

HM greetings
to President
of Ecuador

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Lenin Moreno of the Republic of Ecuador on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Moreno and the friendly people of Ecuador further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

Lebanese
minister resigns
as donors
pledge aid



A woman holds a Lebanese flag as people gather at the Trocadero square near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. — **Reuters**

BEIRUT: Lebanese Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad announced her resignation on Sunday, as world leaders held a virtual meeting to raise funds to help the country recover from last week's massive deadly explosion in Beirut.

"I apologize to all the Lebanese whom we were not able to fulfill their aspirations," she said in a televised statement on Sunday. **SEE ALSO P7**

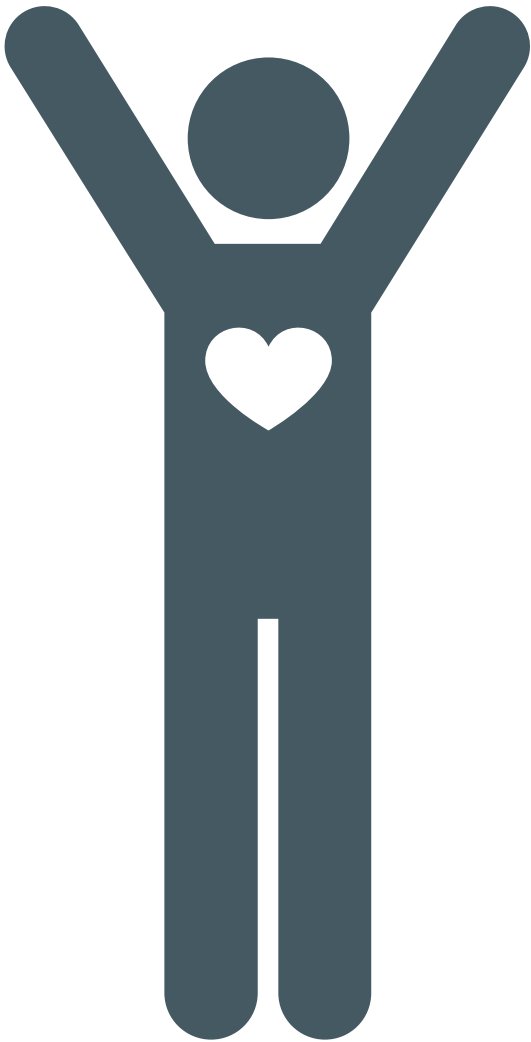
COVID-19 RECOVERY
RATE EXCEEDS 90%
IN SULTANATE

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA INDICATES SIGNS OF FALL IN CASES

ZAINAB
AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: With 1,210 new recoveries, the total recovery from COVID-19 in Oman touched 74,691. The rate of recovery exceeded 90 per cent of the total 81,580 confirmed cases, according to the new figures released by the Ministry of Health on Sunday.

The ministry on Sunday reported 223 new cases of COVID-19 and four deaths. This comes as the pandemic is still spreading and almost no country in the world has



been able to end it completely.

A report issued by the Ministry of Health last Thursday stated that epidemiological data in the Sultanate indicate signs of a decrease in the total number of infected cases as well as admissions in hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs).

According to the report, the epidemiological curves in the Sultanate, the seven-day moving average of cases reached its peak in the first week of July at a rate of 2000 cases.

TURN TO P2

AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR DUQM PORT

Conceived initially as a multipurpose port anchoring a mega industrial and economic hub, Port of Duqm has outlined ambitions to become a major transshipment hub for a range of cargoes. The port seeks to become a transit hub connecting the East with the port. **DETAILS ON P10**

COVID-19 recovery rate exceeds 90 per cent

FROM PAGE 1

Then it began to descend gradually by the end of July – around 1,000 cases, at the rate of 500 per week.

The report noted that the latest update of the definition of the COVID-19 case was issued in the Sultanate on July 25 to keep pace with the global and local epidemiological situation. Laboratory tests were conducted for all cases with acute pneumonia except for mild cases. At the same time, the Sultanate continues to follow preventive measures and control the spread of infection among suspected cases.

The report, however, pointed out at several indicators to determine the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate and to plan for the next stage, including the possibility of another wave of the pandemic. That to



be done through monitoring the number of hospitalised patients in general and those in ICUs in particular, accredited centres for epidemiological surveillance of respiratory diseases (sentinel sites) in

different governorates, by using the results of the National Serological Survey on COVID-19, and finally through the daily death figures per million of the population, and comparing them with death rates during

previous years.

The Sultanate recorded the first case of COVID-19 on February 24 among two citizens who returned from Iran. The number of tests done so far, according to Tarassud, reached 309,212.

India announces 23 more repatriation flights

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: India has announced 23 more repatriation flights in phase five of Vande Bharat Mission starting from August 15 to 31. Of the 23, eight will fly to Kerala and the rest to Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Chennai, Bangalore and Lucknow.

Passenger lists for the flights will be finalised by the Embassy on the basis of information received by it. The Embassy will be floating an online form for seeking confirmation of passengers to travel on

a particular flight and then share the list of registered people with Air India. All such people will be contacted by Air India directly for booking of tickets.

The cost of tickets will have to be borne by the passengers themselves. All passengers are required to confirm acceptance of all conditions of travel, including quarantine requirements in India as well as health requirements in order to board the flight.

As many as 56,000 Indians have already flown from Oman in the last three months.



1. August 16..... Muscat-Goa / Mumbai
2. August 17..... Muscat-Tiruchirappalli
3. August 17..... Muscat-Kozhikode
4. August 18..... Muscat-Lucknow
5. August 18..... Muscat-Chennai
6. August 20..... Muscat-Kannur
7. August 21..... Muscat-Mumbai
8. August 22..... Muscat-Kochi
9. August 22..... Muscat Trivandrum
10. August 23..... Muscat-Delhi
11. August 24..... Muscat-Bengaluru / Mangalore
12. August 25..... Muscat-Lucknow
13. August 25..... Muscat Hyderabad
14. August 25..... Muscat-Chennai
15. August 26..... Muscat-Vijayawada
16. August 27..... Muscat-Kannur
17. August 28..... Muscat-Trivandrum
18. August 29..... Muscat-Mumbai
19. August 30..... Muscat-Kochi
20. August 31..... Muscat-Bengaluru/ Mangalore
21. August 31..... Muscat-Kozhikode
22. August 31..... Muscat-Tiruchirappalli
23. August 31..... Muscat-Delhi

All private firms must submit tax card: OCCI

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry issued an online statement regarding tax cards on Sunday. “The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry brings to the notice of all private sector institutions that the Tax Authority has issued Decision No. 27/2020 regarding the handling of tax cards and issuance fees. This indicates that all private sector establishments must submit a copy of the tax card or the valid tax certificate with the required documents when completing the procedures of contracting or dealing or initiating any procedure with any company, institution, branch or foreign company. The decision came into force on July 1.”

TRA directive to ensure fair competition in telecom sector

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: With the third telecom operator expected to enter the Oman market in the coming days, the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a decision that will help regulate the anti-competitive behavior in the sector.

The TRA issued decision 59/2020 amending some provisions of the earlier decision 70/2013, regarding the rules for post-market regulation (anti-competitive behavior).

