their crops. The ministry underscores the need for cleanliness of Busoor crop that is supplied to it or exported to maintain its reputation in local and foreign markets. — **ONA**

Many units closed for COVID-19 violations

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: A number of commercial establishments and industrial units were closed in the Sultanate for not following the regulations issued by the Supreme Committee tackling the COVID-19 situation.

Although Muscat Municipality did not release the figures, Madayn, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates said it closed 42 units for violations relating to precautionary measures.

“The municipality closed a number of commercial activities due to their failure to adhere to the regulations and violation of the Supreme Committee decisions. Inspections will continue to ensure proper implementation of the decisions”, the civic body said in a statement.

According to a statement by Basim al Zadjali, senior health, safety and environmental health specialist at Madayn, inspection visits were conducted in 2,392 industrial units to monitor their commitment to precautionary measures till the end of June.

“Of these units, 1,669 were found to be adhering to the precautionary measures, warnings and practices; correction notices were issued to 723 units; and violations were filed against 43 units, out of which 42 were closed,” it said.

He said that Madayn conducts continuous inspections at the industrial units to ensure the implementation of precautionary measures in accordance with laws.

Through the inspection visits, penalties are being applied on the violating industrial units and fines collected, he said.



Muscat Municipality

Announcement No. 38/2020

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tenders documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E.Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/066	2020/MM/QS-37	RFP of Support and Maintenance Services for Oracle Sun Solaris Servers (E- Tender)	Rial 25	12/08/2020	23/08/2020	Excellent
PRE/20/067	2020/MM/QS-38	Technical Support Services For ITSecurity Appliances (E- Tender)	Rial 25	12/08/2020	23/08/2020	Excellent

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.
- Original Tender Bonds are to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Ground Floor at the reception .
- 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).

DON'T LET OUR GUARD DOWN



SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate have been consistently increasing for the past six weeks with more cases and more deaths. At the moment there is no proven cure for the pandemic, it is now highly important that all of us take extra precautions to ensure we continue following all health, safety and social distancing measures that we don't let our guard down. As scientists and doctors continue their work to understand and treat COVID-19 our knowledge of, and ability to treat and prevent the virus will improve.

Preventative measures are your first line of defense. The best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is to practice good hygiene and reduce your chances of being infected or spreading the virus by taking some simple precautions as suggested by the Oman's ministry of health and World Health Organisation:

- ◆ Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands

HOW SHOULD YOUR FACE MASK BE WORN?

Always wash your hands with soap and water before touching the face mask.

Remove mask from the dispenser or box and make sure the masks do not have any holes or tears.

Make sure you determine which side is the top and which is the front of the mask, so you can properly wear the mask.

Face masks with ear loops: hold by the ear loops and put the loops around each ear.

Face masks with ties: bring mask to your nose and place the ties over your head to secure with a tie.

Face masks with bands: hold mask to your nose and pull the top strap over the crown of your head and pull the bottom strap over your head so it is at the nape of your neck.

Pull the mask over your mouth and chin

with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Why?

Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizers out of children's reach. Teach them how to apply the sanitizer and monitor its use. Apply a coin-sized amount on your hands. There is no need to use a large amount of the product. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose

immediately after using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, as it can cause irritation. Hand sanitizers recommended to protect against COVID-19 are alcohol-based and therefore can be flammable. Do not use before handling fire or cooking.

- ◆ Maintain at least one metre (three feet) distance between yourself and others. Why?

When someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain

virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person has the disease.

- ◆ Avoid going to crowded places. Why?

Where people come together in crowds, you are more likely to come into close contact with someone that has COVID-19 and it is more difficult to maintain physical distance of 1 metre (3 feet).

- ◆ Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Why?

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and infect you.

- ◆ Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. Why?

Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

UNITED NATIONS FAILS TO FIND CONSENSUS ON SYRIAN AID

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council failed to find a consensus on pro-longing cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria late on Friday after Russia and China vetoed an extension and members rejected a counter proposal by Moscow.

Without an agreement, authorisation for the transport of aid to war-torn Syria, which has existed since 2014, expired on Friday night.

Germany and Belgium were working on a final initiative to save the effort, with hopes of bringing it to a vote this weekend.

"We are ready to work round the clock, and call on others to think of the millions of people in Syria waiting for the Security Council to decide their fate," said German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, who holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month.

After Moscow and Beijing wielded vetoes for a second time this week, only three countries joined Russia in

Russia and China vetoed an extension and members rejected a counter proposal by Moscow



Keeping only one Syrian border crossing open would cut off 1.3 million people living north of Aleppo from humanitarian aid, says Kelly Craft, Washington's Ambassador to the UN. – **AFP**

backing its proposal to cut the number of aid transit points from two to one.

China supported Russia, but seven countries including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Belgium voted against, with four abstentions.

An attempt by Russia to pass a similar resolution also failed earlier this week.

The NGO Oxfam had warned that stopping cross-border aid would be "a devastating blow to the millions of Syrian families who rely on this aid for clean water,

food, healthcare and shelter."

Thirteen countries voted in favour of an earlier German-Belgian draft, but Moscow and Beijing opposed the extension because they favour a more limited proposal.

European countries and the US want to maintain two crossing points on the Turkish border -- at Bab al Salam, which leads to the Aleppo region, and Bab al Hawa, which serves the Idlib region.

The UN authorisation allows the body to distribute aid to displaced Syrians without needing permission from Damascus.

Russia and China argue that the UN authorisation violates Syria's sovereignty, and that aid can increasingly be channelled through Syrian authorities.

The latest proposal by Russia, which claims to want continued aid for the insurgent Idlib region, would have kept only the Bab al Hawa access point open, and for one year. – **AFP**

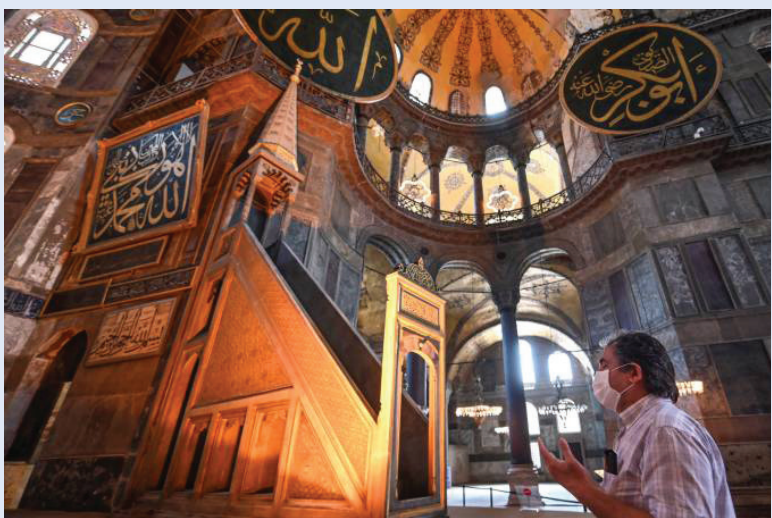
HAGIA SOPHIA TO OPEN FOR PRAYERS ON JULY 24

ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities started inspections at Istanbul's iconic Hagia Sophia on Saturday for logistical preparations to make the former museum compatible with Islamic prayers, a day after the country announced its re-conversion.

