

P10

MAINTAINING STANDARD CHALLENGE FOR OMAN CRICKET



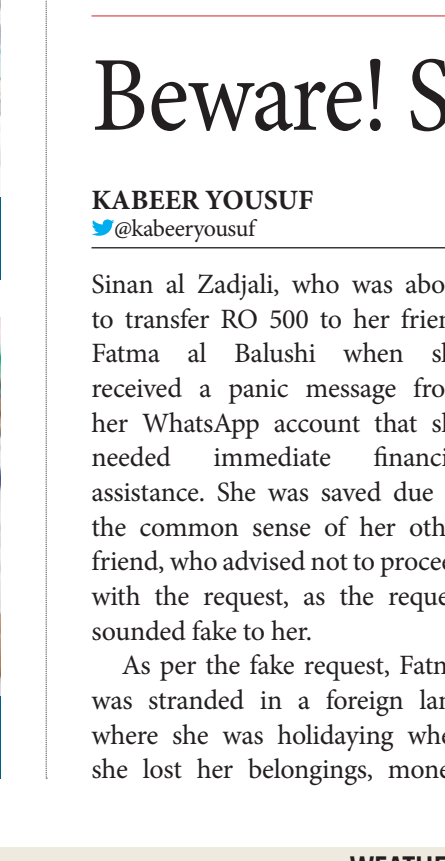
P13

WIEA' FAKHARI JAMIL: THE BEAUTIFUL CLAY POTS OF OMAN



P20

US CONSUMER SPENDING REBOUNDS WITH RELIEF MONEY



MUSCAT

GOVT PAYMENTS WITHIN 5 DAYS

Oman's Ministry of Finance says it has been able to disburse payments to private sector vendors, contractors and other service providers within five working days on average upon receipt of the payment voucher via its newly installed e-payment system. Since it came online, payments totalling RO 411.6 million were disbursed through the e-payment system as of April 29, 2021, the ministry said. All companies and enterprises can update their data in the Beneficiary Code System via MoF website, and can track their payments through the system.

SEE P17

KABUL

TALIBAN WARNS AS US, NATO PULLOUT

Taliban militants on Saturday said that international forces had violated a US-Taliban agreement to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan by May 1, and that this "opened the way" for the group to retaliate. A formal withdrawal of US and Nato forces began on Saturday, due to be completed by September 11, although military equipment had already started leaving the country weeks ago. After 20 years of international troops' presence, the withdrawal leaves Afghanistan to an uncertain future amid rising attacks by Taliban insurgents. The Taliban said on Saturday that the withdrawal was too late.

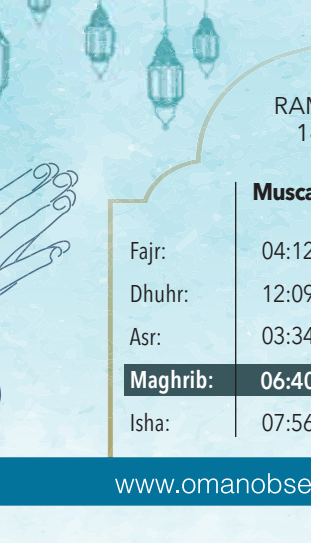
SEE P7

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INSIDE



KYRGYZ, TAJIK LEADERS MOVE TO SAVE CEASEFIRE

P7



INDIA'S DAILY COVID-19 CASES PASS 400,000

P8

MORE VACCINES EXPECTED SOON

A TOTAL OF 62,691 PEOPLE HAVE RECEIVED THE SECOND DOSE OF VACCINE IN OMAN TO DATE



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

While Oman reported fewer cases towards the end of last week, there were still 833 inpatients, including 274 in ICUs across hospitals in the country.

The Sultanate has now reported two thousand deaths 2,010 since the first death of the pandemic was reported in early April last year.

On Thursday, the total recovery rate also recorded improvement as it went up from around 89.3 to 90 per cent in a matter of two days.

Most of the cases in the country are reported from Bausher, Seeb, Muttrah in the capital and Salalah in Dhofar. Deaths are also from these regions.

Meanwhile, the Covax facility is coordinating additional shipments to 13 countries in the region, and more countries are expected to receive new shipments in the coming weeks and months, the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region has said.

A total of 62,691 people have received the second dose of vaccine in Oman to date.

"Covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective to end this pandemic. Under the regional vision of health for all by all, we want as many people as possible to have access to lifesaving Covid-19 vaccines", said Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

TURN TO P2

TRACKING SYSTEM FOR FISHING VESSELS

NEMO: Hybrid Satellite Transponder

Designed for Fishermen

Easy to use

No power onboard needed

Zone management

Safety & weather alerts

CLS

Secure Data Guaranteed

DATA ACQUISITION & STORAGE

ANALYTICS DATA MINING EXPERT SYSTEMS

DECISION MAKING TOOLS

FISHERIES & FAMILIES

FISHING ORGANIZATIONS SHIPOWNERS

FISHING AUTHORITIES

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has approved the system to track fishing boats and vessels through automatic devices to ensure the safety of the fishermen and their boats.

REPORT ON P2

Over 10,000 jobs provided in three months

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Over 10,000 job opportunities (10,196) were provided during the first quarter of this year, which is 31.6 per cent of the numbers targeted by the Ministry of Labour for 2021.

This achievement is due to various measures taken by the Ministry of Labour to fulfil what it had committed to in its executive plan announced in January this year, the ministry said its Q1 report for 2021.

The report said 4,051 job opportunities were presented in the units of the state's administrative apparatus, including replacements — 1,330 in the Ministry of Health, 2,469 in the Ministry of Education, 115 in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 92 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences and other institutions.

The report indicated that 51 job opportunities were provided in companies and institutions that fall under the supervision of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and others.

Covid-19 situation impacts revenues

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The Sultanate's public revenue declined by 30.5 per cent to RO 1,818.5 million by the end of the first quarter of 2021, compared with the same period of 2020.

The net oil revenue declined by 34.2%, which is attributable to low prices and economic implications triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Finance said in its monthly bulletin on Saturday.

The current revenue increased by 6 per cent. It is worth noting that the decline in capital revenue and repayments during the first quarter of 2021, as compared to the same period of 2020, is due to the privatisation of Oman Electricity Transmission Company that generated a yield of RO 365.4 million, recorded in March 2020.

SEE P17

Beware! Spamsters using new tricks to dupe people

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousuf

Sinan al Zadjali, who was about to transfer RO 500 to her friend Fatma al Balushi when she received a panic message from her WhatsApp account that she needed immediate financial assistance. She was saved due to the common sense of her other friend, who advised not to proceed with the request, as the request sounded fake to her.

As per the fake request, Fatma was stranded in a foreign land where she was holidaying when she lost her belongings, money,



cards and other important things.

Sinan, however, was alerted that the WhatsApp number from which she received the panic message was a bogus account created by some unscrupulous spamster to dupe Fatma.

Added to her bewilderment, she was informed that many of her friends fell prey to the call

The ROP has alerted all social media users of ongoing spam trying to dupe netizens of their money after cloning or duplicating the social media accounts and WhatsApp account of their close friends

after blindly trying to help her "stranded" friend.

A senior journalist in Oman also got alerts on Wednesday from many of his friends who

noticed some fake Facebook account created in his name. The spamster was asking for some distress money impersonating as the journalist. He immediately informed all his contacts about the fraud move and told them not to respond to the fake call.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has alerted all social media users of ongoing spam trying to dupe netizens of their money after cloning or duplicating the social media accounts and WhatsApp account of their close friends.

TURN TO P3

Who should avoid Covid-19 vaccination?

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

There has been a dramatic decrease in hospitalisation of Covid-19 cases amongst the age group of 60 and above, while more cases of the younger population have been reported to be impacted by the virus now compared to the first wave.

“The reasons are many,” says Dr Sulein al Khalili, Specialist in Microbiology at Directorate General for Disease Control and Surveillance, Ministry of Health.

She said while there is a need for more data analysis on the people admitted in the hospital these days, such as how many of them are healthy otherwise and the suspected complications suspected from the Covid infection.

“The sixty and above population have been receiving their vaccination, and they have been restricting their movements outside. While the younger population is exposed to the virus as they move around, more job related, education and entertainment.

When asked if the vaccination should focus on the younger age group, she replied, “That has already been in the plan. The elderly group got priority because of the underlying complications



that are connected with the age group. Now the variants have made it possible to spread more rapidly whether there are risk factors or not. According to the availability of the vaccine, the groups will be vaccinated.”

Another recurring doubt the public has been thinking about is who should avoid taking vaccinations.