Article 1 of the decision stipulated that the text of the article shall be replaced by the text of Article (4) of the rules for post-market regulation (anti-competitive behavior) will now read, "The authority may, on its own initiative or on the basis of a complaint submitted by the concerned parties, initiate investigations to ensure that the actions or the licensee's activities that prevent or limit competition, including abuse of a dominant position, entering into agreements, providing anti-competitive facilities, or violating prior



The authority may, on its own initiative or on the basis of a complaint submitted by the concerned parties, initiate investigations to ensure that the actions or the licensee's activities that prevent or limit competition, including abuse of a dominant position.

TRA

regulatory obligations, in accordance with the procedures for adjudicating competition complaints."

Article 2 of the decision includes complaint submission and examination procedures, investigation and determination of the complaint, and confidentiality.

The decision demands making a judgment on the complaints within 90 days from the date of acceptance of the complaint or initiates an investigation on its own against the violating party. The investigation period can be extended if the circumstances of the complaint require more time.

Currently, TRA is undertaking a periodical review of the telecommunications service markets, with the view of updating the Market Definition and Dominance (MDD) Report published in 2013.

"Since the issuance of MDD Report 2013, significant developments took place in the sector such as entry of new companies, including the forthcoming third mobile operator. Similarly, the market witnessed growth in the deployment of fiber, LTE, and fixed 5G services whereas 5G mobile services are also in the pipeline. From the consumers' side, demand for data services, bundled plans, and OTT services are on the rise," TRA said.

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OMAN OBSERVER

Together, we shall overcome

MOH Statement 159

Today's Total Cases

Omanis

148

223

Non-Omanis

75

Total Cases 81580

Recoveries

1210

Total 74691

Deaths

4

Total 513

Admitted Cases

44

Currently admitted

488

Current ICU admissions

171

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#Living_with_COVID19

Frequent use of sanitisers may cause eczema

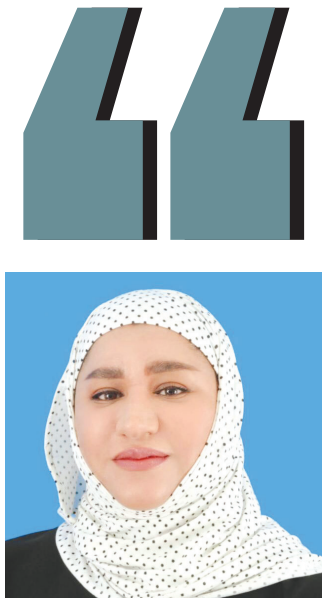
KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: There has already been debate on the use of sanitisers, soaps and gloves as defence against the COVID-19. Everyone is talking about the standards of this stuff as a foolproof measure against the highly contagious virus.

Most of the experts agree on more than 60 per cent alcohol base for a standard sanitiser, whereas some standard is being discussed about the quality of gloves and hand wash brands available in the market.

A section of dermatologists, however, say frequent use of sanitisers and soaps may cause skin irritation or eczema if used too frequently. The issue is all over the Internet with lots of advice on how to manage skin care while keeping safe from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Faiza Ahmed al Raaie, Senior Dermatology Consultant at the Ministry of Health, agreed with the assumption that frequent use of soaps and sanitisers can lead to eczema especially among those who are prone to it and have family history.



If at all a person prone to eczema has to wear gloves, he should put plastic or cloth gloves and above that latex gloves can be used," she said and added that latex gloves are known factors of aggravating dermatitis among those who are prone to it

DR FAIZA AHMED AL RAAIE,
SENIOR DERMATOLOGIST

"But you cannot live without sanitisers and hand wash in this time of the pandemic. You have to be careful about your skin at the same time. If there is any sign of irritation, dryness, or etching you have to immediately identify the reason — whether it is the sanitiser or the soap that is irritating the skin. In such cases, it is advisable to stop regular sanitisers and soaps and switch to hypoallergenic, which are made for people who are easily

allergic to most chemicals and ingredients found in regular hand cleaning products."

Mostly the producers of hand hygiene products take care of this aspect of skin care, but in some individuals, the skin is either too sensitive or prone to skin problems. "They have to be careful because once the skin disorder settles it takes time to go away in some cases. It depends on the type and level of skin infection."

She suggested baby soaps as an alternative for those who have sensitive skin.

Dr Faiza warned against the use of latex gloves for those who are prone to any kind of eczema. "If at all a person prone to eczema has to wear gloves, he should put plastic or cloth gloves and above that latex gloves can be used," she said and added that latex gloves are known factors of aggravating dermatitis among those who are prone to it.



MAN DROWNS IN N BATINAH, PACDA RECOVERS BODY



The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) has recovered the body of a person who went missing in the



Port of Naber in North Batinah Governorate. In a statement on Sunday, PACDA said, "The authority's Operations Centre received a report

about a person who had drowned in the Port of Naber in the Wilayat of Liwa, North Batinah Governorate. After search, he was found dead."

RETURNING EXPATS MUST ABIDE BY COVID-19 PROTOCOL

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: When expatriates return to the Sultanate they must follow safety measures responsibly to curb the spread of COVID-19.

According to the World Health Organisation and the message of Oman's Ministry of Health for the travellers, "It is the responsibility of all the travellers to self-monitor for the potential onset of symptoms on arrival for 14 days, report symptoms and travel history to local health facilities, and follow national protocols."

Contacts of confirmed cases should be also quarantined or asked to self-quarantine as part of national response



strategies.

While over 100 expatriates, including their families, have returned to Oman after being stranded abroad during months of lockdowns, there are a few who are not able to go through the formalities.

With life getting back to normal in Oman, resuming job is important for expatriates. Some of their visas have expired.

Even after getting permits, some of the residents face difficulties due to ticket fares and unscheduled flight operations.

A group of volunteers in the Sultanate is helping returning expatriates and their families to overcome the challenges.

This support group not only works to ensure approval but also is in touch with the airlines (including national airlines of Oman and India) to help expats return home. Over 100 people have returned with the help of this support group.

As people can be vulnerable to be cheated, our advice is, "We will help with whatever is possible, but just that people need to be patient and not get cheated in any case," said

Rashmi Sahay who herself was stranded in India for a couple of months during lockdown with children and husband in the Sultanate.

Rashmi is supported by Ravi Jayanthi, Kaushik Datta Gupta, Rinki Kanabar, Sankar Narayanan MN, Shohaib Khan, James Moirangthem, Priyanka Singh.

"Apart from people who have returned, we helped over 250 people by way of guiding them to get the approvals and process including the precautions to be taken while traveling," Rashmi said.

LOST
PASSPORT

MAHMOUD
ABDELAZIZ
AHMED
MOHAMED
has lost
EGYPTIAN
PASSPORT
No. A08668126.
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handover to
ROP.

Electricity and water output fall

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's total electricity production in May fell 3.1 per cent to reach 13,254.8 GW per hour compared to 13,684.8 GW per hour in the same month of 2019.

Water production in April increased by 5.5 per cent to reach 147.26 million cubic meters compared to 139.64 million cubic meters in the same period in 2019, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total electricity production in the Governorates of Al Batinah and Ad Dhahira reached 8,113 GW per hour at the end of May 2020 compared to 8,489.1 GW per hour in the same period of 2019. The total electricity production in Al Sharqiyah reached 2,913.1 GW per hour compared to an output of 2,687.4 GW last year, recording a rise of 8.4 per cent.

Electricity output in Dhofar declined 3 per cent at the end of the 5-month period of 2020, reached 1,476.1 GW per hour compared to 1,521.5 GW per hour in 2019. Al Wusta also recorded a rise in total electrici-

ty production by 19 per cent.