On Friday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that the sixth-century building is being re-converted into a mosque, shortly after a court decision to that end.

The president said the site will be opened to Muslim worshippers on July 24 for the first time since 1934, when the founders of the secular republic made it a museum.

The building was closed to visitors on Saturday, state news agency Anadolu said, adding that teams from



A Turkish visitor prays in front of the Apsis, inside Hagia Sophia museum in Istanbul. – **AFP**

the Tourism Ministry were inspecting the dome and four minarets for preparations.

Erdogan on Friday said preparations at the building, home to some world-renowned Christian symbols and mosaics, would continue even after the designated opening.

The building was handed over to the religious directorate, whose head, Ali Erbas, said on Saturday that his office already started preparations to have the mosque ready by July 24. – **dpa**

IRAN BANS WEDDINGS, WAKES TO HALT VIRUS SPREAD

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani called on Saturday for big gatherings such as weddings and wakes to be banned to stem a rise in coronavirus infections, but insisted the country's economy had to stay open. Shortly after Rouhani's televised speech, a police official in Tehran announced the closure of all wedding and mourning venues in the capital until further notice.

The death toll on Saturday rose by 188 over the previous 24 hours to 12,635, while the total number of diagnosed cases reached 255,117, up by 2,397 during the same period, Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on state TV. – **Reuters**

WHO urges aggressive virus measures as flare-ups spark new closures

GENEVA: The World Health Organization has urged countries grappling with coronavirus to step up control measures, saying it is still possible to rein it in, as some nations clamp fresh restrictions on citizens.

With case numbers world-wide more than doubling in the past six weeks, Uzbekistan on Friday returned to lockdown and Hong Kong said schools would close from Monday after the city recorded “exponential growth” in locally transmitted infections. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on countries to adopt an aggressive approach, highlighting Italy, Spain, South Korea and India’s biggest slum to show it was possible to stop the spread, no matter how bad the out-

break. The health agency’s comments came as US President Donald Trump was forced to cancel an election rally in New Hampshire, citing an approaching storm. Trump has pushed to hold large gatherings against health advice as epidemiologists warn of the dangers posed by the virus moving through the air in crowded and confined spaces.

The virus has killed at least 556,140 people worldwide since it emerged in China last December.

More than 12.3 million cases have been registered in 196 countries and territories, triggering massive economic damage.

US THE WORST HIT
The United States, the country worst hit by the illness,



Citizens in Uzbekistan were from Friday facing lockdown restrictions again that were originally imposed in March but lifted gradually over the past two months. — AFP

reported almost 64,000 new cases on Friday and the death toll now stands at just under 134,000, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Brazil, the second-hardest hit, surpassed 70,000 deaths and reported 45,000 new infections, the health ministry said. In Uzbekistan, citizens were from Friday facing lockdown restrictions again that were originally imposed in March but lifted gradually over the past two months. The Central Asian country’s return to confinement followed a decision by Australia to lock down its second-biggest city Melbourne from Thursday.

A police officer manning a checkpoint on the outskirts of the former Soviet republic’s capital said only drivers with “a good reason” to enter Tashkent - such as deliver-

ing food or other vital supplies - could pass.

Restaurants, gyms, swimming pools and non-food markets have all shut their doors until at least August 1.

In Hong Kong, the spike marks a setback for the city after daily life had largely returned to normal with restaurants and bars resuming regular business and cultural attractions reopening.

“Across all walks of life, we are all being tested to the limit,” the WHO’s Tedros told a virtual news conference in Geneva. “From countries where there is exponential growth, to places that are loosening restrictions and now starting to see cases rise. “Only aggressive action combined with national unity and global solidarity can turn this pandemic around,” he said. — AFP

Trump commutes Stone’s prison sentence

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump commuted the sentence of his longtime friend and adviser Roger Stone on Friday, sparing him from prison after he was convicted of lying under oath to lawmakers investigating Russian interference in the 2016 US election. Trump’s decision to commute Stone’s sentence days before he was due to report to prison marked the Republican president’s most assertive intervention to protect an associate in a criminal case and his latest use of executive clemency to benefit an ally. Democrats condemned Trump’s action as an assault on the rule of law. “Roger Stone has already suffered greatly,” the White House said in a statement. — Reuters

Virus-free British pilot to leave Vietnam

HANOI: Vietnam’s most seriously ill COVID-19 patient, a British pilot who at one point seemed close to death, left hospital on Saturday on his way home after a dramatic recovery that attracted national attention. The case of Stephen Cameron, a pilot for national carrier Vietnam Airlines, became a sensation in Vietnam, where a combination of targeted testing and an aggressive quarantine programme has kept its coronavirus tally to an impressively low 370 cases, and zero deaths.

“The odds say that I shouldn’t be here, so I can only thank everybody here for what they’ve done,” Cameron said, leaving hospital in a wheelchair and flanked by doctors holding flowers. — Reuters

Singapore ruling party wins, support drops

SINGAPORE: Singapore’s ruling party, stung by its worst ever election results, on Saturday signalled a possible delay to its meticulous succession plans, and analysts foresaw other policy changes that could affect the international business hub.

The People’s Action Party secured 83 of 93 parliamentary seats in Friday’s election - a resounding win by international standards - and its share of the popular vote dropped near a record low, while the opposition won an unprecedented 10 seats. The results showed “a clear desire for a diversity of voices,” Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong told an early morning news conference. — Reuters



Astronauts laying the groundwork for a Mars simulation in the Omani desert, a terrestrial mission intended to pave the way to the red planet.