“As of now, there is no contraindication regarding any genetic cases or immune suppression of any kind. There is limited data regarding specific age

groups. However, it has been said — less than 18 — AstraZeneca vaccine and under 16 — Pfizer vaccine. Even the data related to this is expected soon about younger age groups, safety and efficacy of the vaccine for these groups. The other factor is the use of vaccines during pregnancy. Here, too much data has been released on the vaccines that outweigh the risks in pregnant and lactating women. People suffering from genetic disorders are not excluded from the Covid-19 vaccination programme. In

fact, internationally, the health authorities have been saying that people with genetic disorders are more at risk due to Covid-19, and so they should be prioritised. There is limited data on paediatric groups as well. The restriction is in place for people who have had allergic reactions to previous vaccinations that have the same components as Covid-19 vaccinations,” she pointed out.

In Oman, pregnant women have not been administered the Covid-19 vaccine so far.

“Concerning vaccination for

Concerning vaccination for pregnant women, Oman is still waiting for further evidence, and the evidence has to be registered and until the manufacturers give the green light

DR SULEIN AL KHALILI

Specialist in Microbiology at
Directorate General for Disease
Control and Surveillance,
Ministry of Health

pregnant women, Oman is still waiting for further evidence, and the evidence has to be registered and until the manufacturers give the green light,” she noted.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) the Covid-19 vaccines are safe for most people 18 years and older, including those with pre-existing conditions of any kind, including auto-immune disorders. These conditions include hypertension, diabetes, asthma, pulmonary, liver and kidney disease, and chronic infections that are stable and controlled.



460 LPG storage depots across Sultanate

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The number of (wholesale/retail) storage depots of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) across the governorates reached 460, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The ministry said four of these 460 depots were licensed in 2020.

The ministry said North al Batinah topped the list with 88 depots and stores, followed by Al Dakhiliyah (74), South al Batinah (52), Al Sharqiyah South (51), Muscat (46), Al Sharqiyah North (43), Al Dhahirah (42), Musandam (30), Buraimi (20) and Al Wusta (14).

More vaccines expected soon

FROM PAGE 1

“With commitment and solidarity, we can hope to end the acute phase of the pandemic by the end of 2021,” he stressed. “With so many people in the region affected by other emergencies, we need to make sure that all persons eligible to the vaccine receive it, regardless of their geographical location or political affiliation.”

He added, “We need to continue with those most at risk of severe diseases, like the elderly. Ultimately, no one will be safe until everyone is safe,” Dr Al Mandhari said.

As of April 28, the region has reported over nine million confirmed Covid-19 cases and almost 180,906 deaths (case-fatality rate of two per cent) since

the beginning of the pandemic.

The number of new cases and deaths increased steadily as variants continue to be detected and communities do not adhere to public health and social measures.

The Covax facility aims to have 2 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines available for distribution worldwide by the end of 2021.

National University opens admission, registration

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The National University of Science and Technology has announced opening of admission and registration for the academic year 2021-2022. The study will begin in September 2021 in the various programmes of engineering, pharmacy and medicine including Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Pharmacy, Bachelor of Engineering programmes in civil engineering, mechanical engineering, Computer Engineering, Electrical Power Engineering, Process Operation and Maintenance Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Quantity Surveying and Cost Management, and Bachelor of IT Management for Business (ITMB).

The university also announced a number of masters programmes that is being offered in cooperation with Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom and University of South Carolina, United States. These programmes include Master in Asset and Maintenance Management, Master in Construction Manage-



ment, Master of Science in Supply Chain Management and International Operations, Master of Science in Process Engineering, Master of Science in Electrical Engineering and Master of Science in Information Technology with three sub-disciplines: Cloud Computing, Big Data and Internet of Things, Advanced computer networks and cybersecurity.

On behalf of the family of the National University of Science and Technology, Dr Ali al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of the University, stated that “We are very pleased and looking forward to welcoming our new students in September 2021 at the National University who are going to

enrol in the NU academic programmes in medicine, pharmacy, health sciences and engineering at its various branches, as well as in master programmes.

Dr Ali al Bimani said that the NU is distinguished by its focus on postgraduate study programmes and scientific research in many fields.

The scientific research is driven by development plans in the Sultanate which coincides with Oman 2040 Vision objectives.

The National University accords high priority to training, qualify students for the labour market and preparing them for professional life in a systematic manner.

Private schools ready to take e-learning to next level

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

After imparting education virtually in the past year, private schools in the Sultanate are all set to take the e-learning system to the next level, a study revealed.

Principals of various schools spread across the country believe that readiness for this is very high. Some teachers also find it a good move.

The research project titled ‘E-learning in private schools in the Sultanate of Oman during Covid-19 pandemic: Readiness and development requirements’, which was conducted by a team from the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), came out with positive note on E-learning.

The study investigating the readiness and development requirements of E-learning at private schools in Oman used a sample of 2,292 individuals from 43 private schools from

different governorates of Oman, including 43 school principals, 438 teachers, 963 students, and 848 parents.

The project’s main findings revolved around the readiness and development requirements of the e-learning system. Indicators of readiness in terms of infrastructure include owning appropriate smart devices that support e-learning (a personal computer or tablet device) most important ones.

Additionally, obtaining technical support when needed, having a clear school plan to implement e-learning, availability of training workshops for educational purposes at schools, as well as



schools’ commitment to the rules and regulations governing e-learning that the Ministry of Education issues are other indicators of readiness in terms of infrastructure.

“As for the most prominent requirements of e-learning skills, they are training school professionals on using e-learning platforms and managing electronic chat rooms, using computers and their applications, managing e-learning content, and a mechanism for protecting children from Internet risks, especially cyber blackmailing and information security,” said Prof Ali Mahdi Kazem, Principal Investigator of the research.

Among the most prominent infrastructure requirements is the availability of technical support for any problem that may hinder the application of e-learning, the existence of a school-specific platform for e-learning, and the availability of good and sufficient computers.

As far as development requirements are concerned, school principals believe that the levels

of requirement is very important, while teachers, students and parents see it as important.

The research carried out by SQU team comprising Prof Ali Mahdi Kazem, Dr Rabeaa al Sagria, Wafa Bany Oraba and Wafa al Housni, and MoE team consisting of Dr Mahmood al Abri, Khalid al Oufi, Wadha al Saadi, and Mohammad al Hadhrami further recommended the private schools to continue to intensify the awareness programmes provided to parents, students and teachers concerning ethics and mechanisms for dealing with e-learning applications, methods of protecting children from the dangers of the Internet, especially cyber blackmailing, information security, and realising the importance of education and the ease of employing it in the educational learning process.

It also advised them to continue to implement training programmes for students and their parents to effectively employ e-learning in the educational process, especially in providing students with self-learning skills.



Tracking system of fishing boats to boost fisheries potential

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

The system to track fishing boats and vessels through automatic devices, that was approved recently by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, may emerge as a major boost to the sector.

With this system it will be easy to regulate the fisheries sector properly and ensure the safety of fishermen and their boats due to easy and efficient next generation tracking system.

The system, according to the parties involved in the conceptualisation and implementation processes, will be a game changer for the sector in terms of regulation and revenue generation.

An agreement to introduce the system was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman-based Middle East Scientific Equipment Corp (MESEC).

In an interview with *Observer*, Umesh Chauhan, Managing



Director of MESEC, explained the huge benefits that the sector would witness in the coming years with the adoption of the system.

He thanked the ministry for all possible support for facilitating and taking forward the project with due suggestions.

“With the document signing for the tracking system, and much sooner the execution of the project, I believe every fisherman in the Sultanate will understand the importance of tracking them and hence will be comfortable to communicate to authorities for renewal of their licences as also for any kind of assistance needed during the emergency during

fishing round”, he said.

Tracking of fishing vessels and boats, according to him, is one of the most important aspects of the sector in the current times, as it directly involves safety and security of the fishermen, revenue and employment generation.

Since focus is there on regulation of the fishing activities in the Sultanate, “It would be easy for both the authorities and the fishermen to communicate and resolve... at the same time, the project will effectively improve the local and foreign investment environment opportunities in Oman, promote local employment, and provide a solid

foundation for development of fisheries resources in the country”, said Chauhan.

Oman, according to him, has huge fisheries potential that needs to be tapped and regulated properly. It can emerge as a major fisheries business hub with the implementation and monitoring of the latest technologies.

As the region’s leading solution provider of fisheries monitoring and surveillance, environmental monitoring, and process analysis and laboratory, Chauhan finds Oman’s strategic locations one of the best in the region that can fetch good revenue from the fisheries sector.

According to Chauhan, MESEC Oman is partner with CLS, France, a world leader in fisheries management solutions for several years. “In tracking and managing such services, whereas all the countries across the world attach high importance to CLS France, a subsidiary of National Centre for Space Studies (NCSS) and French Space Agency”, he said.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Beware! Spamsters using new tricks to dupe people

“There’s an ongoing spam attempt currently targeting net users in the Sultanate and we advise all not to transfer cash without reconfirming that your friend is really in need”, an ROP source said.

Muraleedharan, an expatriate, was bombarded with calls and messages one fine morning after his near and dear ones began to check with him if he was keeping well.