The total electricity production in A'Dakhliya fell by 86.8 per cent at the end of May 2020 to reach 24.5 GW per hour compared to 185.5 GW in May 2019.

The net figures are inclusive of purchases by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC) from local power generating entities, as well as output from auto-generators and diesel rental units.

The Sultanate's net electricity production at the end of May 2020 dropped 2.3 per cent to touch 12,955.4 GW per hour compared to 13,254.7 GW per hour in May 2019.

As per the NCSI data, Al Batinah and A'Dhahira recorded the highest net electricity production, reaching 7,937.4 GW per hour from 8,187.7 GW per hour in 2019. A'Sharqiya ranked second with 2,836.9 GW per hour at the end of May 2020 compared to 2,621.7 GW in 2019. Muscat and Dhofar recorded a fall in net electricity production by 19.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent to reach 378 GW per hour and 1,400.9 GW per hour. — ONA



العمانية للاستثمارات التعليمية والتدريبية
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URGENTLY REQUIRED
LEGAL ADVISOR

Oman Education & Training (OETI) looking for a Legal Advisor to be responsible for providing the group with legal assistance and advice.

The responsibilities of the Legal Advisor will include

- Drafting legal documents.
- Drafting and reviewing Contracts.
- Structuring solutions for issues, and providing support in legal issues.
- Conducting legal analysis and researching legal matters.
- Providing advice on legal matters.
- Drafting legal opinions, memoranda, and briefing documents.
- Reviewing legal material.
- Monitoring the implementation of the legal clauses.
- Conduct legal analysis and research on various legal matters of the Group.
- Provide advice on different legal issues and drafting legal opinions, memoranda and other briefing documents.
- Conduct legal research by utilizing various resources and selecting the relevant material to analyze the legal information.
- Any other duties as may be assigned by the CEO, or by the Board of Directors.

Skills and Professional Qualifications:

- Law degree graduate with at least 15 year's post qualification experience within commercial and contract legal work, with experience of the drafting, review, negotiation and management of supply agreements etc.
- Preference would be for a candidate with in-house Legal Counsel Experience gained either in-house with another company or law firm.
- Strong organizational skills and ability to prioritize multiple tasks.
- Self-starter and independent/strategic thinker.
- Advanced English (spoken and written), plus Arabic.
- Excellent communication skills and ability to present in a clear and concise manner.
- Possess excellent analytical, research and writing skills.
- Strong communication skills.
- The ability to make good judgments, and be able to work well within a team.
- Be able to manage a large workload with a tight deadline, and remain up-to-date with laws.

The CV accompanied by copies of qualifications and certificates of expertise to be send to the following e-mail
(a.alkhayet@su.edu.om) & (a.alkhayet@oeti.om)
from 10/8/2020 and the deadline for sending resumes 17/8/2020



SMART CAMPUSES LEAD TO SMART CITIES

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Developing smart campuses across the country can lead to the clusters of smart cities that can offer smart living in various parts of the country, according to an academician and an expert in smart cities concept in the country.

"The question of how to develop a smart city or upgrade the current one to become 'smart' has become a topical one and in doing so, the small campuses can present themselves as a success and inspiring story for other local and international cities to follow," says Dr Mohamed Sarrab (**pictured**), Deputy Director of Communication and Information Research Center, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Oman's national strategy of digitisation, Digital Oman 2040 envisages developing smart and green cities and the vision of the 2040 strategy is to build Oman as an international digital reference and making ICT an important lever for socio-economic development.

"Conversion of our cam-



Oman's national strategy of digitisation, Digital Oman 2040 envisages developing smart and green cities as an important lever for socio-economic development

pus into digital campuses can lead to making smart cities in the country and I believe starting to meet Oman 2040 vision can begin at a small scale by testing and piloting some aspects of smart cities at small areas such as Almouj, Duqm, Madinat al Irfan," adds Dr Mohammed.

"Meeting such vision at a city or a country level is very complex and inhibited

by several factors and the lack of existing success story is one of these factors."

According to him, a smart city should bring together technology, data, services and citizens to enable different features including smart living, people, environment, economy, education, government and mobility. Smart living includes elements of safety, a culturally vibrant, happy, and healthy atmosphere. Smart people focus on learning and education, inclusive society and creativity. A smart environment considers green energy, green buildings, green urban planning. A smart economy should also include productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship and local and global interconnectivity.

"A comprehensive study investigating challenges, needs analysis, preparedness level, and key success factors for enabling smart cities ending up with designing and implementing a testbed application prototype that include major smart cities technologies needs to be carried out,"

according to him.

"The Smart Cities Research Group at the Sultan Qaboos University can shed more light on the emerging technologies that offer an easier way to help develop smart cities and improve the current one but it has been noted that there is lack of a universal approach for the development of Smart cities."

He feels that, in Oman, as the concerns of the cities are different, we need to find solutions to the problem statement related to the launching of smart cities by answering some questions.

"What are the main operating challenges and issues of Omani cities, what are the crucial areas to focus on when building smart cities in Oman, the feasibility of Omani smart cities, what are the technical and non-technical requirements to convert into a smart city and the like," Dr Sarrab adds.

Also, thought for an effective ICT architecture both logical and physical, while considering smart cities in the country needs to be mulled over.



A man walks past a truck that was burned during a protest in Beirut. — Reuters

FURIOUS LEBANESE VOW NEW PROTESTS OVER DEADLY MEGA-BLAST

BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters enraged by official negligence blamed for Beirut's enormous and deadly explosion vowed on Sunday to rally again after a night of street clashes in which they stormed several ministries.

The calls for renewed protests came as French President Emmanuel Macron opened a UN-backed virtual donors conference to raise aid for Lebanon.

World powers have a duty to support the Lebanese people after a massive blast devastated their capital as the country's future is at stake, Macron told the conference.



Manal Samad apologises to the Lebanese public for failing them. — AFP

In Beirut, the fury on the streets has further shaken the embattled government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, which saw its first cabinet resignation when the information minister, Manal Abdel Samad, quit on Sunday.

"After the enormous Beirut catastrophe, I announce my resignation from the government," she said, apologising to citizens for having failed them.

The revelation that Lebanese state officials had long tolerated a ticking time-bomb in the heart of the capital has served as shocking proof to many Lebanese of the rot at the core of the state apparatus.

The death toll from the explosion of a long-neglected pile of ammonium nitrate stood at 158 people, with 60 still reported missing, and a staggering 6,000 wounded, many by flying glass as the shockwave tore through the city.

The blast, whose mushroom cloud reminded many of an atomic bomb, left a 43-metre deep crater at Beirut's port, said a security official citing French experts working in the disaster area.

The mood was one of grief and fury in Beirut, a day after many of the dead were laid to rest and when thousands demonstrated in the biggest anti-government rally the country has seen in months.

TEARGAS, RUBBER BULLETS

The country's worst peace-time disaster has reignited a protest movement against the ruling elite that first flared last October but had then faded amid economic hardship and the coronavirus pandemic.

As tensions have again escalated, the army on Saturday used teargas and rubber bullets to clear hundreds of protesters from the central Martyr's Square, once more the epicentre of Lebanon's protest movement. — AFP

Afghanistan to free 400 Taliban to start talks

KABUL: Afghanistan agreed on Sunday to release 400 "hard-core" Taliban prisoners, paving the way for the beginning of peace talks aimed at ending more than 19 years of war.