The quest to find signs of ancient life on Mars

JULIETTE COLLEN, KELLY MACNAMARA

Mars may now be considered a barren, icy desert but did Earth's nearest neighbour once harbour life? It is a question that has preoccupied scientists for centuries and fired up sci-fi imaginings. Now three space exploration projects are gearing up to launch some of the most ambitious bids yet to find an answer. Scientists believe that four billion years ago the two planets both had the potential to nurture life -- but much of Mars' intervening history is an enigma. The new Mars probes from the United States, United Arab Emirates and China will launch this summer. Their goal is not to find Martian life -- scientists believe nothing would survive there now -- but to search for possible traces of past lifeforms. These vast and costly programmes could prove futile. But astrobiologists say the red planet is still our best hope for finding a record of life

on other planets. Mars is "the only planet with concrete chances of finding traces of extraterrestrial life because we know that billions of years ago it was inhabitable," said Jean-Yves Le Gall, president of French space agency CNES in a conference call with journalists this week. Le Gall is one of the architects of Nasa's Mars 2020 exploratory probe, which is scheduled for launch at the end of July when Earth and Mars will be the closest for more than two years. The more than \$2.5 billion project is the latest -- and most technologically advanced -- attempt to uncover Mars' deep buried secrets. But it is not alone, as enthusiasm for space exploration has reignited. Scientific enquiry of the red planet began in earnest in the 17th Century. In 1609 Italian Galileo Galilei observed Mars with a primitive telescope and in doing so became the first person to use the new technology for astronomical purposes. — AFP

Irresponsibility and apathy must have their consequences



RAY PETERSEN
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The disappointment and resignation in the voice of a continuity announcer on a local radio station was palpable yesterday as she read out the official COVID-19 statistics for another day, reflecting the significant upswing that has occurred in infections, particularly among the Omani population. Giving the figures for the day, which identified a two to one infection rate among Omanis as compared to expats, she sighed deeply before continuing... "How many times do we have to say it? Wear masks, gloves, wash your hands, social distance, and don't go out unless you must... and avoid gatherings... please. Her tone of voice, the pauses... and the raw emotional desperation of a voice that is usually so vigorous and joyous spoke volumes for her intense disappointment at what is happening here. Sophocles, the Ancient Greek author of 2,500 years ago, and

most famous for his Oedipus Rex, also famously wrote, "I have no desire to suffer twice, once in reality, and once in retrospect." These are wise words, and very much elaborate upon where we are now. By ignoring the Supreme Committee, the government, the health sector, and the police, the local population is ensuring not only the real and retrospective suffering to date, but that, to now, we have achieved nothing, absolutely nothing, in the battle against the pandemic. Of course, Oman is not alone in this, however in looking at what was, and now is occurring in the world around us, did it not make greater sense to 'do the right thing,' and accept the 'short term gain for the long term gain?' Social media clips over recent weeks have clearly demonstrated that far too many people are in defiance of the consequences of COVID-19, and their foolishness is making it impossible for everyone to move on with their lives.

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

BUSINESS

Instant Banking Services

Mobile Payments System

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

Welcome to the most hassle-free way to transfer money from your account to any other account instantly, with BankDhofar Mobile Payments System.

Instantly transfer Cash to any other wallet in the Sultanate.
Quick pay and transfer to merchants.

For more information: https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/COVID_19_Preventive_Measures.aspx

بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

the best bank for you 2479 1111 www.bankdhofar.com

NEW NATIONAL PAYMENTS FIRM ON ANVIL IN OMAN

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is spearheading the establishment of a dedicated agency to manage the country's national payment systems – part of a broader effort to spur the nation's transformation into a cashless society. On the cards is a National Payment Company (NPC), privately owned by a consortium of commercial banks, which will have the mandate to, among other things, manage the country's payment systems, print cheque books, plastic cards for customers and operate a customer call centre as well.

Assisting with the fast-track establishment of the National Payment Company is the Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit (ISFU) of the Diwan of Royal Court, which is tasked with securing speedy approvals for projects and initiatives that can accelerate Oman's economic diversification.

"In line with global trends, and in response to the recommendation of the World Bank to separate the operator from payment systems, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is currently privatising services related to national payment systems through the establishment of a private payment company owned by a group of banks in Oman", said ISFU in a recent update on its facilitation efforts.

As the banking and



CASHLESS SOCIETY:

The privately-owned National Payments Company will manage the country's payment systems on behalf of the Central Bank, print cheque books, cards for customers and operate a call centre.

financial sector regulator, the Central Bank oversees the operation of a number of national payment systems, notably Oman Net and the Automated Clearing House (ACH). It also regulates these systems to ensure they are in line with the country's laws and statutes, among other regional and international conventions that the Sultanate has ratified.

Electronic payment systems ensure better results than transactions involving the use of bank notes, according to ISFU. "This is considered a significant project as it will reduce tax evasion and alleviate the risk associated with the use of banknotes. It will also enhance the level of transparency and reduce the potential for corruption", it stated.

Importantly, the national payments company

project will also bode well for Oman's efforts to promote itself as a regional hub for disaster recovery services.

The promulgation of a proposed Data Protection Law, anticipated before the end of this year, is expected to accelerate the implementation of this initiative.

Significantly, Oman is also working alongside fellow member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the establishment of a regional payments company in conjunction with the roll-out of a GCC Payment Systems Connection System (Afaq).

The Constituent Assembly of GCC Payments Company (GPC), comprising the governors of GCC monetary authorities and central banks, met last month to review progress in the formation of the entity. Tahir bin

Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, represented the Sultanate at the virtual forum

The GCC Payment Systems Connection System (Afaq) is currently being piloted in a number of phases. Plans for a Gulf-wide payments company were adopted during the 37th GCC Supreme Council which approved the establishment and buildup of a setup to link cross-border GCC payment systems. It also authorised GCC monetary authorities and central banks to own, manage and finance the project by establishing an independent company.

GPC will oversee the operation of the Afaq system for remittances and settlement of financial payments among GCC monetary authorities and central banks. Afaq will enable the speedy flow of remittances between the Gulf states in an efficient and cost-effective manner. GPC will be headquartered in Riyadh with a branch in Abu Dhabi.

BUDGET DEFICIT DECLINES 91.5 PER CENT IN Q1

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's budget deficit fell 91.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 to reach RO 26.3 million, compared to RO309.1 million in the same period of 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The deficit constitutes 0.4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices.

Total public revenue decreased by 3.5 per cent to RO 2.6 billion, compared to RO2.7 billion for the same period of 2019. The total public expenditure decreased by 12.5 per cent to reach RO2.6 billion.

