

BE PREPARED TO LIVE WITH THE PANDEMIC

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Living with the coronavirus is one of the most discussed hot topics of the contemporary world. No one knows how much time it will take for the pandemic to subside. At the same time, time is unstoppable, and life has to go on. In search of some solution, countries around the world are adjusting to the 'new normal' till the time a vaccine comes, and things start limping back to the pre-pandemic world. Chairing the Supreme Committee meeting in the beginning of the last month, His Majesty

FOLLOW GUIDELINES AT ROP CENTRES

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) have called upon everyone to adhere to the Ministry of Health guidelines against COVID-19, as the ROP services have been reopened. Heavy rush was witnessed as services began on Wednesday. All visa, passport, emigration and traffic services offered by the ROP, which were temporarily stopped after the COVID-19 outbreak, have resumed, according to the ROP sources.

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik dwelt upon the fact that due to persistence of the pandemic and lack of effective treatment so far, it has become necessary to coexist in accordance

with this emerging situation and adapt to it gradually. Cooperation of all members of society is necessary to realise the desired goals at this point in time. **SEE ALSO PAGES 3 AND 4**

MIGRATORY BIRDS RETURN TO WILDLIFE RESERVE



The Environment Conservation Office at the Diwan of Royal Court registered the return of migratory bird cream-coloured Courser to the Wildlife Reserve in the Governorate of Al Wusta, two years after it was last spotted in the sanctuary. **DETAILS ON P5**



Takeover Offer Completion

Takeover offer by OMAN ARAB BANK SAOC (OAB), acting in concert with a trust established by OMINVEST and ARAB BANK PLC, to acquire 100 percent issued share capital of ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK SAOG (AIB) pursuant to CMA Takeover and Acquisition Regulation (E/2/2019).

This is to announce that the Takeover Offer has received acceptance from AIB shareholders representing 93.37% shareholding. Accordingly, the following actions have been completed:

- AIB shareholders (representing 77.29% shareholding) who opted for Consideration Shares have been allotted OAB shares based on the swap ratio
- AIB shareholders (representing 16.08% shareholding) who opted for Cash Consideration, the Trust acquired the shares, and the required cash has been transferred to Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC) for further transfer to the shareholder's bank account as registered with MCDC.
- Shareholding of the balance AIB shareholder (representing 6.63% shareholding) who did not respond to the Takeover Offer, have been compulsorily acquired and OAB shares have been allotted to them based on the swap ratio.

Eligible AIB Shareholders whose shares are compulsorily acquired may note that they have a 30-day window ending on 28th July 2020 to exchange their OAB shares for cash as per terms set out in the Offer Document.



COVID-19 claims 9 on Wednesday, 53 in eight days

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Oman reported nine deaths due to COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the total death toll in the country to 185. The country has seen 53 deaths over the past eight days, according to the Ministry of Health.

Of the total 185 deaths, Muscat tops the list with 125, followed by South Batinah 19, North Batinah 19, Al Dakhiliyah 6, South Al Sharqiyah 5, North Al Sharqiyah 1, Dhofar 4, Al Dhahirah 1, Buraimi 5.

In the GCC, Saudi Arabia has recorded 1,649 deaths, followed by UAE 315, Kuwait 354, Qatar 113 and Bahrain 87.

Of the total deaths reported, 108 of them are residents and 77 Omanis; 97 of them are in the 15-69 age group, 88 in the 60+ group and 158 of them are males.

As precautionary measures, MoH urged people to continue using masks and maintain the physical spacing of distance of at least two metres and clean-

ing hands with soap or water. It urged people to use a certified alcohol-based steriliser, and avoid touching the face, nose, mouth, eyes and follow healthy habits when sneezing and coughing. It asked people to avoid going out unless necessary.

Muscat reported 598 cases on Wednesday, followed by North Al Batinah 132, South Al Batinah 190, Al Dakhiliyah 70, Al Wusta 12, South Sharqiyah 42, North Sharqiyah 25, Al Buraimi 12, Al Dhahirah 22, Dhofar 20 Musandam 1.

Within Muscat, Bausher reported 126 new cases, Seeb 249, Amerat 75, Muttrah 99, Muscat 25 and Qurayat 24.

MoH also reported that 737 patients recovered from COVID-19 during the past 24 hours, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 24,162 in Oman.

A total of 52 people were admitted to the hospital yesterday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 426, including 120 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).



Envoy to Kazakhstan presents credentials

NUR-SULTAN: President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan received here Mohammed bin Abdullah al Bahrani, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's accredited Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan.

During the meeting, the Ambassador conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Tokayev and the friendly people of Kazakhstan, and the bilateral relations further progress and prosperity.

President Tokayev expressed his sincere wishes of good health and well-being to His Majesty the Sultan. He also wished the Omani people further progress, hoping that bilateral relations will continue to grow and prosper in the interest of the two friendly countries. — **ONA**

SAMUEL KUTTY

SEZAD WARNS AGAINST HOUSING WORKERS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

MUSCAT: Establishments and companies operating in the Special Economic Zone Authority in Duqm (Sezad) have been warned against providing housing facilities for workers in the residential neighbourhood.

According to a statement from the Sezad, during the inspection it was found that the accommodations lacked health and safety standards and were built in total violation of the laws.

The statement said that the authority has been receiving complaints about establishments and companies operating in the zone were providing accommodation to their

workers in the residential areas in Duqm.

"In order to avoid any legal action against such accommodation, it is advised that companies and public establishments in the zone provide accommodation approved by the relevant authorities", the statement said.

Meanwhile, there have not been new coronavirus cases recorded in the last two days in Duqm. A total of 1,094 cases have been registered in Duqm of which 895 have recovered.

Duqm and its free zone were closed following spike in the number of COVID-19 cases last month.

The inspection team found that these accommodations were built in unlicensed areas and did not meet even the basic health and safety requirements.

As per the health requirements issued by Sezad, hygiene, sufficient ventilation and inspection of the rooms on a daily basis shall be conducted to measure the workers' temperature

and monitor their health condition.

Last month, the Authority urged the companies not to bring any other workers from outside Duqm, unless written approval is obtained from the HSE Department.

"All violators of the Supreme Committee's decisions will be severely punished according to the regulations issued by the Royal Oman Police pursuant to decision No 151/2020, issued on May 21, 2020", it said.

FEAR NOT, FACE THE VIRUS WITH CONFIDENCE

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The fear of COVID-19 may be slowly fading in the Sultanate as people accept the reality that they have to live with the virus. Though the virus has claimed many lives, the survivors tell tales of hope and confidence. They say there is nothing to fear if infected with the virus “if proper care is taken”.

For Abdul Salam, the ordeal with COVID-19 started on May 12 when he was tested even though he did not have any flu-like symptoms.

“From the very beginning, I was not worried because I did not have any serious symptoms. I was advised to stay in home isolation, take medicine and proper food. But what helped me to survive is the timely detection of the infection,” he said.

Abdul Salam, who works in a mobile shop in Ruwi, is one among many who survived the coronavirus infection and started working with rejuvenated confidence.

“I was initially afraid and was under severe mental stress after getting to know about the outbreak of COVID-19. Maybe the fear got me the virus. I had coughing and mild fever when I was tested positive,” said Rajan Thomas, salesman at a building material



shop in Ruwi.

But he has a word of thanks for his friends and colleagues who fed him with healthy food after being placed in a single room for the two-week isolation period.

“Do not get panic but develop self-confidence. Follow the guidelines given by the authorities to survive the scare,” he advises. Faizal Ahmed, an Omani, who was tested positive, had regularly been attending office till his swab was examined. “I went to the health centre following a fever like situation. After being screened I was found to be the carrier of the virus. Now I am in isolation at home without any

serious illness,” he told the Observer over the phone.

But Benny Thomas, an Indian national who left for his home country this week, had a different tale to say. “I had many comorbid conditions resulting from chronic illnesses including diabetes and coronary heart conditions. After being tested positive, that too with serious coughing and temperature, I was admitted to Al Nahda Hospital. But I pulled through thanks to the exemplary service provided by the health staff at the hospital,” he said.