“I received a message from Muraleedharan’s account saying he was stranded somewhere and needed some money. I called him personally to make sure if he was really in need. I was shocked to see his account was duplicated”, said Jijin Jith, a dance teacher in Muscat, who added that the cloned version was as good as or even better than the original one.

Cyber experts have sounded warnings when they noticed such online attempts to dupe people online.

“Spamsters feel that WhatsApp is one of the number one platforms where such things

Cyber experts have sounded warnings when they noticed such online attempts to dupe people online

can be carried out. The app at the moment has over 2 billion users worldwide and is also ranked as the number one messaging app out there,” opines Samir al Hajri, an IT expert.

When such message is received, don’t jump the gun. Without panicking, try to reach the friend who is said to have sent the same.

“Call the friend from whom supposedly you got the message, and if he or she is not available, again, don’t send the money but try to reach their close friends or relatives. Never transfer money for any deal which you think may be fake. And if possible, please report to the online police service”, he added.

Substantial growth in online games among children



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

There has been a massive growth in the number of children engaged in online games and computer games over the past one year, according to major game providers.

Ever since the schools were closed in the wake of the Covid-19 related issues, the games sector witnessed nearly 80 per cent growth against the previous year’s somewhat stable market, they said.

“There has been tremendous growth as far as the demand for all sorts of games and game software, equipment and other accessories are concerned. The rise is nothing less than 70 per cent”, says Mustafa Chenoth of Gamer Zone.

A study report on children’s gaming habits by the CS Mott National Poll suggests that 86 per cent of parents know that their adolescent children are spending excessive time playing video games.

The report further underlined that twice as many teenage boys spend more time gaming than

adolescent girls. On an average, according to the parent survey, teenage boys are spending around three hours a day playing video games.

For games-related software and games, consoles and PC games sales, the school vacation period is the peak time, whereas exam months are off-peak months.

“Unlike in the past when we had peak months and off-peak months for the games and related software, the past 12 months were a steady market season”, added Shamees and Rajesh.

Games providers in various shopping malls further said that although the live in-games inside the games shops have been banned, more people made a games console inside their houses and were depending upon software bought online and shops.

“We have provided many games consoles inside various homes in the Sultanate whose demand too was astounding. It’s good to see that kids are engaged in intellectually challenging games along with their studies”, adds Mustafa.



YANQUL RECEIVES LARGEST AMOUNT OF RAINFALL

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 1

The Wilayat of Yanqul received the largest amount of rainfall of 24mm during the past three days, followed by Rustaq 16 mm and Ibri 14 mm.

The thunderstorm cloud activity continued in several areas of the Hajar Mountains, with clouds forming on the Dhofar Mountains and the surrounding areas on Saturday.

“Clear to partly cloudy skies over most of the Sultanate with chance of convective clouds formation over governorates of Musandam, Dhofar, Al Wusta and Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas and isolated rain, occasionally thunder-showers associated with downdraft and hail extend to the coastal areas”, the forecast for Sunday said.

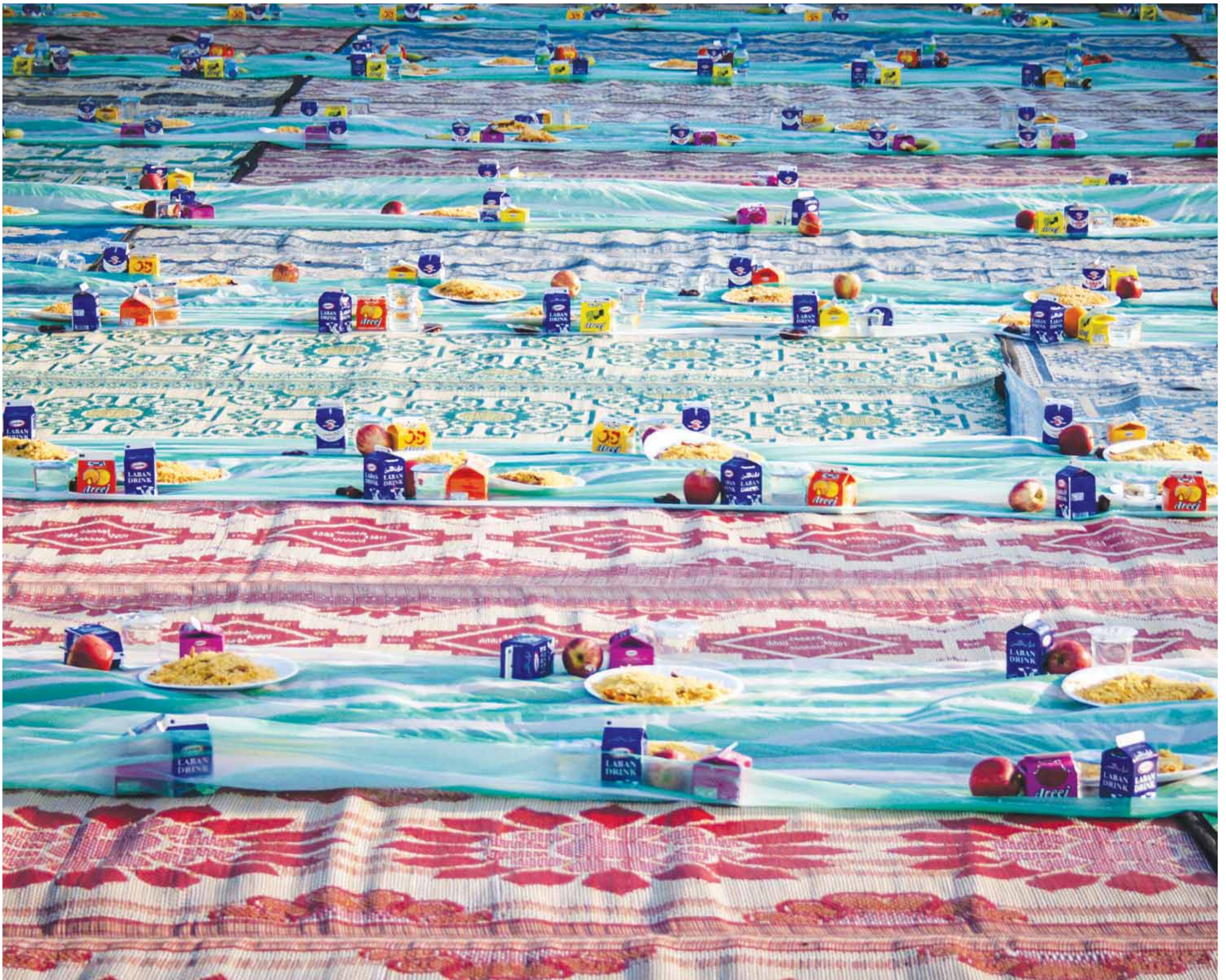




Ramadhan
M U B A R A K

Mass iftars missing but not the helping hand

The last two Ramadhan months have been a dampener on mass iftars due to restrictions on movements and for the fact that many corporate houses are facing severe cash crunch due to prolonged closure of the retail sectors



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Ramadhan in Oman has been known for mass iftar gatherings sponsored by corporates and various charitable organisations, especially the blue-collar workers.

The GCC countries are home to a large number of expatriate construction workers and other labourers whose low pay scales do not make them eligible to bring their families.

During the holy month, these workers used to participate in mass iftars regularly organised in various parts of the country, which also allowed

them to meet and make friends, many of them employed in the same or similar industry.

The last two Ramadhan months have been a dampener on mass iftars due to restrictions on movements and for the fact that many corporate houses are facing severe cash crunch due to prolonged closure of the retail sectors.

Apart from iftars sponsored by Omani citizens, business houses and expatriates, and charitable organisations at mosques, the Ramadhan tents in Muttrah, and mass iftar at the Clock Tower in CBD have been the prominent ones.

Feroz, a Bangladeshi expatriate, said,

“We have no option but to prepare homemade bachelor delicacies with room-mates at home. Mosques are closed, and it is not possible to gather in large numbers with friends. So, we strictly restrict to our room-mates.”

He added, “Though the authorities have stopped free iftar parties, I want to tell you we still get food prepared at home and cash to buy items for food preparations from some generous individuals in the neighbourhood.”

Mustafa, an Indian expatriate, employed with a leading construction company, echoed the same. “My company used to conduct one big iftar party during Ramadhan and then offer

help in cash. Mass iftars are stopped, but the company continues to make sure that we are not deprived of a good meal after long hours of fasting.”

Things cannot be said of the same companies. Still, many expatriate workers told the *Observer* that there is no shortage of generous individuals who contribute despite economic challenges.

Lubina, a citizen, said, “As I prepare food for my family, I arranged for them to be delivered to expatriate workers in the neighbourhood who are either employed for the municipal work or construction. It is a very challenging time for them, and we all have a social

and moral responsibility towards them.”