GDP at current prices fell 3.9 per cent, down from RO 7 billion in the first quarter of 2019 to RO 6.75 billion in 2020. The decline is due to the decrease in the total value-add of non-oil activities from RO4.9 billion in Q1 2019 to RO 4.6 billion in Q1 2020.

The total value-add of oil activities increased by 0.7 per cent to reach RO 2.43 billion in the first quarter of 2020, compared to RO 2.41 billion in 2019. This rise is due to the increase in crude oil's value added by 2.6 per cent, while the value add of natural gas decreased by 9.1 per cent, reaching RO 356.7 million in the first quarter of 2020, compared to RO 392.5 million for the same



THE TOTAL VALUE OF LOANS AND FINANCING GRANTED BY COMMERCIAL BANKS AND ISLAMIC WINDOWS IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2020 INCREASED BY 3.7 PER CENT, REACHING RO 26.4 BILLION, COMPARED TO RO 25.5 BILLION IN THE SAME PERIOD OF 2019.

period of the previous year.

As for the indicators of foreign trade, the NCSI data show that the sur-

plus in the trade balance in the first quarter of 2020 decreased by RO 88.6 million, compared to the same quarter of the previous year of 2019 reaching RO 1.5 billion.

The decline is due to an 11 per cent dip in the value of merchandise imports, while merchandise exports decreased by 8.8 per cent to reach RO3.5 billion.

Total deposits of the private sector in the first quarter of 2020 increased by 9.1 per cent, reaching RO 15.9 billion, compared to RO 14.6 billion in the same quarter of 2019.

The total value of loans and financing granted by commercial banks and Islamic windows in the first quarter of 2020 increased by 3.7 per cent, reaching RO 26.4 billion, compared to RO 25.5 billion in the same period of 2019.

The total value of personal loans in the first quarter of 2020 also increased by 1.3 per cent, reaching RO 8.5 billion, where the average of the interest rate on total loans reached 5.5 per cent, compared to 5.3 per cent for the same period of 2019.

— ONA

CREDIT OMAN PAYS OUT RO 2.13 MILLION IN CLAIMS TO EXPORTERS

MUSCAT: Credit Oman, the Sultanate's credit insurance agency, has paid a total of RO 2.136 million in compensation to local exporters and sellers who failed to receive payments for their exports.

Exports that attracted compensation under Credit Oman's coverage included agriculture and fisheries, food, packaging and building materials (11.3 per cent of the total), consumer goods (65 per

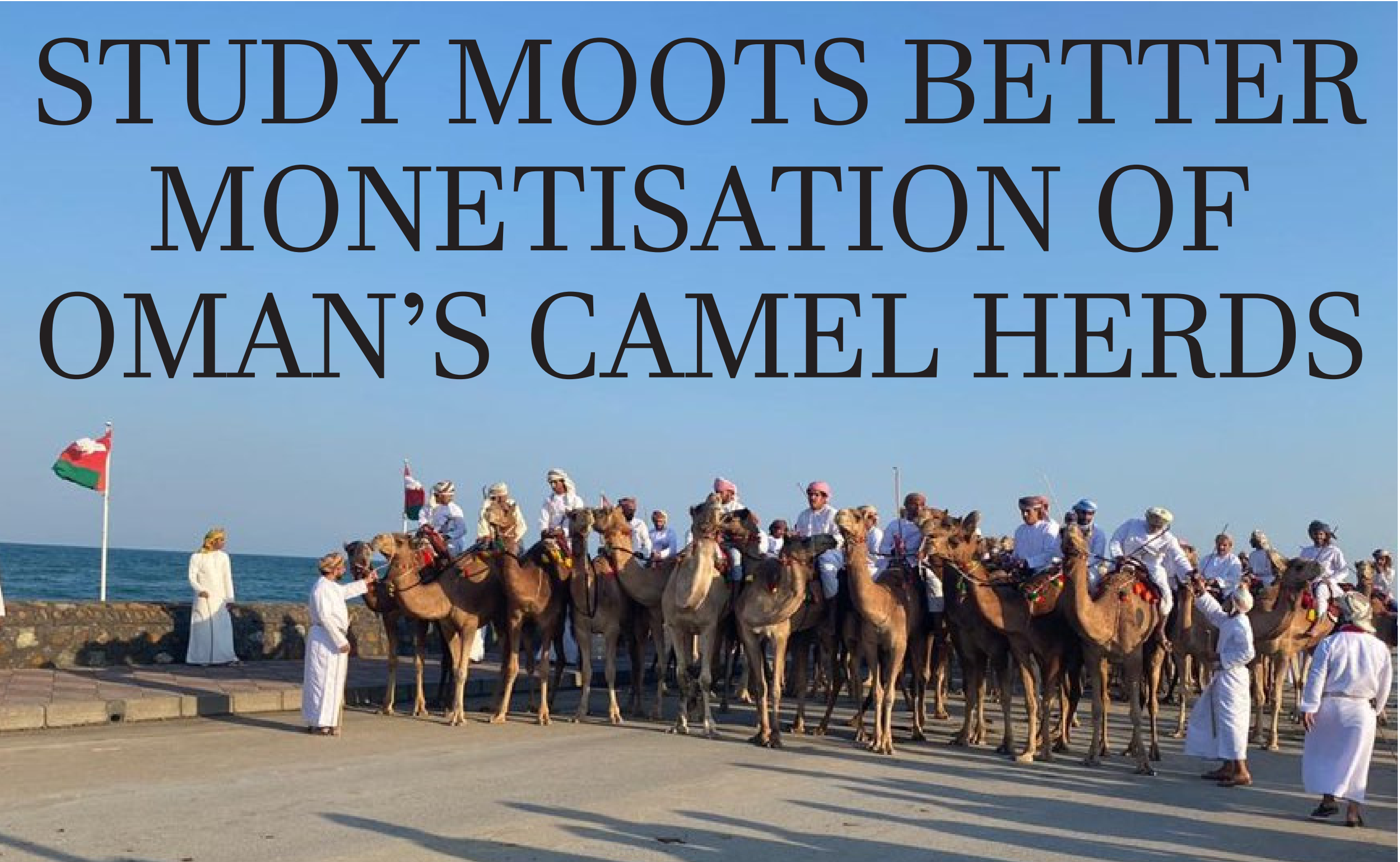
cent) and petrochemicals and plastics (0.4 per cent).

The compensations come within Credit Oman's commitment to offer insurance cover to its clients in all circumstances, secure their rights and to indemnify them against commercial and non-commercial risks, so that they could confidently market their products locally and internationally.