“A sense of discipline and new social habits need to be cultivated to

cope with the post-coronavirus world to live fit both physically and psychologically,” suggests Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Once people are let out into the world to rejoin their lives, the pandemic will continue to haunt them for years to come. But the human mind can adapt to changes that occur frequently in its culture and habits, he said. “This is time to reflect upon our current state of affairs and consider where we are going and how we might do better. It’s an opportunity to make systemic improvements,” he said.

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Chairing the Supreme Committee meeting in the beginning of the last month, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik dwelt upon the fact that due to persistence of the pandemic and lack of effective treatment so far, it has become necessary to coexist in accordance with this emerging situation and adapt to it gradually. Cooperation of all members of society is necessary to realise the desired goals at this point in time.

The pandemic has affected the world economy. It has affected all human interests in all sectors. Boredom and isolation are natural byproducts of the situation. All of these are behind the rapid trend of finding an alternative solution to foster a culture of coexistence with the virus, which means that societies have gained adequate health awareness that enables them to live 'new-normally'. However, many things will remain idle until life returns to normal, as the virus has to go even if it is a prolonged departure. Living with the virus is what the Supreme Committee



NO ONE KNOWS HOW MUCH TIME IT WILL TAKE FOR THE PANDEMIC TO SUBSIDE. AT THE SAME TIME, TIME IS UNSTOPPABLE, AND LIFE HAS TO GO ON

has called upon, does not mean surrendering to it. Life is not like before now. It is certainly different in an exceptional and abnormal situation. This means that there are many obligations and directives that we must adhere to. They came in the form of decisions and directives by the competent authorities.

Applying the principle of 'coexistence', the Sultanate has taken many measures to reopen hundreds of commercial and economic activities that were closed for almost three months because of the pandemic outbreak. They opened gradually under regulations to prevent the spread of the virus. The Governorate of Muscat reopened after a total closure due to the highest number of cases, yet

some parts in Muttrah and Wadi al Kabir are still under lockdown. The world is optimistic that the pandemic will recede sometime and it will be controlled.

There are many ongoing studies and many vaccinations are under study. Perhaps, we will soon hear international accreditation for a cure of the virus, which may be able to reduce complications of the disease. For the time being, we have to be careful and continue with what we started to confront this virus and prevent its spread. This spread depends on the awareness of the community members and their effective contribution by adhering to the guidelines.



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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



Sultanate chairs regional meet on virus impact

MUSCAT: The Sultanate chaired the virtual Regional Consultative Technical Meeting for the Near East and North Africa, to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic impact on Agriculture and Food Security in the Near East and North Africa Region. The meeting is organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for Agriculture.

The first meeting discussed three topics, namely, managing trade as a key element of the region's food security strategies, protecting and enhancing agriculture and local value chains and building resilience to multiple shocks.

The meeting aims to discuss and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and agriculture in the region, in addition to the necessary procedures for agriculture and food systems in the region to become healthier, more resilient, more inclusive and sustainable. The meeting will help define how member states, FAO and involved institutions together develop and implement a response to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in countries of the region.

—ONA

TAX ON ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES INCREASED

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The Oman Tax Authority will apply a 100-per cent selective tax on alcoholic beverages, which was 50 per cent at the time of its implementation in June last year. This is applicable from Wednesday.

The tax will be not applicable at duty-free shops, according to sources.

Oman had previously, in 2019, introduced a rate of 100 per cent for the excise tax imposed on alcohol and alcohol products, energy drinks, carbonated drinks, pork and pork products, and tobacco and tobacco products.

The tax authority temporarily reduced the rate of excise tax on alcohol and alcohol products to 50 per cent. That temporary rate reduction

is being removed, and the original rate of 100 per cent for the excise tax on alcohol and alcohol products will be effective from July 1, 2020.

“According to ministerial decision 112/2019, on the determination of value, types of excise goods, and rate of tax imposed on each of such goods, published on June 2, 2019 (Ministerial Decision), alcohol and alcohol products were subject to an excise tax at the rate of 100 per cent.”

The Oman Tax Authority later implemented a temporary reduction in the rate of excise tax on alcohol and alcohol products to 50 per cent. The ministerial decision was, however, not amended to reflect the temporary reduction.

CREAM-COLOURED COURSER BIRD IS BACK



MUSCAT: The cream-coloured courser bird has been sighted at Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve after a gap of two years, the Office for Conservation of Environment at the Diwan of Royal Court said.

Locally known as (daraj), the cream-coloured courser used to live across Oman during the seasonal bird period.

Cream-coloured courser lives in dry, sandy or stony places. It is distinguished by its pale grey upper parts and pale, yellow underparts, black beak with white and black strips running across the head. — ONA

Al-Dhahira

COLAS

Under Liquidation

Invitation to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of Al Dhahira Colas SAOC (under liquidation) (Company)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN by the liquidator of the Company inviting all of the shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the Company to be held at 3 pm on Thursday, 16th July 2020 at Beach One offices, in Shatti Al Qurum, Office No 402.

In the case of an incomplete quorum at the first EGM, a second meeting shall be held on Thursday, 23 July 2020 at 03:00 pm to discuss the following agenda:

Agenda of the Meeting:

1. To approve the write off the amount owed to the Company which the liquidator could not collect from the debtors.

2. To present and approve the final report of the liquidator and the auditor's.

3. To approve the completion of the liquidator's tasks, pay shareholders final amount (OMR 1.567 per share) and cancel the commercial registration of the Company.

Each shareholder is entitled to give a written proxy to another person, who need not be a shareholder, to attend the meeting and vote on its/his/her behalf at the EGM.

If you wish to appoint a proxy, please complete and submit the attached proxy form to n.alhabsi@aglaw.com.

If you wish to attend the meeting, please contact Nasser Al Habsi on 24950700 a day prior the meeting.

For further information, please contact 24950700.

Liquidator

Mandatory quarantine discourages people from travelling

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: As many countries, including Oman, are a few weeks away, if not months, to resume air services, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has urged governments to avoid quarantine measures.

The IATA said on Tuesday that it is promoting a layered approach of measures to reduce the risk of countries importing COVID-19 via air travel and to mitigate the possibility of transmission in cases where people may travel while unknowingly being infected.

Mandatory quarantine measures stop people from travelling. Recent public opinion research revealed that 83 per cent of travellers would not even consider travelling if quarantine measures were imposed on travellers at their destination.

An analysis of trends

during the lockdown period shows that countries imposing quarantine saw arrivals decrease by more than 90 per cent - an outcome that is similar to countries that banned foreign arrivals.

"Imposing quarantine measures on arriving travellers keep countries in isolation and the travel and tourism sector in lockdown. Fortunately, there are policy alternatives that can reduce the risk of importing COVID-19 infections while still allowing for the resumption of travel and tourism that are vital to jumpstarting national economies. We are proposing a framework with layers of protection to keep sick people from travelling and to mitigate the risk of transmission should a traveller discover they were infected after arrival," said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's Director-General and CEO.

IATA encourages a

layering of bio-safety measures in two areas:

Discouraging symptomatic passengers from travelling: It is important that passengers do not travel when ill. To encourage passengers to "do the right thing" and stay home if they are unwell or potentially exposed, airlines are offering travellers flexibility in adjusting their bookings.

IATA supports health screening by governments in the form of health declarations. To avoid privacy issues and cut the risk of infection with paper documents, standardised contactless electronic declarations via government web portals or government mobile applications are recommended.