Under election-year pressure from US President Donald Trump for a deal allowing him to bring home American troops, the war-torn country's grand assembly, or Loya Jirga, on Sunday approved the release, a controversial condition raised by the Taliban militants to join peace talks.

"In order to remove an obstacle, allow the start of the peace process and an end of bloodshed, the Loya Jirga approves the release of 400 Taliban," the assembly said in a resolution.

Minutes later, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said, "Today, I will sign the release order of these 400 prisoners."

Last week Ghani invited some 3,200 Afghan community leaders and politicians to Kabul amid tight security and concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic to advise the government on whether the prisoners should be freed. With the release, the Afghan government will fulfil its pledge to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners. — Reuters

Virus emergency could last through Jan in Iran



Iranians wearing face masks ride a motorcycle in the capital Tehran on Sunday. — AFP

TEHRAN: Iran will remain in a state of emergency due to the novel coronavirus until at least January, President Hassan Rowhani said on Sunday.

"We have been in this situation for six months and we must prepare ourselves for another six months at least," Rowhani said, adding that this meant any complete easing of safety measures was not in the cards for now.

"We must find a middle way between normality and sticking to the virus restrictions," he said in remarks published on his website that appeared to justify those measures he has taken to date to ease the country's response to the virus. — dpa

WORLD

Several dead, many missing after torrential rains in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: At least 13 people are dead after heavy monsoon rains and flooding wreaked havoc in several parts of Pakistan, officials said on Sunday.

Persistent rain flooded dozens of villages in the southern province of Sindh and the south-western province of Balochistan during the last three days.

At least seven people were killed in Karachi, the country's most populous city. Additionally, six people lost their lives in Balochistan in the last 24 hours, officials said.

Hundreds of people were displaced by flooding in both the provinces. Rescue workers were busy shifting people to safer places.

The military said on Sunday that it had rescued more than 100 people from Dadu district in Sindh.

"More than a dozen people are still missing in Balochistan," Younus Aziz Mengal, a spokesperson for the provincial disaster



management authority said. He said that the flooding had damaged bridges and highways, cutting off Gawadar, a port city on the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan's Met office predicted 20 per cent more

rain and urban flooding this monsoon season and asked authorities to take precautionary measures.

Flash floods, land erosion, cloudbursts, droughts and smog resulting in low air quality have been on the

rise in Pakistan in recent years.

Climate experts say it is the impact of global warming, but also due to the country's proximity to highly industrialised China and India. — dpa

India conducts record COVID-19 tests



NEW DELHI: India tested a record number of over 7 lakh samples of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours taking the total tests conducted to 2,41,06,535, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Sunday.

A total of 7,19,364 tests were conducted increasing its frequency by more than a lakh from the previous day when 5,98,778 tests were conducted.

The ministry said that such high level of testing would also lead to a high number of daily positive cases. However, states have been advised to firmly focus on comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation and effective treatment. — IANS

Artwork by Ardern raises thousands

WELLINGTON:

An original sketch by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has raised NZ\$18,000 (\$12,000) for charity.

The artwork, titled "The Political Cycle," went under the hammer on auction website Trade Me on Sunday. The one-off signed sketch, which resembles a tornado, attracted more than 200 bids and was viewed more than 33,000 times. Proceeds from the sale will go to Koru Care, a charity that supports New Zealand children who face life-threatening illnesses or disabilities. It is not the first time Ardern's artwork has been auctioned off on the website, with a piece called "To Do List" raising 2,500 New Zealand dollars for the charity Parent to Parent in 2018. — dpa



Rajapaksa sworn in as Lanka PM

COLOMBO: Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in on Sunday as Sri Lanka's prime minister after a landslide victory for the ruling party in Wednesday's parliamentary elections, officials said.



The 74-year-old was sworn in for another five-year term before President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, his younger brother, at a historic Buddhist temple in Kelaniya, 10 kilometres from the capital.

The ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Party (Sri Lanka Peoples' Party) won 145 seats (59 per cent of the vote) and obtained the support of minor parties to seal a two-thirds majority of 150 members in the 225-seat parliament.

The main opposition, the United People's Front (SJB), trailed far behind with only 24 per cent of the votes and 54 seats. The results have bolstered the powers of both Rajapaksa brothers. — dpa



Central Africa seeks to make forests work for people

MEGAN ROWLING

Countries home to the Congo Basin rainforest, including Gabon and the Republic of Congo, are working on ways to harness their majestic trees to benefit their people while maintaining climate protection and other natural services the forests provide.

This week, the Republic of Congo — also known as Congo-Brazzaville — officially published a new law, approved by the president in July, to ensure more sustainable management of the country's vast forests.

Gabon, meanwhile, hopes to have a new forest law in place by next summer, marrying efforts to safeguard the climate and biodiversity with creating jobs in forestry, said Lee White, its minister for forests, water, environment and climate change.

Former conservationist White said he had been shocked, on taking up his ministerial role last year, at the "very low value we attribute to tropical timber".

Foresters in Gabon do not

make much money — a key reason why some are tempted to turn to illegal practices, he added.

"Unless we can make timber into a precious resource, we're not going to be able to maintain these Congo Basin forests," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Libreville.

White's ministry plans to expand the country's special economic zones, in which the government holds a stake of about 40 per cent, where sustainably logged timber is processed into products ranging from furniture to parquet flooring and charcoal.

The aim is to add economic value and jobs, boost profits and reduce the amount of wood wasted.

White said Gabon's ban on exporting raw logs, introduced a decade ago, had helped quadruple the size of its forest economy and double the number of employees in the sector — but far more could be done to make the most of the rich resource.

Gabon's goal is to reach 300,000 forest-related jobs in the next decade, up from about 27,000 now. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

Aspiring for a new learning experience



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

As coronavirus makes its impact on all walks of life, many countries around the world are implementing different procedures and precautionary measures to limit the number of people flocking public places. In contrary, these actions have disrupted the normal functioning of many life necessities including education. The duration of such measures has been extensive and is likely to continue in some countries for a certain period of time until a vaccine is available.

Therefore, students, parents and educators are feeling the extraordinary effect of coronavirus as schools are closed and quarantine is being ordered to cope with this pandemic. It is expected that over 300 million students around the world are having their education disrupted by the spread of the virus. Educational system has not faced this level of disruption for generations, but learning has to be continued in one way or the other.

While governments and health officials are doing their best to slow down the pandemic, education systems are collaborating to respond and provide quality education for all during these difficult times. Undoubtedly, decision-makers in education sectors have been closely working on alternative methods for students and teachers to continue with their lessons as attending school is not possible in current conditions. Likewise, they are developing methods which make schools fit for working in a safe environment.

On the local front, the Ministry of Education is striving to offer students a positive learning experience whether at home or school. As it is important that learning continues even in such uncertain situations, the ministry has been studying various possible options for the new academic year, which is round the corner. As a first-of-its-kind commendable gesture, the ministry has conducted a survey seeking opinion from the public on different learning alternatives offered by schools.

This reflects the ministry's keenness to involve community in proposing the best educational solution for students during this exceptional year. Thanks to the ministry for introducing such a great initiative as a joint responsibility shouldered by both public and the government. Regardless of what the learning methods would be — homeschooling will be key and highly needed to support students' learning as definitely attendance at schools will be strictly limited if not stopped. Thus, all should be ready for such a new educational experience and play the role of a teacher at home!