A senior finance manager of a leading corporate house said, “Our overall spending has been slashed due to dull in business, but the management has directed that our employees should not struggle for food during the holy month.”

Several restaurants and hotels also contribute to offering food to those less-privileged without violating the Covid-related health safety guidelines.

Charitable institutions continue to receive donations, which they are spending on arranging the iftar meal boxes.

Australians returning from Covid-hit India to face fine or jail

SYDNEY: New legislation taking effect on Monday means that Australians who have been in badly coronavirus-hit India in the past two weeks and return home can face a stiff fine or prison, according to media reports.

Legislation banning returning travellers from India — including Australian citizens — from entering the country takes effect on Monday and is to be reviewed on May 15.

Health Minister Greg Hunt announced late on Friday that anyone attempting to defy the new rules would be hit with fines of up to 66,600 Australian dollars (more than US \$51,800), five years in prison or both, the Australian Associated Press reported.

Some 9,000 Australians in India are registered as wanting to return, including 650 registered as “vulnerable,” AAP reported.

The health minister invoked powers under the Biosecurity Act to introduce the new measures, the same act used to close the borders, the *Guardian* newspaper reported.

On Saturday Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg rejected claims that it was “irresponsible” to leave Australians stranded in India when that country was running out of oxygen. — **dpa**

Announcement



An Invitation to Small and Medium Enterprises, Obtaining Entrepreneurs Card to Register with Nama Group

With reference to the Government directives to encourage and support small and medium enterprises that have the Entrepreneurs Card from the “Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development”, Nama Group is pleased to invite all these companies, interested to participate in tenders and carry out the Group works, to register and update their data through the Group’s website. The companies need to submit all supporting documents through the link below, based on the classification issued by the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development:

https://isupplier.nama.om:4443/OA_HTML/AppsLocalLogin.jsp

Nama Group always applies the Government directives and allow these companies to obtain tenders and works presented by the Subsidiaries of the Group, in accordance with the terms and conditions.

For more information, please contact Mr. Mahmood Al Bousaidi
by email: Mahmood.AlBousaidi@Holding.nama.om
or directly with the Procurement Departments of the Group Companies.



نماء
nama
HOLDING

Memorial for Covid victims in London

LONDON: A campaign has been launched to raise £2.3 million (\$3.2 million) to build a memorial in London to commemorate those who have died of Covid-19.

As part of the online memorial project Remember Me, and in partnership with the *Daily Mail* newspaper, the country is being encouraged to support a memorial to be built in St Paul’s Cathedral.

Remember Me, led by St Paul’s Cathedral and supported by the Prince of Wales, has more than 7,300 names of those who have died as a result of the pandemic since it launched in May last year. — **dpa**



Muscat Finance (SAOG)

Directors’ Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat Finance (SAOG), I am pleased to present the report for the period ended March 2021.

Business Results

The Company recorded a net profit after tax of RO 225K for the period ended Mar 2021 against RO 1,380K net loss for the corresponding period in the previous year.

The results signal a path to recovery from a challenging previous year. The business environment and activities were disrupted, due to frequent lockdowns aimed at controlling the spread of COVID19 pandemic, throughout the past year. To support its’ customers in the challenging economic environment, the company extended the payment deferral scheme till September 2021 in line with guidance received from the Central Bank of Oman.

While the company has adopted a cautious approach to advance new credits, a sharp focus on managing non-performing assets, interest and operating expenses has helped regain profitability. Loans and advances stand at RO 112.96 million as against RO 138.39 million in the same period last year. Accelerated remedial and legal recourse on non-performing loans has resulted in stemming the flow of new provisions.

The financial results are summarized below:

Amount in RO ‘000			
PARTICULARS	YTD	YTD	%
	31 March 2021	31 March 2020	change
Net Investment in Finance Debtors	112,958	138,388	(18%)
Net Operating Income	1,577	1,808	(13%)
Operating Expenses	908	853	6%
Operating Profit	669	954	(30%)
Net Profit/(loss) after tax	225	(1,380)	116%

Human Resources

In order to build a performance culture in the organization, the company has overhauled its organization structure and brought in new leadership with Mr. Fahd Amjad joining as Deputy CEO.

The company continues to invest in building local talent with Omanisation ratio standing at 86.9% for the period ended March 31, 2021, above the 80% requirement of the Central Bank of Oman.

To protect its employees and customers alike in the face of the pandemic, the company has undertaken several initiatives to reduce the transmission risk including introduction of thermal scanning, installation of glass shields in customer facing areas and employee education on preventive measures.

Information Technology

The company has upgraded its core financial management ERP system this quarter. The new system brings improved functionality, reduced process time through automation and stronger operational controls. This is the first step and part of a larger digital transformation mandate for your company.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The company acknowledges its responsibility towards the community and has committed a contribution of tablets to Wali Muttrah office. These will be used by children for online education, mandated due to COVID19 lockdown restrictions.

Business outlook

The business plans of the Company have been drawn after assessment of the macroeconomic environment as well as the pandemic situation. We are optimistic about the outcome of the Sultanate’s Economic Stimulus Plan that packages encouraging

NOTE :- The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of such request addressed to:
Chief Executive Officer, Muscat Finance (SAOG) P.O.Box 108, PC 112 Sultanate of Oman

Unaudited Financials for the Period ended March 2021

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31st March 2021

	Mar 2021 RO ‘ 000	Mar 2020 RO ‘ 000
Assets		
Debtors arising from financing activities	112,958	138,388
Cash & Bank balances	1,008	1,807
Other assets	1,331	1,128
	115,297	141,323
Liabilities		
Bank borrowings, Bonds & Corp. Deposit	71,195	92,548
Creditors & other liabilities	7,275	9,859
	78,470	102,407
	36,827	38,916
Net Assets		
Shareholders’ funds		
Share capital	30,715	30,715
Legal reserve	6,960	6,960
Special reserve	-	801
Impairment Reserve	3,955	6,145
Cumulative changes in fair value	62	143
Retained Earnings	(4,865)	(5,848)
	36,827	38,916

Statement of Comprehensive Income for the Period ended 31st March 2021

	Mar 2021 RO ‘ 000	Mar 2020 RO ‘ 000
Lease and Interest income	2,533	2,874
Interest expense	(1,113)	(1,209)
Net interest income	1,420	1,665
Other Income	157	143
Operating Expenses	(908)	(853)
Loss on litigation	-	(2,021)
Provision for Impairment	(444)	(439)
Profit/(Loss) before taxation	225	(1,505)
Provision for taxation	-	125
Profit/(Loss) for the period	225	(1,380)

measures to support the business community. The company is positioned well to identify quality lending opportunities both for retail and business customers. Your company will maintain equal focus on recovery of non-performing loans.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board, I would like to offer our best wishes and unflinching loyalty and obedience to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq as he takes forward the legacy of Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, whose Leadership and Vision provide the foundation for the economic, political and social progress of the Sultanate of Oman.

I would also like to thank His Majesty’s Government, the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority, Ministry of Commerce Industry and Investment Promotion and other Regulatory Authorities for their continued support and guidance.

The Board would like to thank all our customers for their continued patronage and support, to our local and overseas bankers for their active co-operation, and to all the shareholders for the confidence reposed in its Board.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Faisal Mohamed Al Yousef
Chairman



OMAN UNITED INSURANCE CO. SAOG

P. O. Box 1522, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman - Tel: 24477300, Fax: 24477323, E-mail: info@omanutd.com - www.omanutd.com - C.R. No.: 1/23725/0

COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the Un-Audited Financial Statements of the company for the Three months’ period ended on 31 March 2021.

Insurance operations and underwriting results:

The gross premium income of all insurance branches amounted to OMR 12.08 million compared to OMR 10.03 million in the same corresponding period of the year 2020 registering a growth rate of 20.4%.

The gross underwriting profits of all insurance business (before administrative expenses) amounted to OMR 1.68 million compared to Underwriting profits of OMR 1.88 million in the corresponding period of last year registering a decrease rate of (10.3%).

Investment Results:

The MSM30 Index closed at 3708.71 points against 3658.77 points on 31st December 2020, with marginal growth rate of 1.36%. Because of the negative impact of the outbreak of the Coronavirus (Covid 19) on the performance of some banks and some Joint public stock companies in which our company holds some shares, the said banks and companies decided not to distribute dividends for the year 2020, in addition to the investment strategy adopted by the company to reduce the exposure of the stock portfolio and investing in fixed income instruments to avoid the negative impact of the stock markets. Altogether have negatively affected the results of our stock portfolio. However, our investments in fixed-income instruments achieved good income of OMR 745K during the period. As a result of the foregoing, the company achieved a total investment income of OMR 978K, compared to OMR 1.16 million in the corresponding period last year, with a decrease rate of (15.7%). The net investment income after deducting unrealized investment losses amounted to OMR 742K compared to OMR 793K for the same period last year, with a decrease rate of (6.4%).