— ONA



BUSINESS



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Oman's camel population of an estimated quarter million head makes a limited economic contribution to their owners or to the local economy, a study has found.

Barring economic opportunities stemming from the breeding and racing of thoroughbreds in some parts of the country, coupled with modest contributions coming from camel dairy and meat production, camels remain an under-monetised commodity in the Sultanate, the insightful study has revealed.

Funded by the Oman Animal & Plant Genetic Resources Center (OAPGRC), which operates under the auspices of The Research Council (TRC), the study was conducted by a group of students of Ibra College of Technology. It was primarily focused on North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, an important hotspot for camel breeding and camel racing activities.

Oman is home to an estimated 243K head of camels, out of which around 145K live in Dhofar Governorate. Besides being an integral part of the country's social and cultural traditions, this livestock species also supports



The research was conducted by Mubarak bin al Abd al Wahaibi, Amer bin Hamad al Hajri and Badr bin Mohammed al Rashdi, under the supervision of Dr Habiba al Mughayriya.

NEW RESEARCH:

Thoroughbred racing is the only profitable economic activity for owners and breeders of Omani camels, says a key study, which calls for effective strategies to harness the full potential of this livestock species for national economic development.

a thriving cattle breeding sector that currently employs thousands of Omanis.

However, according to a report of the study, published in the latest edition of *Scientific Insights* — the monthly newsletter of the TRC — financial profits from camel milk and meat production are “very low” in the Sultanate.

Much of the profit from camel breeding activities

comes from thoroughbred racing.

Significantly, the report laments the non-utilisation of camels in the tourism sector. It also underlines the need for Oman's camel heritage to be suitably developed and commercialised in order to enhance its contribution to the country's GDP.

Camel breeders interviewed by the research team also appealed for the

introduction of a pricing system for thoroughbreds, and for the promotion of camel racing as an industry.

They also pleaded for the suitable expansion of government-run veterinary clinics to meet the needs of the breeding community.

In this regard, they also called for a review of the price of medicines and treatments charged by private veterinary clinics.

“The main challenges facing camel breeders are: acquiring property for a barn from the government with electricity and water, attracting workers, and the high prices of cattle feed,” the report noted. “Camel movement should be facilitated between the GCC countries,” it further stated.

BUSINESS

MSM ENDS LOWER ON FOREIGN SELLING

MUSCAT: MSM30 closed the week lower by 0.51 per cent on the back of drop in financial and services index and also as the foreigners were net sellers of \$2.2m. The turnover and volumes were lower than last week by 22 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

Also last week, the application of Bankruptcy Law, promulgated under Royal Decree 53/2019, has come into force. The Bankruptcy Law aims to find a legal framework that enhances business climate through the restructuring of economic activity. This pertains to branches and agencies of foreign firms in the Sultanate. The law sets out a number of procedures, notably the legalisation of statutes regulating bankruptcy in a manner that responds to complications facing business persons.

Oman's government announced new tax incentives for companies impacted by the pandemic. The new

incentives include the suspension of additional tax resulting from the non-payment of the income tax due to be paid for the year ending December 31, 2019. The previously specified date extends for cases where a fiscal year ends at a later date for a maximum period of nine months from the date of the end of its fiscal year. The authority said that tax due for the year 2019 can be paid in instalments while those from the previous years can be rescheduled. The Oman Tax Authority has suspended fines and penalties due to the failure to submit declarations and accounts for 2019 and any additional tax due from the original taxes payable for previous years from January 1, 2020 to September 2020.

Galfar Engineering & Contracting, a publicly listed Omani firm, has announced that it's been awarded a contract valued at nearly \$297m for the dualization 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 115m. During 2020, the Parent Company has received new orders worth RO 145m. The order book as of date is around RO 521m.

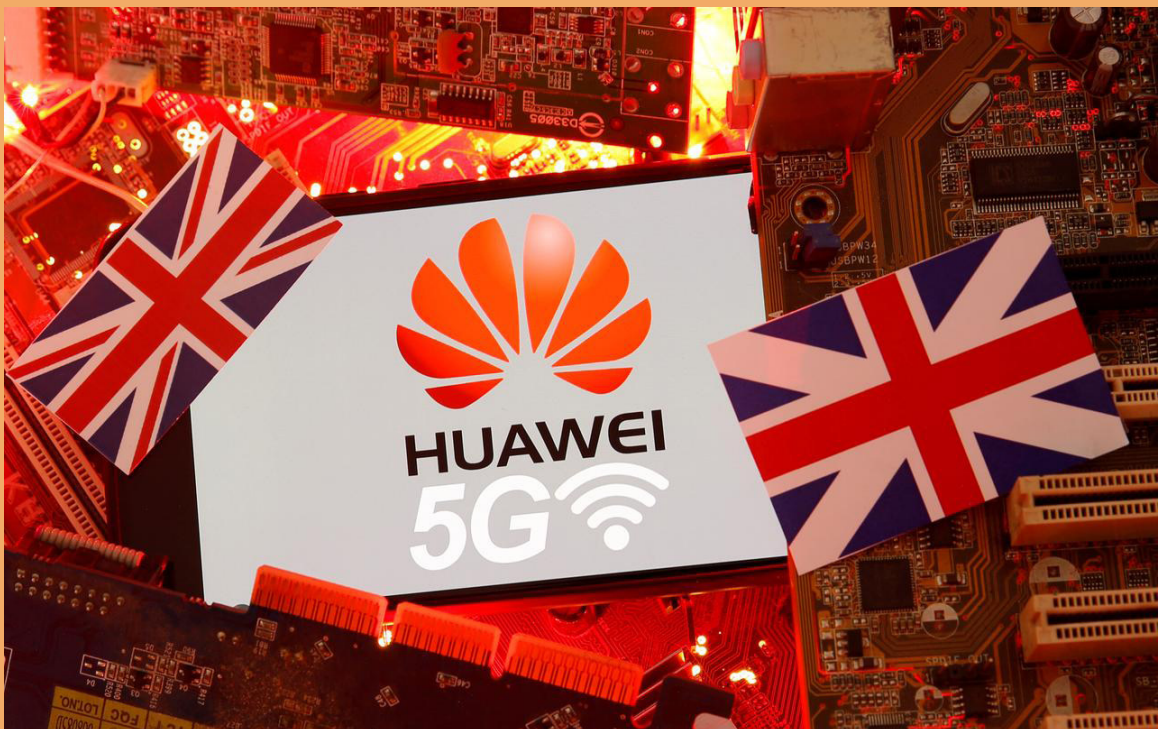
Oman Education and Training Institute announced that the arbitral tribunal issued a decision in favour of Sohar University against Alpha Company. The decision outlines payment of RO 2.09m for Sohar University.