Health screening using measures such as non-intrusive temperature checks can also play an important role. Although

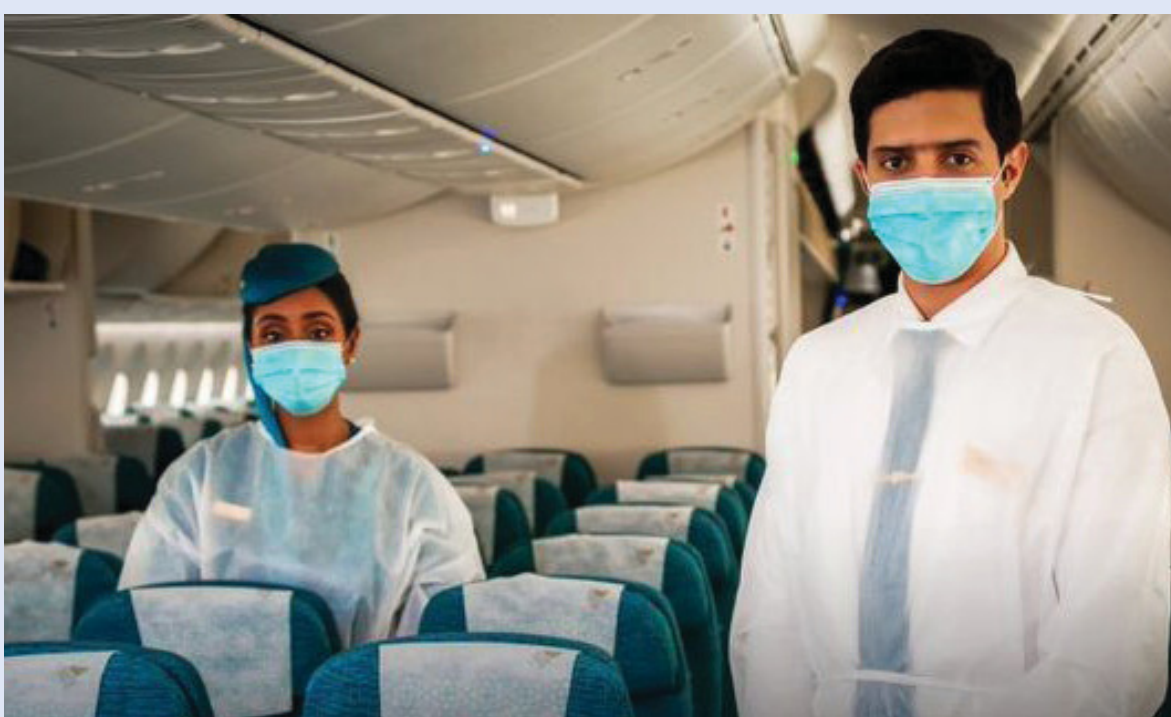
temperature checks are not the most effective screening method for COVID-19 symptoms, they can act as a deterrent to travelling while unwell.

Temperature checks can also shore up passenger confidence: in a recent IATA survey of travellers, 80 per cent indicated that temperature checks make them feel safer when travelling.

When accepting travellers from countries where the rate of new infections is significantly higher, the arrival authority could consider COVID-19 testing. It is recommended that tests are undertaken prior to arrival at the departure airport (so as not to add to airport congestion and avoid the potential for contagion in the travel process) with documentation to prove a negative result.



Oman Air to operate special flights to Frankfurt, London



MUSCAT: Oman Air will operate a special flight between Muscat and Frankfurt on July 5.

Apart from operating a special flight on Wednesday to London, the national airline will be operating a second flight to the UK on July 4.

For bookings or additional information, travellers have to call 96893561117 / +96824765142 or email mct.sales@omanair.com

between 0800-1600.

"On the ground and in the air, we carefully follow rigorous health and safety procedures to ensure our guests' safety," the airline said in a statement.

"Our cabin crew wear masks, gloves and protective gowns to ensure their safety and the safety of our guests onboard. All personal protective equipment is replaced after each flight," it added.

EU reopens to outside visitors as virus surges in the US

CORFU, GREECE: The European Union reopened its borders on Wednesday to visitors from 15 countries but excluded the United States, where coronavirus deaths are spiking once again, six months after the first cluster was reported in China.

The final list of nations safe enough to allow residents to enter the EU did not include Russia, Brazil or the US, where the daily death toll passed 1,000 on Tuesday for the first time since June 10.

US infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci said the United States was heading in the “wrong direction” and warned it could see 100,000 cases a day if the current trend continued. Several US states imposed 14-day quarantines on travellers from other states. The EU hopes relaxing restrictions on countries from Algeria to Uruguay will breathe life into its tourism sector, which has been choked by a ban on non-essential travel since mid-March.

Travellers from China, where the virus first emerged late last year, will be allowed to enter the bloc only if Beijing reciprocates and opens the door to EU residents.

However, with over 10 million known infections worldwide and more than



500,000 deaths, the pandemic is “not even close to being over”, the World Health Organization has warned.

The WHO was first alerted to a cluster of pneumonia cases six months ago announced in a media statement by health officials in the city of Wuhan -- experts only later discovering the illness was caused by a coronavirus.

Greece, which has suffered fewer than 200 virus deaths, has seen its economy

hit hard by lockdowns and travel restrictions — all but ending its lucrative tourism season before it began.

Romanian Cojan Dragos was “the first tourist” in one Corfu hotel. He drove with his wife and daughter and said: “We have the whole hotel just for us”.

“It’s empty, there’s not a single tourist, the restaurants, the shops are closed, it’s sad”, he said, hoping for some excitement when other tourists arrive. — **AFP**



THAILAND SCHOOLS REOPEN WITH STRICT HYGIENE RULES

ABANGKOK: Mask-wearing pupils catching up with friends at one Bangkok high school were quickly told to spread out as they headed back to lessons on Wednesday after months of distance learning due to coronavirus restrictions. The teenagers, resuming classes along with all other public school students in the kingdom,

chatted animatedly before being called to sit in widely spaced rows for the opening session. The school principal, Arwuth Meekhanphet, warned them all to closely follow new hygiene rules, which included the face coverings and social distancing.

SAUDI TRIPLES VAT IN VIRUS-LED AUSTERITY PUSH

BRIYADH: Saudis braced for a tripling in value added tax, another austerity measure after the twin shocks of coronavirus and an oil price slump triggered the kingdom’s worst economic decline in decades. Retailers in the country reported a sharp uptick in sales this week of everything from gold and electronics to cars and building materials, as shoppers sought to stock up before VAT is raised to 15 per cent. The hike could push up inflation and depress consumer spending as the kingdom emerges from a three-month coronavirus lockdown. “Cuts, cuts, cuts everywhere”, a Saudi teacher in Riyadh said, bemoaning vanishing subsidies as salaries remain stagnant.

“Air-conditioner, television, electronic items”, he said, rattling off a list of items he bought last week ahead of the VAT hike.

KAZAKHSTAN TO REIMPOSE LOCKDOWN AS CASES SOAR

NUR-SULTAN: Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said on Wednesday that the government would reimpose a lockdown to stop a surge in virus cases that followed an easing of restrictions in May. The Central Asian government had “presented a plan to introduce quarantine from July 5 for a period of 14 days”, Tokayev announced on Twitter. The leader of the ex-Soviet country -- which has seen its total number of infections quadruple in the past month -- added that the two-week lockdown could be extended if necessary. Oil-rich Kazakhstan currently has over 41,000 registered virus infections, including more than 13,000 recovered cases and 188 deaths. — **Agencies**



HK marks handover anniversary with first arrest under new security law

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police made the first arrest under Beijing's new national security law as the city greeted the anniversary of its handover to China with protests banned.

The commemorations came a day after China imposed a sweeping security law on the city, a historic move decried by many Western governments as an unprecedented assault on the finance hub's liberties and autonomy.

Police said a man with a Hong Kong independence flag was the first to be arrested under the new law, confirming that certain political views and symbols had become illegal overnight.

Opprobrium poured in from critics and western governments — led by the United States — over fears the law will usher in a new era of mainland-style political repression.

Under a deal ahead of the 1997 handover from Britain, China guaranteed Hong Kong civil liberties as well as judicial and legislative autonomy until 2047 in a deal known as "One Country,



Dozens of people have been reported arrested after anti-national security law protesters marched through the streets of Hong Kong on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

Two Systems".

"(China) promised 50 years of freedom to the Hong Kong people, and gave them only 23," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said as he promised unspecified countermeasures.

But Beijing said foreign countries should keep quiet about the law, while Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam hailed the legislation as the

"most important development" since the city's return to Beijing's rule.

Activists called on people to defy a ban on protests and march on Hong Kong island in the afternoon.

But it was unclear how many would be willing to face the risks posed by the new law and increasingly aggressive police tactics towards even peaceful ral-

lies in recent months.

Gatherings of more than 50 people are banned under anti-coronavirus laws even though local transmissions have ended.