Net profit:

The company’s net profit after tax amounted to OMR 918 K against a net profit after tax of OMR. 1.14 million in the corresponding period of last year, registering a decrease rate of (19.3%), accordingly the earnings per share amounted to 9 Bzs against 11 Bzs in the corresponding period of last year. It is worth noting that the net asset value per share amounted to 278 Bzs compared to 272 Bzs in the same period of last year with a growth rate of 2.2%, this is despite the continuous distribution of dividends to the shareholders, as the dividends during this year amounted to OMR 3.5 million.

Business risks:

Honorable shareholders: As you know, insurance business is exposed to natural and other risks that are governed by fate and destiny, (such as the pandemic of Coronavirus, Covid19) and on the other hand, the performance of the investment portfolio is very much influenced by the prevailing economic and political conditions. However, the management has been exerting its utmost efforts by adopting a conservative risk management mechanism that mitigates the effects of the risks related to the activity.

Acknowledgement:

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the shareholders, our loyal customers, reinsurers and employees. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also extended to Capital Market Authority for their tremendous support in regulating and developing the local insurance sector and for their assistance, which has led to the smooth functioning of operations.

Finally, our sincere thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq. We all pray to Almighty Allah to shower His Majesty with blessings, keep him in good health and give him long life. Our sincere thanks and appreciation extended to His Majesty’s rational government and we wish to the Omani people always progress and prosperity.

Thank You and Kindest Regards

Salim Bin Nassir Al Busaidi
Chairman

April/2021

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH 2021

(Amounts in Rial Omani)			
DESCRIPTION	31st March 2021	31st March 2020	31st Dec. 2020
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, furniture and equipments	1,529,877	1,536,348	1,603,240
Investment Property - Land & Buildings	2,126,081	2,197,673	2,142,352
Available-for-sale investments	824,348	1,485,074	976,624
Deposits	39,000,000	41,150,000	41,400,000
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	6,324,984	6,870,000	6,861,000
Total Non-Current assets	49,805,290	53,239,095	52,983,216
Current assets			
Financial assets at fair value through income	4,112,565	6,536,839	4,304,329
Insurance & other receivables	11,192,046	12,470,303	7,212,165
Deposits	14,765,396	6,876,253	17,146,400
Cash & Cash equivalents	5,485,255	2,476,853	1,936,502
Reinsurance Contracts	22,406,630	30,932,465	23,726,982
Total current assets	57,961,892	59,292,713	54,326,378
Total assets	107,767,182	112,531,808	107,309,594
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Share Premium	871,519	871,519	871,519
Retained earnings	3,316,722	2,782,513	5,899,195
Legal reserve	3,333,334	3,333,334	3,333,334
Contingency reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
General reserve	100,000	100,000	100,000
Fair value reserve	189,645	134,371	255,240
Total capital and reserves	27,811,220	27,221,737	30,459,288
Non-current liabilities			
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	7,504,984	8,370,000	8,141,000
Employees’ end of service benefits	895,516	894,882	846,912
Lease liability	264,568	35,700	294,082
Deferred tax liability	138,727	96,042	125,481
Total Non-current liabilities	8,803,795	9,396,624	9,407,475
Current liabilities			
Bank Overdraft	-	-	2,405,907
Insurance Contracts	48,358,219	56,421,544	48,522,345
Trade and other payables	21,546,302	19,077,126	15,470,715
Lease liability	62,793	158,021	68,206
Provision for Income Tax	1,184,853	256,756	975,658
Total current liabilities	71,152,167	75,913,447	67,442,831
Total liabilities	79,955,962	85,310,071	76,850,306
Total equity and liabilities	107,767,182	112,531,808	107,309,594
Net asset per share	0.278	0.272	0.305

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01-01-2021 TO 31-03-2021

(Amounts in Rial Omani)		
PARTICULARS	2021	2020
Income		
Gross Written Premiums	12,080,415	10,032,122
Net underwriting result	1,683,049	1,875,486
Investment income - net	563,041	634,608
Other operating income	179,310	158,414
Total Income	2,425,400	2,668,508
General and administration expenses	(1,285,431)	(1,311,975)
Operating Profit before taxation	1,139,969	1,356,533
Taxation	(222,442)	(218,888)
Net profit for the period	917,527	1,137,645
Other comprehensive income:		
Available for sale investments fair value gain/(loss)	(65,595)	(170,368)
Total comprehensive income for the period	851,932	967,277
Earnings Per Share	0.009	0.011

SALIM BIN NASSIR AL BUSAIDI
CHAIRMAN

NASSIR BIN SALIM AL BUSAIDI
CHIEF MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE

	Location	Telephone	Fax
B R A N C H E S	Head Office	2447 7300	2447 7323
	Darsait	2470 3991	2479 6327
	Al Qurum	2456 2105	2456 2074
	Barka	2688 6687	2688 6698
	Buraimi	2565 0105	2565 0096
	Ibra	2557 2386	2557 2387
	Ibri	2569 2386	2569 1840
	Nizwa	2541 0330	2541 2392
	Salalah	2329 5040	2329 8405
	Seeb	2442 1771	2442 1770
	Sohar	2684 1533	2684 0016
	Sur	2554 3229	2554 2454
	Bidaya	2670 9545	2670 9548

Turkish police detain hundreds at lockdown May Day marches

ISTANBUL: Turkish police detained 212 demonstrators after scuffles broke out at May Day marches on Saturday amid a coronavirus-related curfew, according to the Istanbul governor's office and Reuters witnesses.

Riot police and plainclothes officers jostled with union leaders and other demonstrators and threw some to the ground before detaining dozens of them near Istanbul's Taksim Square, Reuters video and images showed.

The governor's office said some labour unions were allowed to hold memorials to mark the annual holiday, while others who had "gathered illegally" in violation of the lockdown, and ignored calls to disperse, were detained.

State-owned Anadolu Agency said 20 protesters were also detained in the western city of Izmir.

Turkey this week adopted a 17-day partial lockdown, including stay-home orders and the closure of schools and some businesses, to curb a wave of coronavirus infections.

Local media reported efforts by police in Istanbul and Ankara to block reporters from filming the May Day demonstrations and detentions, with officers citing a new police circular.

On Friday, Turkish media reported that officers were instructed to prevent people from filming or recording security forces on smartphones while they are on duty, a move critics called



Turkish police detain demonstrators during a May Day rally marking the international day of the worker in Istanbul. – AFP

unlawful and a threat to citizens' rights.

Turkish police have not commented on the reports.

The DISK press union said on Twitter that journalists filming the May Day events "are being blocked by police", adding "a police circular cannot prevent" coverage.

AFP reports that Istanbul police detained dozens of people who were trying to hold a May Day rally in the city on Saturday in defiance of a ban ordered amid the coronavirus pandemic.

At least 100 demonstrators were detained as they attempted to walk to Taksim Square, a traditional

Journalists filming the May Day events 'are being blocked by police', as Turkey adopts a 17-day partial lockdown

area of protest, correspondents said, and in other areas nearby including the popular Istiklal Avenue.

Police officers pushed a crowd back forcefully using their shields, while other officers dragged protesters away, a correspondent said. The Istanbul branch of the Contemporary Lawyers' Association said 170 people were detained.

Turkey has been under a full lockdown since April 29 with a third wave of the virus causing record numbers of daily deaths. Some 394 people died of Covid-19 in Turkey on Friday, official data showed.

There are often detentions during the annual May 1 workers' holiday.

Taksim has been a flashpoint on May Day with frequent clashes since 34 people were killed there on May 1, 1977 during an unstable period in modern Turkey's history. — Reuters/AFP

Vaccine roll-out begins in northern Syria

IDLIB: Residents of rebel-held parts of northern Syria began receiving coronavirus vaccinations on Saturday, a reporter said, with medics among the first to be inoculated. Authorities in Idlib and northern Aleppo provinces received an initial batch of 53,800 AstraZeneca Covid-19 jabs on April 21, under the Covax programme for poorer nations.

In Idlib city, the first to receive the jab was a doctor at the Ibn Sina children's hospital, one of the city's biggest medical facilities.

Yasser Najib, the head of a committee running the vaccine drive, said the first doses would go to medical staff at Ibn Sina and the national hospital in Azaz, in northern Aleppo.

He said that by Monday the campaign would reach "all medical facilities, including those in the camps" on the border with Turkey, which shelter hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

Humanitarian workers are also among the first groups to be inoculated, followed by the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

The committee said it had set up more than 90 mobile teams to administer the vaccines.

The campaign covers both areas of northwestern Syria controlled by former Al Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al Sham, and border regions of northern Aleppo province held by Turkish and pro-Turkish forces.

The area, which hosts some four million people, has recorded over 21,000 cases of Covid-19



A man receives a dose of the coronavirus disease vaccine at a hospital in Idlib. – Reuters

including 641 deaths.