The expatriate population continues to drop in Oman with current number at 1.849m as of July 6 compared to 1.972m at the end of last year, drop of 122,354 YTD. Expatriates now stand at 40.5 per cent of the population compared to 42.3 per cent at the end of last year.

Oman's position as a regional shipping hub continues to grow, with re-exports from the country increasing by 33 per cent in the first quarter of this year compared with last year. Figures from the NCSI show that the Sultanate earned RO 114.9m from re-exports more in the first three months of 2020, than it did during the corresponding period last year. Earnings from re-exports amounted to RO 463.4m at the end of March 2020, compared to RO 348.5m at the end of March 2019, owing to increased re-exporting of goods to the Sultanate's trade partners. Qatar and the UAE are the two GCC countries to which re-exports from Oman increased significantly. Re-exports to Qatar increased by 75 per cent, with the total value of goods re-exported there increasing from RO 78.9mn in 2019, to RO 138mn this year.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

UK to order removal of Huawei 5G equipment by 2025



The British flag and a smartphone with a Huawei and 5G network logo are seen on a PC motherboard in this illustration picture. — Reuters

LONDON: The British government is expected to set a deadline of 2025 for removing equipment made by China's Huawei from the country's 5G telecoms networks, The Telegraph newspaper said on Friday.

The Telegraph reported that British Culture Minister Oliver Dowden will make a statement in Parliament on Tuesday about Huawei, and that ministers wanted Huawei's removal within five years.

Adding to strains in ties between London and Beijing, Britain in January capped Huawei's role in its 5G networks at 35 per cent and barred it from the most sensitive parts of the system.

The government said

recently that US sanctions could damage Huawei's ability to supply crucial networking equipment.

China's ambassador to London, Liu Xiaoming, warned last week that getting rid of Huawei would send a "very bad message" to Chinese business.

Operators Vodafone and BT said on Thursday that they needed a minimum of five years and ideally seven to avoid major disruption to Britain's emerging superfast networks.

Conservative lawmakers have pressed Prime Minister Boris Johnson to speed up the process to 2023, The Telegraph said.

A spokeswoman for Britain's Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport was unable to comment immediately on the report.

— Reuters

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday unveiled heavy import duties on France in retaliation for the country's tax on American tech giants, but will hold off on collecting the fees to allow time for the dispute to be resolved.

The office of US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer found France's digital services tax was discriminatory and "unfairly targets US digital technology companies", and will impose 25 per cent punitive duties on \$1.3 billion in French products.

However, it will suspend the tariffs until January 6, 2021 while discussions continue over the disagreement.

France approved the tax last summer on tech firms like Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Google, which were accused of moving their profits offshore to evade taxes.

But in January, Paris suspended collection of the tax through the end of the year.

French cosmetics and handbags will be subject to the US tariffs, but champagne, camembert and Roquefort were

US UNVEILS TARIFFS ON FRANCE OVER TECH TAX

FRANCE APPROVED THE TAX LAST SUMMER ON TECH FIRMS LIKE FACEBOOK, AMAZON, APPLE AND GOOGLE, WHICH WERE ACCUSED OF MOVING THEIR PROFITS OFFSHORE TO EVADE TAXES

spared, according to the final product list after USTR collected thousands of public comments on the retaliation plans.

The sides have been trying to negotiate a deal through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that would address the policy dilemma of taxing profits earned in one country by a company based in another with a more favourable tax policy.

But the talks have not made much headway and were suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile,

more countries are considering following France's example.

Lighthizer said on Thursday that the US "won't tolerate" unfair treatment, although he acknowledged that there is a problem with multinational corporations offshoring profits to avoid paying taxes.

But he said the French tax "didn't even do a clever job of veiling the fact that they were just trying to get into the pocket of US companies".

A USTR investigation in January ruled the tax was "unreasonable" and threatened 100 per cent duties on a potential list of \$2.4 billion in French goods.

Vitor Gaspar, head of the IMF's fiscal affairs department, told AFP on Friday that there is "a perception that firms that are extremely profitable, that act in the global sphere, are not paying their fair share of taxation", and called for an international agreement.

"It's very important to avoid trade wars, it's very important to avoid tax wars", Gaspar said in an interview. — **AFP**

Shoppers wearing face masks walk past a Hermes store at a shopping centre in Paris. — Reuters



SPORTS



SQSC - OMAN'S PREMIER SPORTS FACILITY

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: It was the venue where Oman national football team had lifted the Gulf Cup for the first time in 2009 and Oman military football team emerged champions in the World CISM Football Cup in 2017. The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC), which was opened in October 1985, hosted different regional and international sports events and was the stage for different domestic accomplishments.

According to the Ministry of Sports Affairs' website, the top sports facility in the Sultanate had won the Unesco Medal in 1995 as the best youth institution that provides outstanding sporting and educational services for young people through its various facilities. Based on the statistics, SQSC was ranked as the top venue that provid-



ed different sporting facilities to the athletes as it reached more than 199,818 beneficiaries.

The complex, which was opened by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, was approved by the top sports organisations including the Asian Olympic Council which ranked it as a world class sports venue that is fully equipped with all the facilities to host mega sports events.

In an area of 800,000 square metres, SQSC has more than 15 facilities that include an approved football stadium, integrated indoor hall, Olympic swimming pools, hockey field, tennis courts, squash court, sports medicine centre, football training fields, indoor training halls, athletics track, beach courts and accommodation for teams.

The football stadium is equipped with high standard lighting and monitors.

It can accommodate more than 28,000 fans and it has 28 doors for entrance with a royal seating zone. It has a range of changing rooms besides dedicated rooms for referees, press conference hall, VIP lounge, rooms for commentators, audio/video testing room, monitoring room and TV studio.

Besides the football green field, the team's accommodation facility can include more than six teams. It has many other facilities including entertainment zone, gaming area, dining zone, library, conference hall and other related facilities. The athletes in the Sultanate are awaiting the decision of the Supreme Committee to resume their training and competitions at the SQSC as the sporting activities were stopped over the COVID-19 outbreak.