Riot police quickly used pepper spray and made arrests when a few hundred people gathered in the district of Causeway Bay on Wednesday afternoon. — **AFP**

IN BRIEF

Pakistan airlines seeks to overturn EU ban

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is working to convince European air safety authorities to lift the six-month ban on Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) from operating in the European Union. The European Union Air Safety Agency (EASA) suspended the airline's authorisation to fly to the bloc in the wake of revelations that many Pakistani pilots have "dubious" licences. The ban is from Wednesday and PIA has the right to appeal. "The government, ministry of foreign affairs and PIA are working very closely. We hope that PIA's suspension would soon be revoked with our confidence-building measures," PIA spokesperson Abudllah Hafeez Khantold said.

UK PM warns Israel against annexation plan

TEL AVIV: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Israel on Wednesday against going ahead with plans to annex parts of the West Bank, calling them illegal and against the Jewish state's own interests.

"I am a passionate defender of Israel," he wrote in an article published in Hebrew on the front page of Israel's top-selling daily, Yediot Aharonot. "So it is with sadness that I have followed the proposals to annex Palestinian territory," he added. "I am fearful that these proposals will fail in their objective of securing Israel's borders and will be contrary to Israel's own long-term interests."

6 dead in explosion at India thermal power plant

NEW DELHI: At least six workers were killed and 17 others suffered burns after a boiler exploded at a thermal power plant in southern India on Wednesday, officials said. The blast took place at the government-run NLC India Limited plant in Cuddalore, around 180 km south of the city of Chennai in the south-western state of Tamil Nadu.

The boiler was not in operation. We are investigating the incident. There was an explosion followed by a fire that injured the workers and contractual labourers," company spokesman Guru Swaminathan said.

— **Agencies**



Mumbai's Dharavi slum offers a rare glimmer of hope, as new infections shrink thanks to an aggressive strategy of 'chasing' the virus. — AFP

How India's largest slum beat back a pandemic

AMMU KANNAMPILLY, VISHAL MANVE

When coronavirus claimed its first victim in India's largest slum in April, many feared the disease would turn its narrow, congested streets into a graveyard, with social distancing or contact tracing all but impossible. But three months on, Mumbai's Dharavi offers a rare glimmer of hope with new infections shrinking, thanks to an aggressive strategy that focused on "chasing the virus, instead of waiting for disaster", according to city official Kiran Dighavkar. The sprawling slum has long been a byword for the financial capital's bitter income disparities — with Dharavi's estimated one million people scraping a living as factory workers or maids and chauffeurs to Mumbai's well-heeled resi-

dents. With a dozen people typically sleeping in a single room, and hundreds using the same public toilet, authorities realised early that standard practices would be of little use. "Social distancing was never a possibility, home isolation was never an option, and contact tracing was a huge problem with so many people using the same toilet," Dighavkar said. An initial plan to conduct door-to-door screenings was abandoned after Mumbai's searing heat and humidity left medical workers feeling suffocated under layers of protective equipment as they combed the area's cramped alleys for cases. But, with infections rising fast and fewer than 50,000 people checked for symptoms, officials needed to move quickly and get creative. — AFP

CHANGING WORK CULTURE IN OMAN!



Ali Al Matani
ali.matani2@gmail.com

The government organisations are making extraordinary efforts to generate job opportunities for the citizens of the country in various areas of economic sectors and activities. It is doing so keeping in view the educational levels and skills of the citizens and as per the requirement of jobs and professions. But it is unfortunate that there are certain elements which are undermining the spirit of these initiatives and reacting in a manner which may adversely affect the work and the society. Such jobs are also being created in the private sector with some individual efforts. Such jobs are being described by some as low level, which according to these elements, do not suit the citizens. Such judgements are being made and prejudices are shown without understanding the importance of such efforts. It is important to realise that there is a need for change in the work culture. It is also required to instill the right meaning of work in the minds of the people. The relationship between work and the skills of every individual should also be understood. All this requires massive drive for creation of awareness. There is no doubt that the current health and economic conditions have adversely effected all countries of the world. It also had implications on job market. There were jobs which were being done by expatriate workers and were later Omanised.

These jobs should be accepted by the citizens of the country positively as a golden opportunity as they match with their educational levels and skills of some of them. All jobs are not of higher levels. It is not possible that all jobs would be of high levels. Such thinking is tragic and damaging. It creates obstacles in the way of Omanisation. Efforts are also being made to Omanise all jobs at all levels. Success has been achieved in these initiatives. This cannot be ignored and undermined. However, it needs to be explained to the common people through massive awareness programme so that everything is crystal clear in their minds. The people should also be educated about the various levels of jobs and grading system and how they can reach on the top with patience and efforts. They should also learn the requirements of jobs and how to fulfil them to address the ambitions of the nation. Those elements who are creating confusion regarding jobs and work opportunities should also understand the feasibility of what they talk. They should also realise that what they talk addresses the wishes and aspirations of jobs-seekers. Instead of waiting for an opportunity of their wishes just sitting behind the wall, they should grab the avenues made available for them. We expect that the authorities concerned would launch national campaigns to create awareness about work and its culture.

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

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HOSPITALS CANNOT TURN AWAY COVID-19 PATIENTS: MOH OFFICIAL

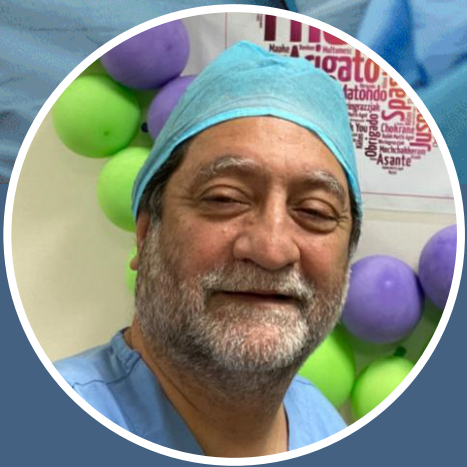
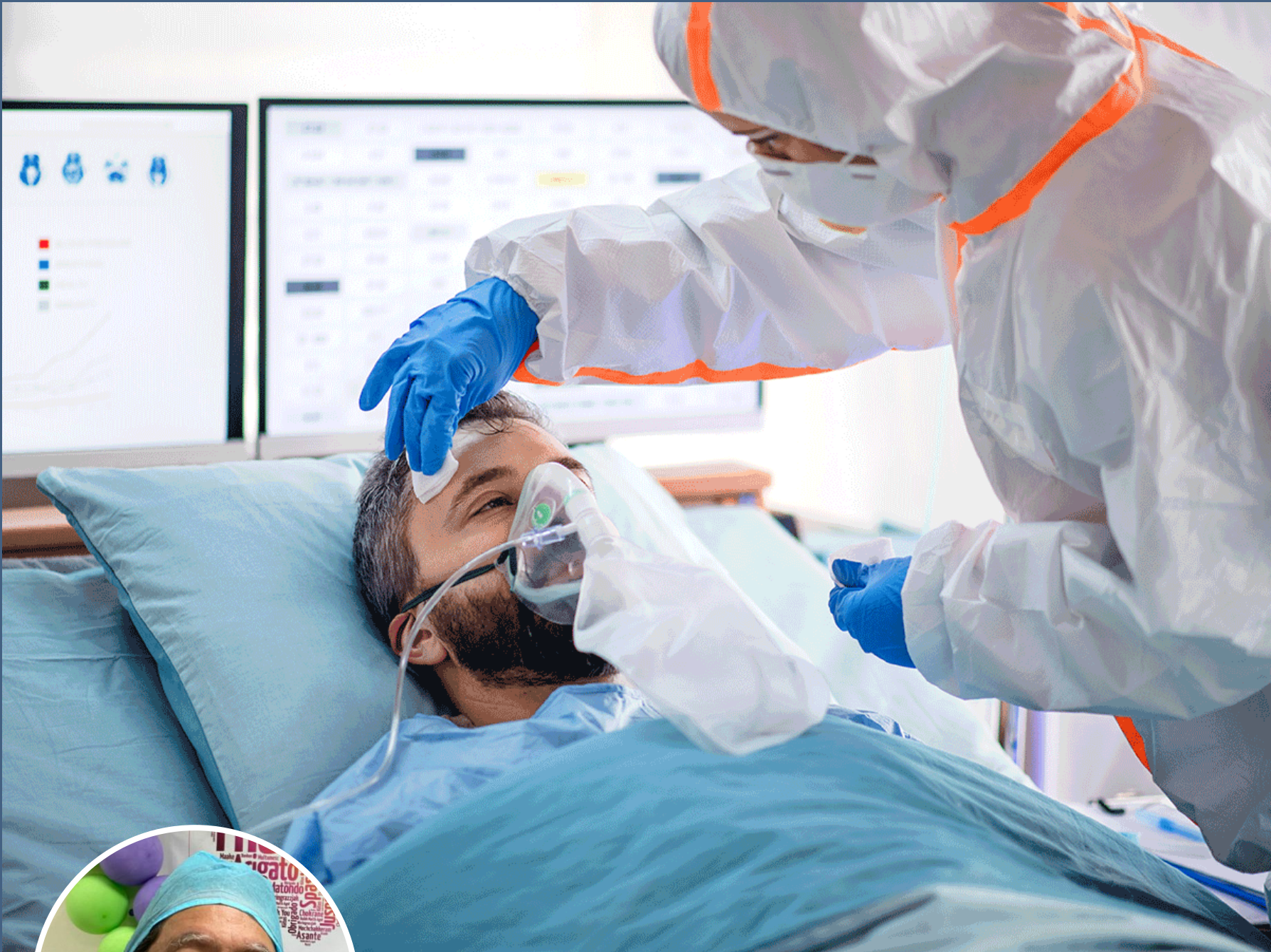
CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Private hospitals in the Sultanate are obliged to receive and treat private COVID-19 patients — Omani and expatriate — regardless of their ability to pay the cost of their hospitalisation, according to a top official of the Ministry of Health. Dr Mazin al Khabori, Director General of Private Health Establishments, stressed that the government's recent declaration guaranteeing the reimbursement of costs borne by private hospitals in the treatment of private patients, mandates the private healthcare sector to unreservedly treat any private patient — particularly an expatriate — afflicted with the novel coronavirus.