"The aim... is to vaccinate 20 percent of the population of northwestern Syria, so around 855,000 people", said Najib.

Last month, Damascus received an initial batch of 203,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses, out of 912,000 it is set to receive for distribution in government and Kurdish-dominated parts of Syria.

The World Health Organization is hoping a fifth of Syria's population will be vaccinated by the end of the year.

Syria's civil war has killed more than 388,000 people and displaced millions at home and abroad since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish-ruled region of northeastern Syria will run out of Covid-19 testing equipment in a week, the International Rescue Committee has warned. The area has witnessed a surge in cases in recent weeks and the health crisis it faces will be made worse if testing stops, the aid organisation said in a statement. — AFP

Polluted Lebanon's river spews out tonnes of dead fish

QARAOUN, Lebanon: Tonnes of dead fish have washed up on the banks of a lake on Lebanon's Litani river, engulfing a nearby village in a pungent smell, in a disaster blamed on polluted waters.

Volunteers collected rotting fish carcasses near the Qaraoun lake on Lebanon's longest river, the Litani, where activists have warned for years of water pollution caused by sewage and waste.

Piles of garbage drifted in the lake near the dead fish. Swarms of flies spread near the reservoir and thousands of fish were decomposing in already dirty waters.

"This phenomenon appeared on the shore of the lake several days ago", said Ahmad Askar, a local activist. "The fish started floating up, and in abnormal

Volunteers collected rotting fish carcasses near the Qaraoun lake on Lebanon's longest river, the Litani, where activists have warned for years of water pollution caused by sewage and waste

quantities... It's unacceptable."

At least 40 tonnes have turned up dead in a few days, numbers which Askar and fishermen in Qaraoun described as unprecedented. They called on the Litani river authority to find the cause and go after anyone dumping wastewater into the lake.

The river authority said this



Dead fish are seen floating in Lake Qaraoun on the Litani River, Lebanon. – Reuters

week that the fish were toxic and carried a virus, urging people to avoid fishing all along the Litani due to "an aggravated disaster that threatens public health".

The pollution prompted a ban since 2018 on fishing in the reservoir, which was created in 1959 with a large dam to collect water for hydropower and irrigation.

Last month, volunteers removed clumps of sticky tar from some beaches along the Lebanese coast after an oil spill which environmentalists warned would harm marine life.

Ecological disasters are the last thing Lebanon needs as it suffers through an alarming financial collapse and the aftermath of a huge explosion that devastated Beirut port last August. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ALGIERS

Pro-democracy marchers arrested in Algeria

Thousands of Algerians marched through the capital denouncing what they said were sweeping arrests of members of the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement. "Police everywhere, justice nowhere", read one sign carried by the protesters.

Local media websites and activists on social networks said police violently broke up the demonstration, with reports of arrests and violence in the capital.

The "peaceful march (was)



violently dispersed", Said Salhi, head of the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH), said on Twitter. — AFP

TEL AVIV

Israel to woo visitors, prepares to relaunch tourism

Israel announced plans to attract visitors from the UAE, after last year's historic normalisation deal and as the Jewish state prepares to re-open to groups of vaccinated tourists on May 23. Israel's borders have largely been closed since March 2020, when it imposed its first of three pandemic lockdowns.

But a successful vaccination campaign has enabled a broad economic re-opening, months after the UAE became only the third Arab state to establish full



ties with Israel in a US-brokered deal. "Dubai has great tourism potential for Israel", Tourism Minister Orit Farkash-Hacohen told reporters, as she unveiled a marketing push including a billboard campaign in Dubai. — AFP

TUNIS

Tunisia to seek \$4 billion IMF loan, says PM

Tunisia will seek a \$4 billion loan programme from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in talks, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi said that politicians faced a "last opportunity" to save the economy.

Mechichi said he expected talks to last about two months and had "confidence" Tunisia could secure financial support to help it through an economic crisis that has been aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"All efforts must be unified in



Tunisia because we consider that we have reached the last opportunity and we must use it to save the economy", he said in an interview. — Reuters



A Kyrgyzstan's emergencies ministry serviceman carries mattresses for citizens, who were evacuated from districts bordering Tajikistan following the fighting along the Kyrgyz-Tajik disputed border in Kyrgyzstan's southwestern town of Batken. — AFP

Kyrgyz, Tajik leaders move to save ceasefire after fresh clashes

BISHKEK: The presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan spoke by telephone on Saturday hoping to maintain a fragile ceasefire after the worst border clashes between the ex-Soviet countries left at least 33 dead.

The talks came after Kyrgyzstan accused Tajikistan of violating the truce, but the press services of Kyrgyzstan's leader Sadyr Japarov and Tajikistan's Emomali Rakhmon said they discussed fulfilling the agreement reached on Thursday, when the fighting erupted.

Clashes between communities over land and water along the long-contested border are regular occurrences, with border guards often getting involved, however this week's violence was by far the most serious during the Central Asian pair's 30 years of independence.

Kyrgyzstan on Satur-

day announced two days of mourning and said that its death toll had risen from 31 to 33, with over a hundred other Kyrgyz injured and at least 30 properties destroyed in its southwestern Batken region.

Despite the ceasefire, Kyrgyzstan's national security committee said that Tajikistan's military had "opened fire on dwellings" in Batken's Leilik district on Saturday. The security committee in a separate statement said that Tajikistan was breaking the ceasefire by bringing its forces closer to the border and periodically firing at cars travelling along a road running through the disputed territory.

Tajikistan's military also blocked off one strategic section of road, the security committee said, cutting off a Kyrgyz region to the rest of the country. — AFP

US, Nato formally begin troop withdrawal from Afghanistan

KABUL: After almost 20 years, the United States and Nato officially begin withdrawing their last troops from Afghanistan on Saturday, leaving the country to an uncertain future amid rising attacks by Taliban insurgents.

Almost 10,000 Nato soldiers from the Resolute Support training mission, including 2,500 soldiers from the US and around 1,100 from Germany as the two biggest contingents, will leave the country by September 11.

May 1 is the official start date, but military equipment had already started leaving the country weeks ago.

Several Nato countries have deployed additional forces or are holding them ready to secure the withdrawal.

There are fears the Taliban might attack the forces during the withdrawal. A Nato official said any attacks would be met with a forceful response.

The withdrawal of the international forces will also be a test for the Afghan security forces, which will have to defend the territory it



US Marines board a C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft headed to Kandahar as British and US forces withdraw from the Camp Bastion-Leatherneck complex at Lashkar Gah in Helmand province. — AFP File Photo

currently controls and support the government without direct international support.

In recent weeks, US generals have expressed fears that the withdrawal might lead to the collapse of

the Afghan government or a new civil war.

US President Joe Biden is determined to follow through, however, announcing in mid-April that the withdrawal of the remaining 2,500

US forces would be complete by the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Washington's Nato allies also declared that it would follow the US out of Afghanistan.

— dpa/AFP

Philippines receives first batch of Sputnik vaccines

MANILA: The Philippines received its first batch of Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine on Saturday, the presidential office said.

The 15,000 doses of Sputnik V, developed by Russia's Gamaleya Institute, will be used in four cities in the capital region, the Philippines' coronavirus hotspot, the health ministry said. It was supposed to arrive on April 25, but

was delayed by logistical issues.

The Philippines is negotiating to buy 20 million doses of Sputnik V, as part of its target to inoculate up to 70 million adults this year.

It has so far received 4.04 million vaccine doses, more than 86 per cent of which were from China's Sinovac Biotech and the rest from AstraZeneca through the Covax facility.

More than 1.8 million doses had

been administered as of April 27, government data showed. With nearly 1.05 million infections and 17,354 deaths, the Philippines is battling one of the worst Covid-19 outbreaks in Asia.

Meanwhile, the Philippines extended a month-long lockdown in the capital region and nearby provinces for another two weeks in a bid to radically slow the amount of Covid-19 cases. The restrictions in

Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Rizal, Laguna and Cavite will be in effect until May 14, President Rodrigo Duterte announced in his weekly televised public address.

The lockdown in the northern provinces of Quirino and Abra, and the city of Santiago in Cagayan Valley province will be in effect for the whole of May, Duterte added. — AFP

Biden administration sets new N Korea policy of 'practical' diplomacy

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE: President Joe Biden has settled on a new approach to pressuring North Korea to give up nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles that will explore diplomacy but not seek a grand bargain with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the White House said on Friday.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Air Force One that US officials had completed a months-long review of North Korean policy.

Complete denuclearisation of North Korea remains the goal, she said, but she noted that the past four presidents had been unable to get Pyongyang to forswear nuclear weapons.

The Biden policy attempts to strike a middle ground between the policy pursued by Biden's most recent predecessors.

Republican Donald Trump held three summit meetings with Kim but achieved no breakthrough other than a pause in nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests that has lasted since 2017.