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

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Port of Duqm seeks to evolve into transshipment hub

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT: Conceived initially as a multipurpose port anchoring a mega industrial and economic hub, Port of Duqm has outlined ambitions to become a major transshipment hub for a range of cargoes.

Reggy Vermeulen, CEO, said in an interview to Duqm Economist, the quarterly newsletter of the Special Economic Zone Authority of Duqm (SEZAD), that the port seeks to unlock its full potential as an enabler of growth across the SEZ and the wider Wusta region.

Duqm port, he said, is planning to become a major transshipment hub for containerised, dry bulk, liquid bulk and automotive cargoes as well as promoting its position to feeder operators and main liners. Furthermore, the port seeks to become a transit port connecting the East with the West, he noted.

"The plan is to develop as the preferred multi-purpose port of the region, which

GROWTH AMBITIONS:

The gateway plans to become a major transshipment hub for containerised, dry bulk, liquid bulk and automotive cargoes, as well as promote its position to feeder operators and main liners.

allows us positively respond to any inquiry or opportunity that is presented.

The Port is acting as a key enabler of the entire Special Economic Zone and its hinterland, unlocking its full potential of becoming the leading economic beating heart of the country. The Port will facilitate the import of raw materials and re-export of finished goods after value addition in the Zone," Vermeulen stated.

The official noted that with the completion of the commercial berth, Port of Duqm is now equipped to provide a wider range of services.

Currently, Port of Duqm has a yard capacity of approximately 40 ha and a berth length of 1200m available at its commercial berth for carrying out port and

terminal services to various industries.

At this moment, we are primarily focusing on project and break bulk cargo, dry bulk cargo and containerized cargoes, as well as the accommodation of various navies," he said. "By mid-2020 the yard at our commercial berth will increase to 70 hectares and Port of Duqm will get full access to the 2.2km berth."

Significantly, 2019 was a record breaking year for the port, according to the CEO.

The port handled about 1.3 million metric tonnes (MT) of cargoes, comprising around 600,000 MT of exports and 700,000 MT of imports. The port also received 606 vessel calls, an increase of 45 per cent over

the previous year.

Small numbers of containers are also being handled at the port, thanks to an Express Feeder Service operated by Oman Shipping which calls Duqm on a weekly basis, said Vermuelen, adding that volumes are expected to grow as various industries envisaged at the SEZ commence operations.

Going forward, Port of Duqm plans to expand the level of services in line with its ambitions to become the 'most preferred multipurpose port' of the region, said the CEO.

"Other industries, like the container transshipment operations, food businesses, automotive cargoes and liquid bulk cargoes will be added to its current portfolio.

The related volumes handled are expected to increase exponentially, since no major bottlenecks will exist any longer, and the port will be able to fully deploy its capabilities in line with the activities in SEZAD," he added.



World-class bulk liquid terminal taking shape at Duqm SEZ

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Oman's newest oil terminal, encompassing a complex of facilities for the storage and export of refined petroleum products from the under-construction Duqm Refinery & Petrochemical scheme, is rapidly taking shape within the Port of Duqm on the Sultanate's southeastern coast.

When operational in 2023, alongside the multi-billion-dollar refinery project, the oil terminal will position Duqm as a new energy hub for Oman, according to a report published in Duqm Economist, the quarterly newsletter of the Special Economic Zone Authority of Duqm (SEZAD).

The Duqm Liquid Bulk Berth, as it is formally referred to, is a landmark in its own right. Conceived initially as an export facility for the refined petroleum products of Duqm Refinery, it has since been scaled up to serve assorted international energy firms looking to operate out of Duqm.

Leading global dredging and maritime infrastructure services provider Royal Boskalis

Westminster NV was selected by SEZAD in 2017 to construct the bulk liquid terminal at the Port of Duqm at a cost of RO 199.1 million (\$510 million).

The contract called for, among other things, the construction of a 980-metre quay wall, deepening of the port basin to — 18 metres and approach channel to — 19 metres,

dredging and reclamation works, and the establishment of a new double berth jetty island.

Worley Parsons provided construction supervision services for the overall project supported by specialists drawn from SEZAD, Tatweer and Duqm Refinery.

While Phase 1 of the project was completed last year, the second phase was delivered in the second quarter of this year. In conjunction with the project, around 79 hectares of terminal capacity

was developed adjacent to the 4.6 kilometre-long secondary breakwater.

However, following heightened international investment interest in Duqm, a further 55 hectares was reclaimed from the sea to create new terminal capacity for current and future companies looking to capitalise on the SEZ's strategic appeal.

Following the completion of the marine infrastructure, the consortium consisting of CB&I and Saipem has since commenced construction work on a crude tank farm, product export terminal and other facilities as part of its commitments under the EPC-3 package of the contract for the implementation of the Duqm Refinery project.

An 80km crude pipeline linking the new refinery with the Raz Markaz Crude Oil Park just north of the SEZ is also included in this package. Crude

storage capacity envisaged at the Raz Markaz is presently estimated at five million barrels.

Storage capacity planned at the Bulk Liquid Terminal will cater for a variety of refined products emerging from the refinery. But a system of pipelines running from the refinery to the berth will also facilitate the direct loading of ships, particularly in the case of LPG and high sulphur fuel oil.

On the other hand, dry bulk products such as petroleum coke and elemental sulphur will be transported by truck to the terminal and stored in warehouses pending their export to overseas markets.

As part of the Saipem's scope of works, as many as 18 storage tanks will be constructed at the Duqm Liquid Berth for storing product from the refinery.

Eight of these tanks are earmarked for naphtha, six for diesel and four for jet fuel. High-tech loading arms, firefighting systems and flare control system are also part of an elaborate network of investments being made into the delivery of a world-class bulk liquid terminal at Duqm.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE LANDMARK:
Conceived initially as an export facility for the refined petroleum products of Duqm Refinery, the bulk liquid terminal has since been scaled up to serve assorted international energy firms looking to operate out of Duqm.

BUSINESS

Business deals in Europe at lowest in 23 years


ANDY JALIL

andyjailil@aol.com

As the pandemic and resulting recession pushed bosses to preserve cash levels and hold off on acquisitions, European M&A deals crashed to a 23-year low in the second quarter. There was just one deal in Europe over \$10bn in the three months from April to June – the merger of Telefonica's and Liberty Global's UK operations, with a combined value of almost \$35bn. According to data from Refinitiv, in total across Europe, there were just 1,958 M&A deals unveiled in Europe during the second quarter.

A locked-down continent and executive focus on corporate survival helped drive down deals to the lowest number since the first quarter of 1997. Head of M&A for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Citigroup, Alison Harding-Jones said: "There has been a meaningful slowdown in M&A activity. Before the crisis hit, there were a large number of deals due to come to market that were put on hold."

Dealmaking on their own turf was one area where European banks managed to retain market share. The pandemic has now helped that slip away as well.

Some bankers have said that European banks may never recover and that the hit caused by the latest turmoil may usher in a new era of American banking dominance. But the Americans are suffering too. The slump in Europe came amid a broader collapse in global dealmaking, the value of which plunged by 55 per cent compared with the same period last

year.

Globally, M&A fell to an 11-year low during the Q2, with the total value of deals falling to \$485.3bn. In the US – the biggest market for M&A deals in the world – the value of deals dropped to a 17-year low at \$103.5bn, an 85 per cent decline on the same period in 2019.