“Private hospitals have an obligation to accept private COVID patients whether or not they are covered by health insurance or their inability to guarantee payment themselves. We have guaranteed the private hospitals that if they do not receive payment from the employer or the insurer, the government will reimburse them suitably.

Consequently, at the point of care, no individual — especially from the private sector — should be denied treatment for COVID because they may lack insurance coverage or the required funds.”

Speaking to the **Observer**, the official explained that the govern-



“

At the point of care, no individual — especially from the private sector — should be denied treatment for COVID because they may lack insurance coverage or the required funds.

DR MAZIN AL Khabori,
Director General of Private Health Establishments

ment would employ legal means to recoup any costs from employers of private patients treated at private hospitals. Under Omani Labour Law, companies and sponsors have an obligation, up to a certain limit and subject to certain exclusions, to pay the medical bills of their staff, he noted.

With COVID-19 expected to remain part of the epidemiological threat landscape for the foreseeable future, private hospitals must be suitably primed and equipped to open their facilities to COVID treatment as they do other diseases and ailments.

“As COVID is going to remain with us for some

time, hospitals have been advised to embrace two pathways: one for COVID, and the other for non-COVID cases, so they can cater to both types of patients at the same time,” said the official.

“It is no longer practical for hospitals to try to remain exclusively focused on non-COVID treatments. At some point, they will receive COVID cases, and cannot keep turning such patients away or moving them out as soon as they are discovered as positive. This is illogical. Hospitals should create enough capacity to handle and treat such cases as part of their normal offering,” he added.

OMAN LNG REVENUES HIT \$3.485 BILLION IN 2019

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Majority state-owned Oman LNG achieved revenues of \$3.485 billion in 2019 — a year characterised by a new production high, record cargo deliveries and the start of a landmark rejuvenation programme targeting the company's Qalhat liquefaction complex.

Earnings were marginally lower than the previous year's high of \$3.505 billion, the company stated in its newly published 2019 Annual Report. However, Net Income After Tax (NIAT) was higher at \$1.112 billion last year, up from \$1.079 billion in 2018.

In comparison with Oman LNG's Business Plan, revenues and net income were up 16 per cent and 32 per cent respectively, driven by improved oil prices and additional gas supplies as feedstock for liquefaction, it said.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas and Chairman of Oman LNG's Board of Directors, said the company "reaped the rewards" of its investments in a string of major projects, notably the Plant Rejuvenation Programme, Debottlenecking Project and a new power plant.

"Consequently our utilisation and production levels have reached new highs in efficiency and capacity. We were therefore able to deliver the greatest number of cargoes in the history of the company, which reflects another outstanding milestone. This has enabled our company to maintain its robust position and reputation as a reliable and trusted supplier of liquefied natural gas to our long-term customers, and the wider gas market," said Dr Al Rumhy.



Buoyed by new gas volumes, output soared to 10.7 million tonnes of LNG during 2019, surpassing the plant's nameplate capacity of 10.4 million tonnes per annum.

This output was shipped to destinations around the world in a record 166 cargoes.



Dr Mohammed al Rumhy



Harib al Kitani

Harib al Kitani, CEO, described 2019 as a "phenomenal year" punctuated by many accolades as evidence of its performance.

"Despite facing many challenges including the changing market dynamics as liquefied natural gas continues to establish itself as the fuel of choice, the year proved to be the culmination of many years of hard work, dedication, and our deliberate focus to optimise all our resources, resulting in an

exceptionally successful outing on many indices."

Buoyed by new gas volumes, output soared to 10.7 million tonnes of LNG during 2019, surpassing the plant's nameplate capacity of 10.4 million tonnes per annum. This output was shipped to destinations around the world in a record 166 cargoes.

Significantly, 46 of these cargoes were generated by Qalhat LNG, which owns the third of the three-train liquefaction complex oper-

ated by Oman LNG.

Thanks to the company's far-reaching plant rejuvenation investments, three LNG cargoes were generated as a result and sold in the fourth quarter of 2019, netting Oman LNG's additional revenues.

A key production milestone came in November last year when Oman LNG shipped its 2,500th LNG cargo of its two-decades-long operations. In addition, 43 cargoes of natural gas liquids (NGLs) – a commercially valuable by-product of LNG processing – were produced and shipped during the year as well.

Another key highlight of 2019 was the successful repayment of Oman LNG's \$2 billion loan facility obligation ahead of schedule – a move that attested to its robust financials.

"The combination of our ability to respond efficiently to market demand, prudent management of costs, and keeping our operating expenditures under control, has reflected positively on our revenues and post-tax income," Dr Al Rumhy added in conclusion.

BUSINESS

OMAN ARAB BANK COMPLETES TAKEOVER OF ALIZZ ISLAMIC

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has announced the completion of the takeover offer initiated by Oman Arab Bank (OAB). The transaction stems from a proposal, first unveiled by Oman Arab Bank last month, to acquire 100 per cent of the issued share capital of Alizz Islamic Bank.

The Offeror was a trust established by OAB's parent company, Ominvest, and Arab Bank plc, acting in concert with Oman Arab Bank.

In a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Wednesday, Alizz Islamic Bank stated that the Takeover Offer has received acceptance from AIB shareholders representing 93.37 per cent shareholding.

Accordingly, AIB shareholders (representing 77.29 per cent shareholding) who opted for Consid-



IN A FILING TO THE CAPITAL MARKET AUTHORITY (CMA), ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK STATED THAT THE TAKEOVER OFFER HAS RECEIVED ACCEPTANCE FROM AIB SHAREHOLDERS REPRESENTING 93.37 PER CENT SHAREHOLDING.

eration Shares have been allotted OAB shares based on the swap ratio. AIB shareholders (representing 16.08 per cent shareholding) who opted for Cash Consideration have their shares acquired by the Trust, with the requisite cash transferred to Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC)

for further transfer to the shareholder's bank account.

"Shareholding of the balance AIB shareholder (representing 6.63 per cent shareholding) who did not respond to the Takeover Offer, have been compulsorily acquired and OAB shares have been allotted to them based on

the swap ratio," said Alizz Bank in its filing.

"Eligible AIB Shareholders whose shares are compulsorily acquired may note that they have a 30-day window ending on 28 July 2020 to exchange their OAB shares for cash as per terms set out in the Offer Document," it further noted.

Meanwhile, confirmation of Oman Arab Bank's (OAB) successful conclusion of its acquisition of Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB) also came from OAB's parent company here on Wednesday.

Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that OAB's shares will be listed on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) in due course.