SPORTS



England WC winner Jack Charlton dies at 85

LONDON: Jack Charlton, a soccer World Cup winner with England who became the darling of Ireland after leading their national team to unprecedented success as manager, has died aged 85.

A family statement said that the former Leeds United defender, who helped England beat West Germany to become world champions in 1966, died peacefully on Friday at his

home in Northumberland, northern England, following a long-term illness.

"We cannot express how proud we are of the extraordinary life he led and the pleasure he brought to so many people in different countries and from all walks of life," it read.

Charlton led Ireland to their first major soccer finals at the 1988 European Championship and also

guided them to the World Cup quarterfinals in 1990.

Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin was among the first to tweet his reaction.

"So saddened to hear of the passing of Jack Charlton who brought such honesty and joy to the football world," he said.

"He personified a golden era in Irish football - the Italia 90 campaign being one of pure joy for the

nation. He gave us magical memories. Thank you Jack."

Charlton, the elder brother of Manchester United great Bobby, was a tough tackling centre back who graduated from the Leeds academy and spent his entire playing career at the club. He helped the Yorkshire side win the second division in 1963-64 and then the top-flight title in 1968-69. — **Reuters**



VAR must not show 'wrong idea of solidarity' with refs

BENGALURU: Video Assistant Referees (VAR) must not show the "wrong idea of solidarity" by appearing to protect officials who make mistakes on the pitch, the head of Fifa's Referees' Committee has said.

Speaking at the World Football Summit, Italian Pierluigi Collina also stressed the importance of on-field referees using pitchside monitors during games to review decisions.

"Another thing to be considered (is) a sort of

wrong idea of solidarity," Collina said. "If you belong to a team, you always try to protect your team-mates. If your team-mate made a mistake you try to find everything to say 'no, no, no, he was correct'. — **Reuters**

ENGLAND CUT INTO WINDIES’ LEAD

SOUTHAMPTON: Roston Chase succeeded where West Indies’ fast bowlers had failed by removing England opener Rory Burns on the fourth day of the first Test at Southampton on Saturday.

At lunch, England were 79-1 in their second innings, still 35 runs adrift of West Indies’ first innings 318.

It seemed England would get through the morning session without losing a wicket.

But shortly before the interval, Burns gave his wicket away on 42 when he failed to get over a cut from

part-time off-

spinner Chase and was caught at backward point by John Campbell to end a stand of 72.

Dom Sibley was 31 not out.

Joe Denly, needing a big score to bolster a low Test average for a batsman of under 30, was unbeaten on one.

England resumed on 15-0 after Burns and Sibley had survived 10 testing overs late on Friday.

But in ideal sunny batting conditions on a placid pitch, the pair got through Saturday’s opening spells from the Windies’ quicks without much trouble.

— AFP



Broad ‘gutted’ after Southampton snub

SOUTHAMPTON: An “angry and gutted” Stuart Broad sought reassurance about his England future after being dropped for the ongoing series opener against West Indies, the 34-year-old quick said on Friday.

England’s decision to go with James Anderson, Jofra Archer and Mark Wood for the first Test in Southampton snapped Broad’s run of 51 consecutive home Tests.

“I’m not a particularly emotional person but I’ve

found the last couple of days quite tough,” the right-arm paceman told Sky Sports.

“To say I’m disappointed would be an understatement: you get disappointed if you drop your phone and break your screen.

“I’ve been frustrated, angry and gutted - because it’s quite a hard decision to understand.

“I’ve probably bowled the best I’ve ever bowled in the last couple of years. I felt like it was my shirt having been in the

team through the Ashes and going to South Africa and winning there.”

Broad said stand-in skipper Ben Stokes had explained his omission for the first match of the three-Test series against West Indies.

“Stokesy told me just that they’re going with extra pace in these conditions,” said Broad.

“I wanted clarifications on the future going forward and I was given pretty positive feedback going forward.

— Reuters





REPORTS

REAL IN SIGHT OF TITLE

MADRID BLANK ALAVES, OPEN 4-POINT LEAD OVER BARCA AT TOP

MADRID: Real Madrid could win La Liga on Monday after a routine 2-0 win over Alaves on Friday put them within touching distance of the title.

With suspended skipper Sergio Ramos sitting in the stands, Karim Benzema took over the armband and then penalty duties, firing in from the spot before teeing up Marco Asensio to add a second at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium.

After restoring their four-point advantage at the top of the table, the pressure is back on Barcelona.

If Barca fail to win away at Real Valladolid on Saturday, Madrid will clinch the title with two games to spare by beating Granada on Monday at Los Carmenes.

Yet even if Madrid have to wait, it seems inevitable

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON FRIDAY:	
Real Sociedad 2 (Merino 47, Oyarzabal 83) Granada 3 (Puertas 21, Soldado 43, Duarte 88)	Athletic Bilbao 1 (Capa 29) Sevilla 2 (Banega 69, Munir 74)
Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 11-pen, Marco Asensio 50) Alaves 0	ON WEDNESDAY
ON THURSDAY	Getafe 1 (Duro Perales 80) Villarreal 3 (Cazorla 66-pen, 86-pen, Pena 90+3)
Eibar 0 Leganes 0	Real Betis 3 (Rodriguez 4, Pedraza 25, Alena 90+7) Osasuna 0
Mallorca 2 (Hernandez 40, Kubo 84) Levante 0	Barcelona 1 (Suarez 56) Espanyol 0

they will hoist the trophy given they also boast the superior head-to-head record against Barcelona with three games left.

Madrid can afford to draw two of those, even if Barcelona manage three victories out of three.

“We still don't know what is going to happen,” said Real coach Zinedine Zidane. “La Liga is very

hard and we have three finals still to go.”

“We have to stay focused,” added Raphael Varane.

After sacking their coach Asier Garitano last week following five consecutive defeats Alaves never looked likely to cause an upset. This loss in Juan Ramon Lopez Muniz's first game in charge leaves

them hovering above the relegation zone, only three points ahead of Real Mallorca, who have hope after their win over Levante on Thursday.

Zidane will be relieved all the same, particularly as he had to do without a string of key players.

Ramos and Dani Carvajal were both banned while Marcelo was injured, taking out three of Madrid's regular back four.

Eden Hazard was unable to start but came on in the second half to ease concerns about niggling problems with his ankle.

A makeshift defence, including Lucas Vazquez at right-back, chalked up another clean sheet, Madrid's fifth in a row for the first time in 12 years. It is also their sixth in eight games since the restart.