The value of transactions in Europe during the second quarter, at \$182.9bn, was the lowest second quarter total since 2016. However, this was skewed by one transaction: Unilever's move in June to abandon its dual Anglo-Dutch

corporate structure and become a single holding company based in the UK. Refinitiv counted this as a \$106.9bn deal, the value of European M&A in Q2 declined by 62 per cent this year compared to the same period last year.

The value of deals worldwide, this year, dropped 41 per cent after several big-ticket acquisitions were stuck in the first quarter just before the pandemic went global.

Private equity could boost dealmaking as companies look to deploy the \$1.5tn of uninvested capital that they have amassed, according to data from Preqin.

"In the initial phase of the crisis, the key focus of private equity firms was understandably on securing the health and liquidity of their portfolio companies," said Ina De, co-head of strategic investors group in EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa) at JP Morgan. Adding: "Helping look for opportunities to invest is a top priority and we are spending a great deal of our time identifying appealing assets for our clients to buy."



An employee in a branded helmet is pictured at Saudi Aramco oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

Saudi Aramco profits slump 73 per cent on low oil price

RIYADH: Energy giant Saudi Aramco said on Sunday its net profit for the second quarter plunged a massive 73 per cent due to sharply lower oil prices as the coronavirus crisis undercuts global demand.

The company posted a net profit of \$6.6 billion for the three months to June 30, compared to \$24.7 billion in the same period of 2019.

"Strong headwinds from reduced demand and lower oil prices are reflected in our second quarter results," CEO Amin Nasser said in a statement.

Aramco's net profit for the first half of the year also dived, by 50 per cent to \$23.2 billion, compared to \$46.9 billion over the same period last year.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude oil exporter, has been hit hard by the double whammy of low prices and sharp cuts in production that combined to severely impact oil income.

Oil prices dropped to a two-decade low below \$20 a barrel in April and May as the novel coronavirus pandemic dampened demand, before recovering to around \$44 a barrel after Opec+ producers agreed to record output cuts.

Following the move, Saudi oil production dropped to 7.5 million barrels per day in June, compared to last year's average of 10 million barrels per day.

Aramco's profits were also impacted by losses posted by Saudi Basic Industries Co (SABIC), the petrochemicals giant that it acquired for \$69 billion in a deal agreed in 2019 and completed in June this year. — AFP

Trump signs orders extending economic relief for Americans



WITH DOUBLE DIGIT UNEMPLOYMENT, DISRUPTION TO BUSINESSES FROM SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES, AND PERSISTENT CORONAVIRUS SPREAD, MANY AMERICANS HAD BEEN RELYING ON RELIEF MEASURES APPROVED EARLIER BY CONGRESS, BUT WHICH MOSTLY EXPIRED IN JULY.

President Donald Trump signs executive orders extending coronavirus economic relief during a news conference at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey. — **AFP**

NEW JERSEY: President Donald Trump signed executive actions extending financial relief to Americans hit by the coronavirus pandemic as polls showed a large majority of voters unhappy with his handling of the crisis.

The four measures marked a presidential show of strength after Trump's Republican party and White House team failed to agree with opposition Democrats in Congress on a new stimulus package aimed at stopping vulnerable Americans from falling through the cracks.

"We've had it and we're going to save American jobs and provide relief to the American workers," Trump said at a press conference in his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he was

spending the weekend.

With double digit unemployment, disruption to businesses from social distancing rules, and persistent coronavirus spread, many Americans had been relying on relief measures approved earlier by Congress, but which mostly expired in July.

Trump said his decision to circumvent Congress with executive actions would mean relief money getting "rapidly distributed."

In reality, his measures are likely to face court challenges because Congress controls federal spending, and in any case they may add up to less money than initially appears.

For Trump, lagging badly in the polls against his Democratic rival Joe Biden ahead of the November 3 presidential election, the

orders were partly about showing he is in charge.

He turned the signing ceremony in the ballroom of the golf club into an assault on his opponents and threw in several false claims about his accomplishments in office.

To cheers from club members invited to watch the event, Trump crudely insulted the Democratic "crazy" leader of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, denounced Biden as "far left," and claimed that Democrats want to "steal the election."

One key Trump order promises to get \$400 a week added to Americans' unemployment benefits, while two others offer some protection from evictions and relief for student loans.

The \$400 assistance is

below the \$600 offered in the expired stimulus package. It may also end up amounting only to \$300 extra a week, because Trump said \$100 would be provided from state, not federal, budgets — and only if states were willing or able to do so.

A fourth measure — opposed by many Republicans as well as Democrats — ordered a freeze in payroll taxes. This makes a big headline for Trump but is only a deferral, rather than a cut in the tax.

Democrats, Republicans and White House negotiators had worked all last week without coming close to a deal on an overall congressional relief bill for those struggling to make ends meet in the world's richest economy. — **AFP**



The Exxon Mobil facility is pictured in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. — Reuters

Oil giants' production cuts come to 1 million bpd as they post massive writedowns

NEW YORK: The world's five largest oil companies collectively cut the value of their assets by nearly \$50 billion in the second quarter, and slashed production rates as the coronavirus pandemic caused a drastic fall in fuel prices and demand.

The dramatic reductions in asset valuations and decline in output show the depth of the pain in the second quarter. Fuel demand at one point was down by more than 30 per cent worldwide, and still remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Several executives said they took massive writedowns because they expect demand to remain impaired for several more quarters as people travel less and use less fuel due to the ongoing global pandemic that has killed more than 700,000 people.

Of those five companies, only Exxon Mobil did not book sizeable impairments. But an ongoing re-evaluation of its plans could lead to a "significant portion" of its assets being impaired, it reported, and signal the elimination of 20 per cent or 4.4 billion barrels of its oil and gas reserves.

By contrast, BP took a \$17 billion hit.

Of those five companies, only Exxon Mobil did not book sizeable impairments. But an ongoing re-evaluation of its plans could lead to a "significant portion" of its assets being impaired, it reported, and signal the elimination of 20 per cent or 4.4 billion barrels of its oil and gas reserves.

It said it plans to re-center its spending in coming years around renewables and less on oil and natural gas.

Weak demand means oil producers must revisit business plans, said Lee Maginniss, managing director at consultants Alarez & Marsal. He said the goal should be to pump only what

generates cash in excess of overhead costs.

"It's low-cost production mode through the end of 2021 for sure, and to 2022 to the extent there are new development plans being contemplated," Maginniss said.

London-based BP has previously said it plans to cut its overall output by roughly 1 million barrels of oil equivalent (boepd) by the end of 2030 from its current 3.6 million boepd.

Of the five, Exxon is the largest producer, with daily output of 3.64 million boepd, but its production dropped 408,000 boepd between the first and second quarters. The five majors, which include Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell and Total SA, also cut capital expenditures by a combined \$25 billion between the quarters.

Crude output worldwide dropped sharply after the market crashed in April. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Saudi Arabia, along with allies including Russia, agreed to cut output by nearly 10 million barrels a day to balance out supply and demand in the market. — Reuters



Complete game gives Johnson third round lead at PGA Championship

SAN FRANCISCO: Dustin Johnson's hot putter and improved accuracy off the tee gave him a one-stroke lead after the third round of the PGA Championship on Saturday, with the American looking set to secure his second major title on Sunday.

Johnson's eight birdies were the most by him in a single round at a major and helped offset a bogey and double bogey on the front nine as he carded a five-under 65 and sit nine-under par 201 through 56 holes at TPC Harding Park.