Democrat Barack Obama refused serious diplomatic engagement with North Korea ab-



General view of a military parade to commemorate the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party in Pyongyang in this photo supplied by North Korea's Central News Agency. — Reuters File Photo

sent any steps by Pyongyang to reduce tensions.

"Our policy will not focus on achieving a grand bargain, nor will it rely on strategic patience," Psaki said.

Instead, the United States will pursue a "calibrated practical approach that is open to and will explore diplomacy with" North Korea and making "practical progress" that increases the security of the United States and its allies, she said.

North Korea, so far, has re-

fused diplomatic entreaties from the Biden administration. Pyongyang wants the United States and its allies to lift economic sanctions imposed over its weapons programmes.

Psaki did not provide details of what the administration's next step might be beyond discussions with allies. Biden met Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga two weeks ago and is to meet South Korean President Moon Jae-in on May 21 at the White House.

The United States had consulted with South Korea throughout the policy review process and Washington had informed Seoul of its conclusions in advance, the South Korean foreign ministry said.

"The two countries will discuss the direction of North Korea policy at the scheduled summit and meeting of foreign ministers in May and continue cooperation to have the North Korea-US talks resumed shortly." — Reuters



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 20/2021

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

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/20/073	(27/2021/MM/HQ-24)	Design and Construction of Dualization of University Street at Al Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 280	31/05/2021	30/06/2021	Excellent
PRE/20/093	(28/2021/MM/HQ-25)	Development of MBD Area at Muttrah (E- Tender)	Rial 158	22/05/2021	10/06/2021	Excellent

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency/Head of Intrnal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

India’s daily Covid-19 cases pass 400,000 as second wave worsens

NEW DELHI: India recorded more than 400,000 new Covid-19 cases for the first time on Saturday as it battles a devastating second wave, and the country’s massive new vaccination drive was hampered in some areas by shortages of the shots.

Authorities reported 401,993 new cases in the previous 24 hours, after 10 consecutive days of more than 300,000 daily cases. Deaths jumped by 3,523, taking the country’s total toll to 211,853, according to the federal health ministry.

The surge in infections has overwhelmed hospitals, morgues and crematoriums and left families scrambling for scarce medicines and oxygen. And while India is the world’s biggest producer of Covid-19 vaccines, shortages of the shots in some states hindered the opening of vaccinations for all adults.

West Bengal state was unable to start a drive aimed at adults aged between 18 and 45 due to a shortage of shots and urged the federal government to provide more supplies, a senior state health official said, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak with media.

Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of the hard-hit state of Delhi on Friday urged people not to queue at vaccination centres, promising more vaccines would arrive “tomorrow or the day after”.

Eastern Odisha state said on Friday it had received a consignment of 150,000 shots but would only allow a few people to get shots due to lockdown restrictions preventing movement.

In Ahmedabad, the main commercial city in Prime Minister



A man gets inoculated with a dose of Covishield vaccine against the coronavirus at a vaccination centre in Mumbai. – AFP

Narendra Modi’s home state of Gujarat, hundreds of people lined up for their shots.

“I took my first dose and I am appealing to all students to take the vaccine and be safe”, said Raj Shah, a 27-year-old student in the city.

India has received 150,000 Sputnik-V vaccine doses from Russia and millions more doses will follow, an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said on Saturday.

Shortages of medical oxygen have plagued the medical system.

In New Delhi’s Batra Hospital, local media reported that eight people including a doctor died on Saturday after the facility ran out of oxygen.

“Delhi required 976 tonnes of oxygen and yesterday only 312



A patient breathes with the help of oxygen provided by a Gurdwara in Ghaziabad. – AFP

tonnes of oxygen was given. How does Delhi breathe in such a low oxygen?” Chief Minister Kejriwal tweeted.

At a hearing on Saturday, the Delhi high court took note of the deaths at Batra Hospital and told the federal government to make

arrangements for the allocated supply of oxygen to be given to Delhi.

“Enough is enough”, Justice Vipin Sanghi said. The federal government’s counsel told the court: “We are doing maximum to what human limit can go.”

Desperate coronavirus patients continued to arrive at hospitals despite a shortage of beds.

Gasping for air, 62-year-old Vijay Gupta was turned away by Holy Family Hospital, a non-profit private facility in the southeast of the capital, as all of its 385 beds were full. His family and friends debated what to do try next.

“We have been roaming around since 6 am looking for a bed,” said Gupta’s friend Rajkumar Khandelwal. “Where shall we go?” — Reuters

Protesters march in Paris and other French cities on May Day

PARIS: Thousands of people joined traditional May Day protests across France on Saturday, gathering despite Covid-19 restrictions to demand social and economic justice and voice their opposition to government plans to change unemployment benefits.

About 300 rallies were organised in Paris and other cities including Lyon, Nantes, Lille and Toulouse.

In the French capital, trade unionists were joined by members of the “Yellow Vest” movement that triggered a wave of anti-government protests three years ago and by workers from sectors hit hard by pandemic restrictions such as culture.

Marchers, most wearing masks in line with Covid-19 rules, carried banners reading: “Dividends, not unemployment benefits are the income of lazy people” and “We want to live, not survive”.

“Loads of money is going to those who have plenty and less

tor those who have nothing as reflected in the unemployment insurance reform plan that we want scrapped”, Philippe Martinez, head of the CGT labour union said.

Most demonstrations were peaceful, although Lyon police scattered a group of about 200 people who were throwing fireworks, the Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes prefecture said on Twitter.

Seventeen people were arrested in Paris, where 5,000 police have been deployed, the Paris Prefecture de Police said.

A few hooded, black-clad demonstrators clashed with police or threw stones and garbage bins. Police said they had prevented ‘Black Bloc’ anarchists from forming a group.

Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon and far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who both plan to challenge President Emmanuel Macron in next year’s presidential election, both attended May Day events.

— Reuters



Police detain a protester during clashes at the annual May Day (Labour Day) rally in Paris. – AFP

Somalia votes to cancel presidential term extension

MOGADISHU: Somalia’s Lower House of Parliament voted unanimously on Saturday to cancel a divisive two-year presidential term extension it approved last month, a move that might help end an armed stand-off in the capital Mogadishu.

The crisis over the term extension has raised fears that Al Qaeda-linked Al Shabaab insurgents could exploit the situation. Militants from Al Shabaab took over at least one Somali town in the past week, as heavily armed fighters moved from the countryside into the

Around 100,000 people were forced to flee their homes following clashes that stirred fears of all-out war between heavily armed factions for and against the president

capital city. The Lower House vote was broadcast on Somali television and came shortly after President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed addressed parliament and said he was directing his prime minister to spearhead preparations for the



Somalia legislators are seen inside the lower house of Parliament in Mogadishu. – Reuters

election.

Mohamed’s term expired in February, but wrangling over elections meant a new crop of legislators was not selected to choose a new president.

The term extension was approved by lower house lawmakers last month but rejected by the Senate, provoking a political crisis that intensified in the past week.

The proposal split some security forces along clan lines. Between 60,000 and 100,000 people were forced to flee their homes following clashes on Sunday that stirred fears

of all-out war between heavily armed factions for and against the president.

Rashid Abdi, a Nairobi-based independent analyst, said that the parliament’s vote and the president’s delegation of election preparations to the prime minister appeared to be a good compromise.

“The problem is there is so little trust between the parties and as long as Farmaajo holds the levers of the military and security services, it looks difficult to build confidence in that process”, he said, using a popular nickname for the president. — Reuters

TOKYO

Japan jolted by magnitude 6.8 earthquake

An earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8, revised up from an earlier estimate of 6.6, jolted northeast Japan, shaking buildings 400 kilometres away in Tokyo and raising the possibility of landslides closer to the epicentre.

No tsunami alert was issued after the quake, which struck at 10.27 am Japan time off the coast of Miyagi prefecture at a depth of 51 kilometres, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said. The JMA earlier estimated its depth at 60 kilometres.

— Reuters



LISBON

Portugal extends Covid-19 air travel curbs

Portugal said it was extending until May 16 flight restrictions that stop non-essential travel from countries with high coronavirus incidence rates, including Brazil and India — a new addition to the list. Travellers from countries where 500 or more cases per 100,000 people have been reported over a 14-day period — which also include South Africa, France and the Netherlands, among others — can only enter Portugal if they have a valid reason, such



as for work or healthcare, the government said. They must then quarantine for 14 days.

People from countries where the incidence rate is 150 or more Covid-19 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. — Reuters

ROME

Ex-premier Berlusconi discharged from hospital

Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has been released from hospital after more than 20 days, where he had undergone a series of examinations.

The 84-year-old left the San Raffaele Clinic in Milan on Friday, a spokesperson for Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party confirmed on Saturday.

He was admitted to the hospital on April 6.

Berlusconi’s health was still being affected by a coronavirus



infection which he contracted in September, his lawyer was quoted assaying.