— AFP

FEATURES

THE IMPACT OF IRRESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCING AT THE TIME OF COVID-19

During this time when everyone is trying to keep their families safe, how would you feel if people, potential carriers of the coronavirus, keep coming and lounging by your front gate? Afraid? Annoyed? Traumatized? This has been the case for a family when a social media influencer made their front gate the backdrop of her social media post... **page 20**



FIND US ONLINE



omanobserver

WE ARE ALSO
ON TELEGRAM

OMAN OBSERVER
NEWS

WHAT'S INSIDE

Uffizi masterpieces show
Black culture's role in
the Renaissance



Cinemas miss out on
upgrades as Russia diverts
funds in COVID-19 battle





The impact of irresponsible social media influencing at the time of COVID-19

YERU EBUEN

Every house is a sanctuary. The gates serve as the protective barrier that let the outside world out, keeping strangers away from the sacred place where you and your loved ones are most vulnerable.

Imagine that you left your house for a day to run errands. In your family's absence, somebody, a familiar face commanding huge following on social media held a photoshoot in front of your house.

Falling in love with the beauty of your gate, she held an impromptu photoshoot – your well-framed pastel blue door becoming a backdrop for her OOTD of the day.

When you arrived home, your neighbour eventually told you that people were by your front yard taking photos. It wasn't a big deal at first – that was why you painted the gates exactly as you did – because you wanted people to look and fall in love with it.

But then other people started coming days after. In the beginning, it's just one or two. But they kept coming day after day, the number getting higher by the day as your gateway is plastered on social media account one after another.

Then the panic started to set in. Your mind trying to comprehend the threat that was brought right at your doorsteps.

These people are not wearing masks. And just like the social media influencer that was on your doorstep a few days back, they too, are taking photos, lounging, appreciating – coughing, leaving behind them particles that can infect your family.

During the time of corona, you'd been keeping yourself and your family in. You don't want to be part of the increasing number of cases or another body count on the death list. But while you stay in, here are droves of people seeking your home out, to take a selfie by your front gate and with them, they bring a threat – the very one that your family is trying to stay away from and survive.

The plot of this story seemed funny on the surface. And on other days, better days without the virus threat, it would have been partially wel-

comed. In fact, you would have been proud of the popularity of your house and your front gate.

But it's a real-life story with real-life consequences. A family in Al Bustan Village is now living under constant threat of the virus because one social media influencer used her influence in the wrong way.

For the influencer, it was just a spur of a moment, a post that she would probably forget as she moved to the next outfit of the day and the next destination. She was all smiling on the photo, not even a mask in sight. Because of her fresh content, she got the likes she wanted not understanding that she left behind a family terrorised and living in a nightmare because of the constant barrage of unwelcome visitors who wanted to take the same photo she had. Most of them don't wear masks and most of them a potential carrier of the virus.

It has been said many times that great power comes with great responsibility. In the time of COVID19, social media influencers even have a greater responsibility to be sensitive, to help educate the masses of how to stay safe because the problem we face today is not a joke. When you prioritise a selfie over safety, then there is definitely something wrong with your thought process.

As a social media user, you will, one day, come across this photo of a beautiful Mediterranean house in Al Bustan Village. It has a beautiful blue-painted door and windows reminiscent of the houses in Greece.

You'd come across the photo of this influencer too, smiling, not a care in the world. You would think it's a cool photo and you too would want a photo just like it. If you are tempted to also take a selfie right at that very same doorsteps, remember that there is a family inside that is threatened by your mere presence and the possible harm you can inflict on their family. And before you lounge or click that next Instagram-worthy photo, think what you would have felt if it was your house and you are looking out and see strangers, all potential carriers of the disease, casually ignoring the privacy of your home. Think of your own children or your parents and ask yourself, is one photo really worth it to put a family at risk? If it's not, then leave that blue door alone. Come in another time – a better time when the virus is no longer the problem and you are no longer a threat.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



sooraj.jayaraj • Follow

Salalah, Oman





sushant_photography_india_oman • Follow

Ittin - Salalah Oman





kumkum_nature_capture_sll

Hasik, Z̧ufār, Oman





Uffizi masterpieces show Black culture’s role in the Renaissance

ROME: Italy’s Uffizi gallery said on Thursday it was planning to pick out nine of its masterpieces for a project to highlight the part that Black people and culture played in the Renaissance.

Under the “Black Presence” initiative, images of works including Cristofano dell’Altissimo’s “Portrait of the King of Abyssinia” will be posted online from this weekend for a series of discussions and

other events.

“The idea is also to offer food for thought in the debate on racial issues currently making the front pages and taking centre stage in the political debate,” the gallery said in a statement.

Opening events on Saturday include a concert in front of Piero di Cosimo’s “Perseus Freeing Andromeda” which has a Black musician playing in the foreground.

Staff said a series of eight videoed discussions will be posted on Facebook every week throughout the summer.

“(Uffizi) masterpieces speak a universal language that helps us not only to comprehend their own era better, but also to understand the future that we wish to build”, Uffizi director Eike Schmidt said.

Other paintings included “Adoration of the Magi” by Albrecht Dürer. — **Reuters**

FEATURES

Cinemas miss out on upgrades as Russia diverts funds in COVID-19 battle

MOSCOW: About 140 cinemas in Russia will miss out on scheduled modernisations after the government moved nearly 1.2 billion roubles (\$16.5 million) earmarked for culture spending this year to its reserve fund as it tackles COVID-19.

The coronavirus outbreak has forced the government to adjust spending goals in 13 key areas, known as the national projects, first announced by President

Vladimir Putin during his bid for re-election in 2018. The projects are intended to spur economic growth.

"Funds amounting to 1.17 billion roubles from the 'Culture' national project for 2020 were transferred to the (government's) reserve fund," the TASS news agency quoted Deputy Culture Minister Olga Yarilova as saying on Wednesday.

She said 200 cinemas were to

have been modernised this year but only 60 of the development plans would go ahead under the scheme, and plans to digitise materials from the state film fund would also be affected.

The plan had been by 2024 to equip 1,200 cinemas with professional equipment in settlements with up to 500,000 inhabitants.

Artem Ryzhkov, programme director of a short film festival in Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad, described the move as very sad, saying a modern cinema can transform a city.

"It is a great programme," he said. "I really hope this is temporary and that next year everything will come back."

Under the original spending plan, Russia had intended to spend 113.5 billion roubles on culture between 2019 and 2024.

The government's reserve fund is separate from its National Wealth Fund and is used for emergency spending needs. — Reuters