As part of the acquisition of Alizz Bank by OAB, Ominvest had sold 11.76 per cent of its stake in OAB to Arab Bank plc.

SOHAR STEEL MILL IN \$1BN SALE DEAL

MUSCAT: Indian power and steel conglomerate Jindal has announced the planned sale of its wholly owned Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel Co LLC (JSIS Oman), an integrated steel mill located in Sohar Port, in a deal valued at around \$1 billion.

Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) said it had accepted a binding offer to sell its entire stake in the Sohar mill to promoter company Templar Investments Ltd. JSIS Oman was held through JSPL's subsidiary Jindal Steel and Power (Mauritius) Ltd.

Set up in 2011, the Sohar complex is a key source of hot briquetted iron (HBI), steel billets and rebars for the infrastructure, construction and hydrocarbon industries in Oman and the wider region. The integrated mill features a Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) plant, Steel Melting Shop (SMS) and rebar manufacturing unit.

Confirmation of the sale came in a



press statement issued by V R Sharma, Managing Director, JSPL. "This sale is in line with our vision to reduce debt and create a much healthier balance sheet for our investors and stakeholders. We firmly believe in the India growth story," he said.

Templar Investments Ltd, Mauritius, is an investment company and part of the promoter group of JSPL. Alpen Capital, a West Asia-

based investment bank, was appointed to run the sale process, while CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang LLP, Oman, and Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, India, were the legal advisers for the transaction, according to the press statement.

The transaction is subject to approval from shareholders of JSPL and lenders of JSIS Oman, among others. JSPL expects the transaction to close in a month.

BUSINESS

Is distance learning the answer to the pandemic?



Haider al Lawati

haiderdawood@hotmail.com

Weighting on the minds of many people are economic and social concerns even as the coronavirus epidemic shows no signs of abating. Dominant among these concerns is the issue of educating children in regular schools. Will education be available through the conventional school system and institutions, or will it be transformed into distance learning or electronic channels? It is difficult for families to take their children back to school for fear of exposure to the virus. This makes many families worried about the future of their children, especially those who do not have laptops and other technical devices through which education classes can be introduced through new applications such as Zoom, for example. Not all families in the world have the financial

resources to buy modern electronic devices for the educational needs of their children, while an Internet connection at home can add to their monthly. These issues need solutions so that every child can obtain knowledge notwithstanding the epidemic raging around us. Today, questions are being asked about the safety of continuing work amid the pandemic, or during family gatherings or visits to mosques or places of worship, whenever they reopen, or during gatherings in institutions or clubs, or during visits to relatives in hospital. Indeed, the pandemic has prompted officials around the world to search for ways for people to coexist with the virus, whether during travel in trains, buses and airplanes or in other facets of day-to-day living. As for the education of children, some experts see the importance of continuing the process of education and train-

ing for children by following two methods, which is to continue through the usual study in the schools that they are accustomed to, with the introduction of the new model which is distance study which means to give importance for both sides, with the necessity reconsidering the educational curricula, their arrangement, and the way they are taught. It is not appropriate for children to be deprived from going to their schools, colleges and universities. But due to the closure of educational institutions, we have to deal with what is available by distance learning as a new model for families, students and the educational staff. It is necessary to know the positive and negative results of this type of virtual education if the pandemic continues for a long time. In general, this type of education means losing the relationship between student and teacher, the opportunity to interact with other students and to form new and lasting friendships, and so on. Education is based on thriving relationships between teachers and students, and not in the virtual world.

Burjeel Hospital starts plasma therapy for COVID-19

MUSCAT: Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair has taken a major step by starting plasma therapy in Oman to treat COVID-19 patients in the private sector. The therapy involves taking antibodies from the plasma of a person who has recovered from COVID-19 and transfusing those antibodies into an active coronavirus patient to help the immune system fight the infection. Plasma therapy has already been under trial as a treatment for COVID-19, with patients in various parts of the world and showing positive results. Announcing the initiative of starting CP treatment in Burjeel Hospital, Dr Mohammed Zuhair, Specialist - Internal Medicine, said, "Indeed, it is an important therapeutic option that supports the patient's defense mechanism and shortens the course of illness. Plasma therapy is showing dramatic response in a significant number of severely illness that might make it a promising treatment option despite some uncommon, but serious, adverse reactions." Dr Rohil Raghavan, CEO at VPS Healthcare, Oman said: "We are honoured to initiate plasma therapy in Burjeel hospital with the continuous support of DGPHE, Central Blood Bank and Ministry of Health authorities and we hope to treat patients with utmost care assuring the most advanced treatments available. Together we stand to fight against this pandemic situation."

NEW SCHEME FROM MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS

MUSCAT: In the wake of rising gold prices, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 250 outlets spread across 10 countries, is providing customers with Gold Rate Protection Scheme, a unique opportunity to buy gold, be it for personal use or as an investment, at the best rates. Customers can just pay



10 per cent advance for their favorite jewellery and benefit from increasing Gold Rate for 30 days from the date of booking,

protecting themselves from the increase in gold rate during this period. If gold rate increases at the time of purchase, customers can avail the booked rate and if it reduces they can still draw mileage of the reduced rate i.e. a customer intending to buy gold worth RO 1000 just needs to pay RO 100 to avail the advance booking offer and in turn get protected from the increasing gold rates.

"Gold prices typically rise at times of uncertainty as it is considered as the safe haven by investors across the globe. Hence, this scheme has been designed in such a way that our customers are not affected by the increase in gold rates, by providing them with an option to block the rate, by either paying just 10 per cent or 100 per cent of the value, and get gold rate protection for 30 days and 180 days respectively.

BUSINESS



Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador looks on as Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Mexican Deputy Foreign Minister for North America Jesus Seade, and US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer sign documents during a meeting at the Presidential Palace, in Mexico City, Mexico, in this file photo.
— Reuters

NEW NORTH AMERICAN TRADE AGREEMENT LAUNCHES UNDER GROWING THREAT OF DISPUTES

WASHINGTON: The revamped trade pact between the United States, Canada and Mexico taking effect on Wednesday was meant to create a kind of fortress North America, boosting the region's competitiveness — but cracks are already starting to show in the foundation.

As the deal kicks in, the Trump administration is threatening Canada with new aluminium tariffs, and a prominent Mexican labour activist has been jailed, underscoring concerns about crucial labour reforms in the replacement for the 26-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement. The risk of disputes among the three trading partners is growing.

The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement includes tighter North American content rules for autos, new protections for intellectual property, prohibitions against currency manipulation and new rules on digital commerce that did not exist

when NAFTA launched in 1994, an agreement US President Donald Trump has lambasted as the “worst trade deal ever made.”

The coronavirus has all three countries mired in a deep recession, cutting their April goods trade flows — normally about \$1.2 trillion annually — to the lowest monthly level in a decade.

“The champagne isn't quite as fizzy as we might have expected — even under the best of circumstances — and there's trouble coming from all sides,” said Mary Lovely, a Syracuse University economics pro-

fessor and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

THE US-MEXICO-CANADA AGREEMENT INCLUDES TIGHTER NORTH AMERICAN CONTENT RULES FOR AUTOS, NEW PROTECTIONS FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, PROHIBITIONS AGAINST CURRENCY MANIPULATION AND NEW RULES ON DIGITAL COMMERCE THAT DID NOT EXIST WHEN NAFTA LAUNCHED IN 1994.

“This could be a trade agreement that quickly ends up in dispute and higher trade barriers.”

Issues dogging USMCA include hundreds of legal challenges to Mexico's new labour law championed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to ensure that workers can freely organise and

unions are granted full collective bargaining rights.

A ruling against it would harm Mexico's ability to deliver on provisions aimed

at ending labour contracts agreed without worker consent that are stacked in favor of companies and have kept wages chronically low in Mexico. Democrats in the US Congress had insisted on the stronger labour provisions last year before granting approval, prompting a substantial renegotiation of terms first agreed in October 2018.

The arrest of Mexican labour lawyer Susana Prieto in early June has fueled US unions' arguments that Mexican workers' rights are not being sufficiently protected.

“I remain very concerned that Mexico is falling short of its commitments to implement the legislative reforms that are the foundation in Mexico for effectively protecting labour rights,” US Representative Richard Neal, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said, adding that USMCA's success “truly hinges” on its new labour enforcement mechanism.
— Reuters

BIG-SERVING MURRAY UPBEAT FOR RETURN

LONDON: Andy Murray says he is serving at full throttle again as he bids to rebuild his injury-ravaged career when tennis returns after the coronavirus shut-down.