Johnson is one clear of Scottie Scheffler and Cameron Champ with Collin Morikawa, Paul Casey and two-time defending cham-

JOHNSON IS ONE CLEAR OF SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER AND CAMERON CHAMP WITH COLLIN MORIKAWA, PAUL CASEY AND TWO-TIME DEFENDING CHAMPION BROOKS KOEPKA ALL LURKING A SHOT FURTHER ADRIFT.

pion Brooks Koepka all lurking a shot further adrift.

"I putted really well. That was key," said Johnson, who leads the field in strokes gained with the short stick this week.

The former world number one and 2016 US Open champion is looking to avenge his loss at the 2010 PGA Championship, where he was leading entering the

final hole but was hit with a controversial two-stroke penalty for grounding his club in a bunker and finished tied for fifth.

Johnson said landing the ball safely on the course's narrow fairways will be key to hoisting the Wanamaker Trophy on Sunday.

"Tomorrow I definitely need to hit some more fairways, because it's really

tough playing this golf course from the rough," said Johnson, who hit seven of 14 fairways on Saturday.

Johnson will be paired with Scheffler, who signed a busy scorecard that included eight birdies and three bogeys including one on the difficult par-four 18th, a hole that could prove critical on Sunday given the bunched leaderboard.

The 24-year-old Scheffler said he was trying to keep his wits about him as he looks to secure his first major title.

"There's definitely some nerves but just got to try and handle them as best I can and go out and play, and I did a good job of that today." — **Reuters**

SPORTS



OMAN CRICKET INVITES TEAMS TO REGISTER FOR NEW SEASON



The teams must complete the registration process by logging in to our website www.omancricket.org as there will be no extension in the entry deadlines. Team groupings for all the divisions will be finalised after the deadlines are announced during the captains and managers meetings.

IQBAL ARIWALA,
CAO, OMAN
CRICKET

MUSCAT: Following resumption of international sports competitions in various countries, Oman Cricket has invited teams in the Sultanate to register for the exciting new season 2020-21 which is likely to start in September.

Team registration opens on Sunday, August 9 and OC has advised all the teams willing to participate across all levels of competition to enroll for the season. The deadline to register online for the Senior league including

payment of fees is August 23.

Registration for women's teams as well as all the Junior league sides, including under-19, under-16 and under-13 teams, will open on August 16. All the schools, academies and women's sides have been advised to complete the registration process before the entry deadline expires on August 24.

"The teams must complete the registration process by logging in to our website www.omancricket.org as there will be no extension in the entry deadlines. Team groupings for all the divisions will be finalised after the deadlines are announced during the captains and managers meetings," said Iqbal Ariwala, CAO, Oman Cricket.

Cricket activities were stopped in March following the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in the country and are likely to resume next month subject to approval from the concerned authorities.

Oman Karate Committee participates in AKF Technical Webinar Series



MUSCAT: The Omani Karate Committee participated in the Referee Webinar held by the Asian Karate Federation on Saturday, August 8, 2020 through the Zoom program with five Omani referees classified as Asian and international, namely: Ahmed bin Said al Zakwani, Salim bin

Darwish al Qutaiti, Sulaiman bin Khalifa al Hinai, Yousuf bin Muslim al Siyabi and Hilal bin Mohammed al Abdali.

The Chairman of the Asian Referees Committee and a member of the International Referees Committee, Mansour al Sultan, lectured

on the kumite and kata Rules and the recent amendments to the Rules.

It is worth noting that the Omani Karate Committee participated in the registration of the five mentioned referees who have obtained the Asian rating as referees, and the coaches seminar will be held on August 15, 2020, in which coach Ali bin Said al Shabibi, who previously obtained the Asian classification as a coach, will also participate in the kata and kumite training webinar for the players on August 22 and 29.

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The 2020 AFC Cup is a significant assignment for the newly appointed head coach of Dhofar, Rasheed Jaber.

The other top priorities for the new technical manager of the Salalah giant is clinching the title of the coveted HM Cup and competing with Seeb at Omantel League for the remaining rounds of 2019/2020 season. Jaber took charge of the new position after the board of Dhofar preferred to end the contract of the Egyptian coach Mohammed Azaima and appoint a domestic coach.

The former national team coach stated after the agreement signing with Shaikh Ali al Rawas, chairman of Dhofar Club.

"I am delighted to come back to Dhofar where I had registered different accomplishments previously as player and coach. It is a tough responsibility and it is expected it will not be an easy task for me as a head coach. My footballing experience as a coach for 25 years hopes to support me achieving the set targets

and adding the right value for the team," he added.

Dhofar, which is classified by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), recently as one of the top famous clubs in the Sultanate, is the holder

of top tier league for eleven times.

Moreover, the Salalah giant had clinched the coveted title of HM Cup eight times.

"Dhofar has the right quality of players including the national team members. We will try to

utilise all the available resources to execute all our objectives. Definitely, the top domestic competition which is the HM Cup is one of our focus currently besides the other competitions," coach Rasheed said.

Working in a right environment with clear plans is the favourite for coach Rasheed. "It is required to work on a proper platform and environment to register the success in your work. Moreover, developing the foundation with better focus at junior and cadet levels will provide the best members for the first team. That will be one of our main plans." He concluded.

Coach Rasheed, who has signed a two-year deal with Dhofar, is a well known footballing name in the Sultanate and GCC. He had begun the footballing career with Dhofar as a player in 1977 and supported the team for different accomplishments. He was the national team coach for the first time in 1996 and then in 2001 during the GCC Cup in Saudi Arabia. He was the head of the technical team for the national U-19 football team.



SPORTS

DORIAN FINNEY-SMITH ADDED 27 POINTS AND 11 REBOUNDS, AND KRISTAPS PORZINGIS CONTRIBUTED 26 POINTS AND 11 REBOUNDS AS THE MAVERICKS (42-30) RALLIED FROM A LATE SEVEN-POINT DEFICIT IN REGULATION. MAXI KLEBER SCORED 15 POINTS, AND TREY BURKE HAD 10

DONCIC GOES OFF IN MAVS' OT WIN OVER BUCKS

ORLANDO, US: Luka Doncic had 36 points, a career-high 19 assists and 14 rebounds for his 17th triple-double of this season and 25th of his career while leading the Dallas Mavericks to a 136-132 overtime victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday night near Orlando.

Brook Lopez recorded season highs of 34 points and six 3-pointers, and Giannis Antetokounmpo added 34 points, 13 rebounds and five blocked shots for the NBA-best Bucks (55-15). Khris Middleton registered 21 points and 11 assists, and Eric Bledsoe had 15 points.

Dallas scored 16 straight points — the final seven of regulation and the first nine of overtime — to open up a 128-119 lead. The Bucks closed within two points before Doncic's highlight-reel, lefty bounce pass between his own legs set up Kleber's three-point play to seal it.

PHOENIX SUNS 119 — MIAMI HEAT 112

Devin Booker scored a game-high 35 points as Phoenix remained unbeaten during the NBA's restart with a victory over Miami.

Phoenix also got 18 points and 12 rebounds from Deandre Ayton, and a surprising 20 points in 26

minutes off the bench from Jevon Carter, who entered the game with a 4.6 scoring average. Booker, who entered the night ranked 10th in the NBA with a 26.2 scoring average, made 15 of 26 shots from the floor, although he was 0 of 7 on 3-point attempts.