The three-time Grand Slam champion played his first tournament since last November at the Battle of the Brits event last week.

The ATP and WTA tours are due to return next month, with the US Open starting on August 31 and the French Open beginning a month later.

Murray, who is set to return to action at the Washington Open in mid-August, is planning to play both the Grand Slam events.

"Getting the US Open and the French Open played this year is a good thing, I think," the 33-year-old told the BBC. "It's positive, I just don't like the way the French Open went about scheduling their event."

"But we're going to have to go back to playing at some stage. The most important thing is that the events are safe."

Murray had career-saving hip surgery in 2019,



before suffering another setback with a pelvic injury.

The British former world number one was upbeat about his fitness following the Battle of the Brits event, where he reached the semi-finals.

"I am able to serve well again and am able to serve as hard as I was in my mid-20s, which given I didn't know I was going to be able to play again has been really positive," he said.

"Obviously when you are able to serve bigger and harder, it means more shorter points – and that means good news for the body and the hip. The harder I serve, the better it is for my other hip I guess."

The French Open was switched from its traditional May-June slot because of the pandemic, with September 20 pencilled in as a start date.

French tennis chiefs were heavily criticised by players and rival tournaments over a lack of consultation.

Now the Paris main draw of the season's final Grand Slam event will begin a week later and finish on October 11. — AFP

INDIA'S NITIN BECOMES YOUNGEST ELITE UMPIRE AT 36

NEW DELHI: India's Nitin Menon, 36, recently became the youngest member of the International Cricket Council's elite umpire list.

Menon gave up playing cricket when he was 22 to start umpiring and has gradually moved up the rankings, officiating in three Tests, 24 one-day internationals and 16 Twenty20 matches.

"My priority was to play for the country rather

than umpiring," said Menon, who played two matches for Madhya Pradesh state in 2004 before taking up umpiring.

"I quit playing at 22 and I became a senior umpire at the age of 23. It wasn't worth trying to play and umpire so I decided to focus on umpiring alone," added Menon, who replaced England's Nigel Llong on the 2020-21 season list.

"I'm feeling very confident

by the fact that age is on my side, but the performance is what ultimately matters. Whether I do well or not, age has little to do with performance."

Menon is only the third Indian after Srinivas Venkatraghavan and Sundaram Ravi – who was dropped from the list last year – to join the elite group of 12 umpires who take charge at top matches and tournaments. — AFP



SPORTS



Stokes 'proud' as England captaincy looms

LONDON: Ben Stokes said he was "proud" to be in a position where he might replace Joe Root as England skipper against the West Indies, even though he has not captained a side since he was a teenager.

Vice-captain Stokes could find himself leading out the team for next week's first Test at Southampton - or later in the three-match series - should Root be absent attending the birth of his second child.

But the powerful all-rounder said he would accept the "huge honour" if it came his way.

"Even if it's only once, you can still say 'yeah, I've captained England'," he told a conference call on Monday.

Stokes was restored to his position as Test vice-captain in July 2019, nearly a year after being found not guilty of affray following an incident outside a nightclub.

"After that happened it was right, what am I going to do from this point forward?," Stokes told Sky in a separate interview as he recalled the incident. "How am I going to carry and conduct myself?"

"I'm quite proud to say I'm in this situation through hard work and determination. I wanted to get better and it's been no fluke."

But Stokes, who last led a cricket team aged 16 for Durham Academy, insisted captaincy had never been on his list of priorities.

"I've never set a goal to want to be a captain," explained the 29-year-old.

"Alastair Cook was always destined to be England captain after Andrew Strauss. Joe Root was always destined to be captain after Alastair Cook."

"If I'm being honest, I'm not one of those that people would necessarily associate (as) the next England captain."

'Nine slips and a gully'

With Stokes already England's star all-rounder, pundits including former captain Kevin Pietersen have said he does not need the extra responsibility of captaincy as well.

But Stokes, who jokingly said he would have "nine slips and a gully" as captain, insisted leadership would not dull his attacking approach.

Last year, he played a key role in England's World Cup triumph before scoring a stunning century at Headingley to win an astounding Test victory over Australia.

"Even if I am in charge that's not going to change the way that I go about things, in terms of how I want to influence the game, which is to try to make a positive effect with the ball or bat in my hand," he said.

One problem for Stokes, as fellow pace-bowling all-rounders Ian Botham and

Andrew Flintoff discovered when they were England captain, could be deciding on when to bowl himself.

"It depends if it is a flat wicket or not. If it is flat I will throw the ball to Jofra (Archer), Jimmy (Anderson) and Broady (Stuart Broad) and say 'here you go'," he joked.

"I guess I will have to be a bit more mindful if I am the one making that decision."

England will select a side from a 30-man squad currently training at a bio-secure Southampton, with a three-day intra-squad match - their lone warm-up fixture - starting on Wednesday.

National selector Ed Smith and his panel will pick the team but England captains, however, traditionally have an influence upon the final XI and Stokes admitted: "I might not have as many friends after this Test match."

— AFP

SPORTS



SERIE A LEADERS
MAINTAIN 4-POINT LEAD
WITH GENOA STROLL

JUVE KEEP LAZIO AT BAY

ROME: Juventus maintained their four-point lead at the top of Serie A on Tuesday after strolling to a 3-1 win at Genoa that keeps chasers Lazio at bay despite their comeback triumph at Torino.

Three stunning individual goals from Paulo Dybala, Cristiano Ronaldo and Douglas Costa downed relegation-threatened Genoa and kept Maurizio Sarri on course to deliver Juve's ninth straight league title in his first season as coach.

Andrea Pinamonti pulled one back with 14 minutes left for the struggling hosts, who stay just one point above the drop zone and third-from-bottom Lecce, who host Genoa's local rivals Sampdoria on Wednesday.

Pinamonti's strike was the first goal Juve have conceded since losing at Lyon in late February, but it wasn't enough to stop the champions from cruising to their sixth straight league win.

"It was a good team effort and we scored three brilliant goals," said Sarri.

ITALIAN SERIE
A RESULTS ON
TUESDAY:

Torino 1 (Belotti 5-pen) Lazio 2 (Immobile 48, Parolo 73)	The team have recovered well after the disappointment of losing the Italian Cup final, it was only a matter of time."
Genoa 1 (Pinamonti 76) Juventus 3 (Dybala 50, Ronaldo 57, Costa 73)	

with Genoa goalkeeper Mattia Perin making five saves in the goalless first half as Juve pushed early to win the match.

Dybala put his side in the lead in the 50th minute with a beautiful finish following a snaking dribble, a strike that set the tone for the rest of the match. — AFP

SPORTS



OFA TO COMPLETE LEAGUE

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Oman Football Association's (OFA) Chairman Shaikh Salim Said Al Waehibi met the representative of Omantel leagues on Wednesday to discuss on the status of the remaining matches for the season 2019/2020 which stopped due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting which was held at OFA headquarters in Seeb Stadium outcomed to continue the season with the three remaining matches of top tier domestic league as per the previous confirmation issued by OFA board on mid of March. OFA affirmed on implementation of all the safety precautions measures after resuming the league matches. A detailed medical protocol will be issued prior the season

commencement in direct coordination with the related entities to monitor spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All the attendees of the meeting including the OFA official and club's representatives agreed that the resuming of the league and other sporting activities will depend on the Supreme Committee decision and it is as announced previously the season will be back in September.

The funding which was provided by FIFA for the

football associations to cover the losses occurred due to the novel coronavirus was another item of discussion during the meeting. OFA chairman informed that an amount of 1.5 million Dollars from Fifa will be distributed for the national teams and clubs. The women football department will receive an amount of 500,000 \$ while the rest amount will be distributed between the clubs and OFA.

League clubs officials appreciated the efforts taken by the OFA team in

coordination with the related government bodies for the precautions measures to stop spreading of COVID-19 prior the matches and season resume once again in the near future.

Before the sporting season stopped in the Sultanate in Mid of March, Seeb were topping Omantel League by 50 points while Dhofar are placed second with 45 points. At the bottom of the league table order, Mirbat are confirmed of their relegation to the first division league while Al Oruba and Oman Club are positioned in the 12th and 13th positions respectively. In the HM Cup, the second leg matches of the semifinals and the final are still to be played. Ibri beat Al Oruba 2-1 in the first leg of the semifinal while the match between Al Nahdha and Dhofar ended in a 1-1 draw.



FEATURES

The power of environmental ART

In October 2010 during an international tourism conference where Peter presented more imagery of the beautiful Rock Garden, the government stated publicly that it was considering formally declaring this site a 'Protected Area.'... **page 20**

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Disney to revamp Splash Mountain to feature first Black princess



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The men who bake up a 'blessing' in Tehran



P22



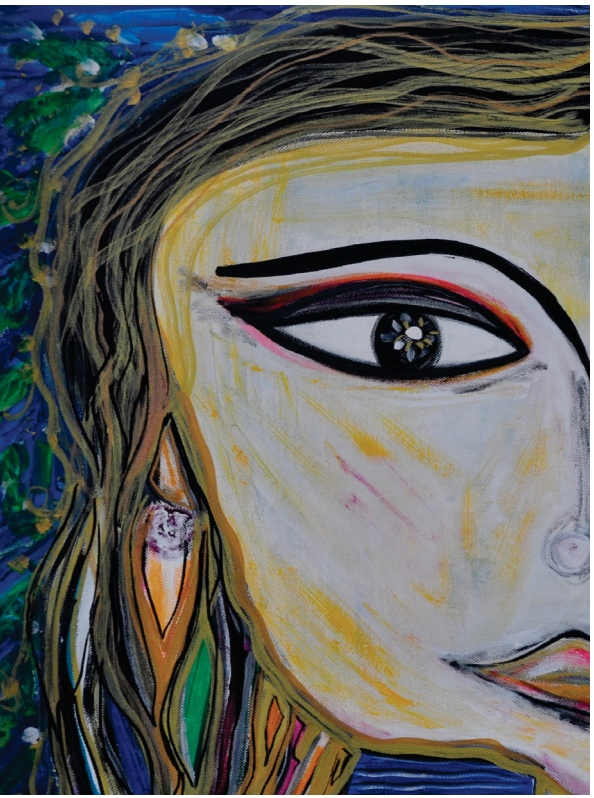
The power of environmental ART

LIJU CHERIAN

This is the story of how four inspired photographs transformed Duqm after a divine encounter with a 'pile of rocks'. Peter Farrington, a Canadian photographer-cum-painter and a resident of the Sultanate in 2008, narrates about how four photographs transformed an entire port town. In May 2008, Peter arrived in Oman from Ottawa as the Environmental Advisor to the government to help them plan a brand new industrial port city at Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate. A month later, Peter had his first encounter with Duqm's magical Rock Garden. Instantly enchanted, he explored the site taking dozens of photographs. However, upon returning to Muscat he learned that the site was to be destroyed. According to the approved Master Plan this wondrous 3x2 km area of natural sculptures was slated to be converted into a multi-lane highway and mas-

sive utility corridor. For Peter, it was clear that the decision makers could not have been aware of the treasure they had in the Rock Garden. He immediately began to seek a way to protect this site. However, 9 months of trying proved fruitless. On March 25, 2009 just days before work on the corridor was to begin, Peter submitted a five-page proposal to the concerned authorities to protect the Rock Garden. Importantly, he included a single page of 4 artistic photographs. The proposal was signed with the direction that the Rock Garden was not to be disturbed by the development; the Master Plan was to be changed. "It was the photos that made all the difference," Peter was told later. The next day, the Master Plan for Duqm was officially redrawn to divert the multi-lane highway and utility corridor from the Rock Garden. Over the next year Peter became an avid photographer as he continued to both explore the Sultanate and advocate for the Rock Garden

and Duqm in general. The power of environmental photography was now undeniable. Presently employed in Dubai, Peter is nostalgic about his Muscat days. From April 20-23, 2011, he along with 30 international and local artists set off to explore Duqm. Titled, 'Duqm: Portraits of Discovery', the package saw children from 3 schools given disposable cameras with the mission to show us what Duqm means to them. On October 29, 2011, 'Duqm: Portraits of Discovery' was opened at the prestigious Bait Muzna Gallery. Accompanied by under-secretaries from several ministries, the Minister of Environment, as guest of honour spent the evening touring the exhibition. The photos by the school children were a highlight. And in a rare move, the Gallery added 10 days to the exhibition at no charge. On October 29, 2011, 'Duqm: Portraits of Discovery' was opened at the prestigious Bait Muzna Gallery.



FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Disney to revamp Splash Mountain to feature first Black princess



WALT DISNEY CO said on Thursday it will renovate its Splash Mountain theme park ride to feature Tiana, the entertainment company's first Black princess and the star of 2009 animated film "The Princess and the Frog."

The announcement follows criticism of the current theme for Splash Mountain, which is based on 1946 film "Song of the

Splash Mountain, "will soon be completely reimagined" with a story that features Princess Tiana preparing to attend a Mardi Gras performance, Disney said in a blog post

South." A recent online petition argued that the film promoted racist stereotypes.

Splash Mountain, "will soon be completely reimagined" with a story that features Princess Tiana preparing to attend a Mardi Gras performance, Disney said in a blog post.

"Tiana is a modern, courageous and empowered woman, who pursues her dreams and never loses sight of what's really important. It's a great story with a strong lead character, set against the backdrop of New Orleans and the Louisiana bayou," the company said.

Hollywood companies including Disney are revisiting works from the past in light of renewed calls for racial justice following the death of African American George Floyd in U.S. police custody.

The petition on Change.org said Splash Mountain was a "beloved classic" at California's Disneyland, Walt DisneyWorld in Florida and Tokyo Disneyland. But "its history and storyline are steeped in extremely problematic and stereotypical racist tropes from the 1946 film Song of the South."—Reuters

FEATURES



THE MEN WHO BAKE UP A 'BLESSING' IN TEHRAN

THEY BAKE what Iranians call "the barakat (blessing) of the table", and it is eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner — traditional breads are a staple of the Iranian diet.

Bakeries are easy to locate in urban centres of Iran where all one has to do is spot a queue spilling onto sidewalks or simply detect the irresistible scent of freshly baked flatbreads.

Exclusively the job of men in the Islamic republic, bakers get up well before the crack of dawn while everyone else is still asleep.

Dressed in all-white clothing that can include caps, they hail from across the country and are usually made up of ethnic Azeris, Kurds and Lurs.

The baker moves and gesticulates constantly as he works in what resembles a dance in front of gas-fired ovens.

He takes a ball of dough and spreads it on a board before placing it on the inside walls of the glowing furnace using a long set of tongs.

Once they are done, the baker again uses the tongs to retrieve the bread, and hangs it on the wall or piles it up.

The walls around them are a patchwork of flatbreads in four different shapes and sizes — barbari, lavash, sangak and taftoon.

But they don't stay there



for long, as customers jostling near the entrance are eager to snap them up while they are still hot.

A freshly baked Iranian flatbread usually accompanies a piece of feta cheese and sweet tea for breakfast or a plate of kebab for lunch.

Of the four main traditional types, sangak is the most popular and is seen as Iran's national bread.

It is made from whole-wheat flour and topped with a sprinkling of sesame seeds and sometimes poppy seeds at the customer's request.

BAKING IN THE TIME OF CORONA

The coronavirus has also affected the bakers' profession like so many others, and their income has decreased as a result.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, some of our customers who had been quarantined bought ingredients from us to bake bread at home," said baker Esmail Asghari.

But making traditional bread at home is difficult, meaning customers were quick to return to their local bakery.

"During isolation, I made bread twice at home, but it didn't go well and I realised it wasn't a good idea!" said Negar Rezai, a customer clutching some sangak outside a bakery in north Tehran.

"We have bread for breakfast and dinner and often eat rice for lunch," adds the 50-year-old housewife.

In order to ensure hygiene, one baker has enforced the strict sanitary instructions imposed by the health ministry, including social distancing and use of bank cards instead of cash.

"The line became long and many people did not respect (health) protocols."

The health ministry reported in January that on average Iranians consume 310 grams (nearly 11 ounces) of bread per day.—**AFP**