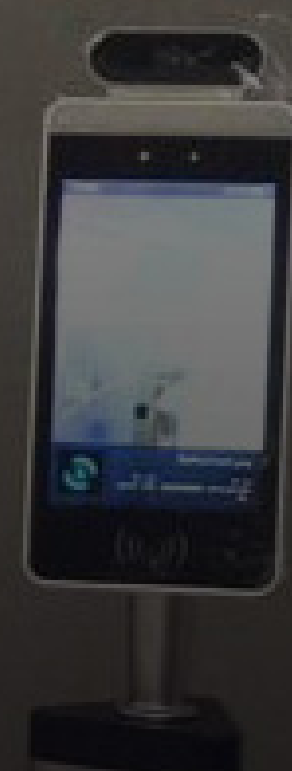
The Suns (31-39) are the only unbeaten team in the NBA restart as they try to avoid missing the playoffs for the 10th consecutive season. Phoenix was without two of its top six scorers as Kelly Oubre and Aron Baynes missed the game due to knee injuries. — **Reuters**



FEATURES

Rising to the occasion: Omani youth fights COVID-19 with auto- sterilization cabin

While the pandemic has disrupted lots of businesses and industries, it also allowed some of Oman's talented youth to take the spotlight by introducing new technologies that help fight the virus. This auto-sterilization cabin by a young Omani engineer is becoming an important aid to fighting the virus... **p20**



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Rising to the occasion: Omani youth fights COVID-19 with auto-sterilization cabin

RUQAYA AL KINDI

Given the proper opportunity, Omani youth will rise up to the occasion to help provide the necessary tools to combat whatever is posing a challenge to the Sultanate.

This has been the case for creative Omani engineer Nasser al Mamari whose latest innovation – an auto-sterilization cabin is helping authorities, business and homes combat the threat of the pandemic.

“It is a comprehensive disinfectant gate placed at the entrance of commercial buildings or businesses. It helps control the spread of COVID-19,” said Al Mamari, the innovator and the project manager of this well-lauded initiative.

Nasser shared that the idea behind his technology is properly utilising modern technology to help fight an unseen enemy. He explained that the disinfecting solution is converted through ultrasound making the liquid into fog allowing for disinfecting bigger areas if compared to the traditional way of spraying disinfectant.

“Wider coverage consuming less disinfectant,” he said.

There are other similar products in the market, but Nasser confirms that his device, as he shared, uses a tiny amount of the particle size of the disinfectant solution; only around 5 microns to cover a larger area of the sterile body.

“Ultrasound system, moreover, consumes less disinfectant solution, so the operating cost will be also less,” he added.

“We also improved the controlling system which will cover reading the temperature of users, recording attendance where it will recognize the face even with masks and glasses,” he added.

Using the Auto sterilization Cabin will not take more than 10 - 15 seconds depending on fog production rate as well as concentration. As for the process, “the controlling system will measure the temperature of the user remotely and will show it in the screen. The organiza-

tion gate will not open if the temperature of the user is very high,” he explained.

Nasser confirmed that the system is 100% safe “because we are using a safe disinfectant solution (100% natural), he explained. “The innovation has been approved by a Main Committee for Technical Innovation which was recently formed in April and consists of many government entities including Ministry of Health,” he added.

He noted that the system accepts any solution and this is another advantage of their system, so the user can use any disinfectant solution diluted with water, but he recommends the “SHEILDme” disinfectant which is well known and approved by the UK and some GCC companies internationally, and it is 100% inhalable save and 100% natural.

“We have customized the capacity of the tank where now it is able to carry two tanks worth of product. It is all filled from the main tank and it can be refilled. It is enough for more than around 1000 users and it can be refilled very easily,” he added.

The device is already in the market. “We have a factory, and we have produced around 50 Pieces so far. The production rate of 7 to 10 cabins per day. We have provided the device already to some government and private organization as well as personal houses “ he noted.

“Our call centres can be reached through 95121777 and people can inquire or learn more through the factory’s website <https://mstech-co.com>,” he said.



FEATURES

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Japan's ninja arts hold key to survival, says first winner of graduate degree



THE MYSTIQUE of Japan's once-feared covert warriors, spread by films and fiction, is embodied today in the world's first winner of a master's degree in ninja studies, who also grows his own crops, just as many of his predecessors did.

The modern black-clad ninja is Genichi Mitsuhashi, 45, who says he realised that ninjutsu, or ninja arts, held the key to survival after he was held up at gunpoint during a stay in Brazil at the age of 19.

"You are allowed to use weapons or make use of

your enemy's body," Mitsuhashi said, describing how he was drawn to learn about ninjas.

"You can use anything you need in order to survive. It's based on reality. It's liberating and flexible."

Mitsuhashi is the first of seven enrolled students to finish a two-year programme on ninja history, traditions, fighting and survival techniques, complete with two days of fieldwork, launched in 2018 by Mie University, southwest of Tokyo.

While Hollywood movies

give the fighters superhuman abilities to run on water or suddenly vanish, many of them, when not on espionage missions, lived as humble farmers, secretly honing their skills through farm chores.

Like the ninjas of old, who sprang from peasantry in feudal times, Mitsuhashi grows his own rice and vegetables.

He runs an inn in Iga, a small city traditionally known as the home of many ninjas, while teaching martial and ninja arts at his own dojo, offering aspirants a

taste of a tradition some experts fear could die out entirely because of scarce talent.

"We shouldn't pick one aspect, but should aim to learn their way of life," Mitsuhashi said of ninjas, as he swung a wooden sword.

"This includes self-defence, a sustainable lifestyle...I think we should aim for a comprehensive way of life, and we should learn this from ninjas."—**Reuters**

FEATURES



UNESCO to restore Mali's conflict-hit Bandiagara site

THE UN'S culture organisation will restore the world heritage site of Bandiagara, in central Mali, which has been hit hard by the country's long-running conflict, it announced Tuesday.

The work will focus on sites devoted to traditional culture, as well as restoring ceremonial objects in a memorial collection, UNESCO said in its statement.

It will be able to launch the three-year project thanks to \$1 million in funding from the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), the organisation added.

Bandiagara is in the central region of Mopti, the site of repeated attacks by the jihadists who have been active in the country since 2012. The region has also been hit by intercommunal violence.

"In addition to claiming civilian lives and creating insecurity, the crisis caused the total or partial destruction of close to 30 villages, of which half are located within the boundaries of the World Heritage property of the Cliff



of Bandiagara (Land of the Dogon)," said UNESCO.

"The gradual disappearance of such cultural practices as traditional funerary rituals, and masked dances, as well as the Yaaral and the Degal festivities fuelled inter-communal strife."

UNESCO said the project would also work on restoring paid work for women, which was central to promoting "reconciliation between communities".

Mali has been struggling to

quell a jihadist revolt that first broke out in north in 2012, before spreading to the centre, as well as neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

Central Mali saw a surge in violence from 2015, when the Islamic preacher Amadou Koufa founded the Katiba Macina militia, recruiting widely from the Fulani community.

Koufa helped set up the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), the main jihadist alliance in the Sahel affiliated with Al-Qaeda, in 2017.

Attacks, often followed by reprisals, have multiplied. They took an intercommunity turn between the Fulani, mainly breeders, and the Bambara and Dogon ethnic groups, who mainly practise agriculture.

UNESCO describes the Bandiagara site as "an outstanding landscape of cliffs and sandy plateaux with some beautiful architecture" and ancient social traditions and rituals.

The World heritage site covers 289 villages over 400,000 hectares (nearly 990,000 acres).-- **AFP**