The trial has been postponed several times due to Berlusconi’s hospitalisation. It has now been scheduled for mid-May. — dpa

A photograph: A snapshot, a tender moment in time

The current obsession with social media could well lead to a 'lost generation.' Nothing sinister of course, but all of us have framed family photos sitting on our tables and dressers, or hanging on the walls, that offer memories with dignity and respect.

I must admit that I never, ever, thought mobile phones would become the essential commodity they have, specially as during the mid-1980's the one I was lugging around was roughly the size and weight of a small car battery, about 14lbs. We truly have become slaves to our phones to the extent that author Margaret Atwood wrote, "We are living in an era where capturing moments using our phones has become more important than actually living in these moments with those around us."

I also looked and laughed at tourists from the Far East and South East Asia mostly, when they arrived with 'selfie sticks' and couldn't stop anywhere without taking a picture of amazing natural beauty, with themselves stuck in the middle! "That's an ego fad", said I, "and will never take off", in my smug, all-knowing way. I was wrong again but I take comfort in the thought of selfie stick users taking twenty pics to get one good enough for Instagram. Then when you meet them on the street, they



Ray Petersen
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LIFE IS VERY MUCH LIKE A CAMERA, AND WE SHOULD FOCUS ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT, CAPTURE THE GOOD TIMES, USE THE POSITIVE SIDE OF NEGATIVES

look just like all the other 19 pics! Yet... look at us today. Everyone is taking selfies 'at the drop of a hat!' Most frustratingly though, people are taking selfies at crazy angles that distort their features, and the latest fad is to add things like rabbit ears, cat's whiskers, rosy, red cheeks and silly hats, and it is doing my head in. You don't know if someone actually looks so foolish or is quite different. And we will all laugh at the cartoon of a woman suggesting "the ultimate beauty product is an Instagram filter."

I do understand informal situations, having fun, making faces, all squashing together at a barbeque or the beach, though not during the last 14 months, but I would be devastated if the only memories of close friends and family were to be those on my mobile phone, with clown faces and furry features. In our family lies our heritage, and in the future, our legacy. We should treasure those memories, offering dignity and respect to those who have gone before us, and celebrating while they are here, all they have done for us.

I am not worried about how myself and my family will be remembered. We have photographs capturing unique occasions, memories, and moments harking back from bonny baby pics to today. Each of them maybe not

elegant, but with an elegance, maybe not dignified, but with dignity, maybe not stylish, but with style, and maybe not funny, but with fun.

We are an ordinary family, nothing special, but I feel, in respect of memories and treasuring each other, our photos mean a great deal to us, and I hope you have similar respect for your families and friends, and will record and recall them not only informally, but allowing them to reveal their character, grace, and style, their gravitas and intellect, through the all-seeing eye of the real, inimitable camera.

In fact, life is very much like a camera, and we should focus on what is important, capture the good times, use the positive side of negatives, and if they don't work out, if something goes wrong, take another shot! A photographer is someone special, they look beyond the lens, outside the camera view, looking for, and seeing more than pretty faces. They seek to capture your essence, the inner you, they capture sophistication, personality, character, heart, passion, and the magic, the candid, unique, tender you that is you. Never pass up an opportunity to record your reality. A photograph may be just a 'snapshot, a moment in time', but oh... what a moment.

A NEW COLD WAR?

The risk of US-China tensions

Acclaimed diplomat Henry Kissinger said on Friday that US-China tensions threaten to engulf the entire world and could lead to an Armageddon-like clash between the two military and technology giants.

The 97-year-old former US secretary of state, who as an adviser to president Richard Nixon crafted the 1971 unfreezing of relations between Washington and Beijing, said the mix of economic, military and technological strengths of the two superpowers carried more risks than the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Strains with China are "the biggest problem for America, the biggest problem for the world", Kissinger told the McCain Institute's Sedona Forum on global issues.

"Because if we can't solve that, then the risk is that all over the world a kind of cold war will develop between China and the United States."

While nuclear weapons were already large

For the first time in human history, humanity has the capacity to extinguish itself in a finite period of time. We have developed the technology of a power that is beyond what anybody imagined even 70 years ago.

HENRY KISSINGER
diplomat

enough to damage the entire globe during the Cold War, he said advances in nuclear technology and artificial intelligence — where China and the United States are both leaders — have multiplied the doomsday threat. "For the first time in human history, humanity has the capacity to extinguish itself in a finite period of

time", Kissinger said. "We have developed the technology of a power that is beyond what anybody imagined even 70 years ago."

"And now, to the nuclear issue is added the high tech issue, which in the field of artificial intelligence, in its essence is based on the fact that man becomes a partner of machines and that machines can develop their own judgement", he said.

"So in a military conflict between high-tech powers, it's of colossal significance." The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union during the decades after World War II was more one-dimensional, focused on nuclear weapons competition, said Kissinger, one of the leading strategic thinkers of the past six decades.

"The Soviet Union had no economic capacity. They had military technological capacity", he said.

"(They) didn't have developmental technological capacity as China does. China is a huge economic power in addition to being a significant military power."

Kissinger said US policy towards China must take a two-pronged approach: standing firm on US principles to demand China's respect, while maintaining a constant dialogue and finding areas of cooperation.

"I'm not saying that diplomacy will always lead to beneficial results", he said.

"This is the complex task we have... Nobody has succeeded in doing it completely", he said. — AFP

VIRTUAL INTENSIVE CARE WARDS

Technology helps students learn safely

ARMAN SOLDIN

The rural county of Somerset in southwest England is best known for its cider, and seems an unlikely setting for cutting-edge technological innovation.

But, owing to teaching disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, medical students at Musgrove Park Hospital in the main town of Taunton are tapping in to virtual reality technology to help them in their studies.

Clutching hand-held controllers and immersed in large headsets, the students are plunged into a maelstrom of virtual intensive care wards.

The technology lets them learn how to explain diagnoses and treatment plans, deal with challenging situations, as well as engage with patients and their families, without attending in-person sessions.

The brains behind the initiative is British start-up Virti, whose VR technology helped Britain's state-funded National Health Service (NHS) come through the height of the pandemic.

"Normally it's very challenging for people to see this in practice because there's only about three or four people in the operating theatre", Virti Chief Executive Alex Young said.

"But with this type of technology, you can immerse 15 to 20 people in one of these environments and really scale how people learn and train", he said.

The VR experience gets a seal of



Virtual reality technology has experienced a boom during the pandemic. — AFP

VIRTI AIMS TO INTRODUCE AFFORDABLE "EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION" ACROSS THE WORLD, AND IS ALREADY WORKING WITH HOSPITALS IN AFRICA

approval from both trainees and more experienced medics.

Richard Bamford, surgeon and lead for skills and courses at the hospital, said: "It's reproducible, it's reliable, and it's based on a real-world setting. It's as realistic as it can be.

"It gives them (the students) a good opportunity to train, particularly in times when training has been affected by different reasons, Covid being one of them."

Medical student Chiranth Badrinath explained that Virti's technology gave him an insight into an operating theatre environment that would have

otherwise been impossible.

"If we had this last year it would be so good for our learning", he said.

"I've been in theatre and felt like I couldn't really ask questions, but having everything explained to you, there's a running commentary — it's really helpful."

Doctor Usama Khan appreciated the close-up virtual views. "It's kind of freaky but it's good", he said.

Virti aims to introduce affordable "experiential education" across the world, and is already working with hospitals in Africa.

— AFP

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**EXCERPTS FROM THE
INTERVIEW:**

Q. What does the ACC post mean to Oman Cricket?

A. This is a great recognition for Oman Cricket and a testimony to what the national team has achieved over the years. It wouldn't have happened without the whole-hearted support from the Government of Oman in putting in place an integrated facility to develop cricket in the Sultanate.

I will be taking charge during the ACC AGM, most probably in June-July.

Q. What are the plans for national team's preparation for the upcoming mega event of Twenty20 World Cup India 2021?

A. We were fortunate to complete the Oman Cricket League season this year despite the difficult situation posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. So all of Oman national team players got sufficient match practice in the season.

We hope to stage back-to-back tournaments that will involve ICC Associate member nation teams in Oman in September. The exact picture will be available only after the Associate countries meeting on May 7.

If this is possible the events will be a perfect dress-rehearsal for the ICC T20 World Cup 2021, scheduled to be played in October and November in India.

Oman Cricket plans to convene the national team camp in August ahead of the World Cup.



Pankaj Khimji

A. As of now our facilities at Al Amerat Ground is good. But to host real big tournaments we need to upgrade the existing facilities.

We need much bigger dressing rooms, integrated scoreboards which give all sorts of information and most importantly greater lighting capability.

Nowadays, for TV coverage we need at least 5 to 10 cameras and the TV towers should be there plus the lighting power should be raised considerably. We hope to raise our existing capacity and make the conditions suitable to host big events in coming future.

Q. How is the growth of women's cricket in Oman?

A. Oman has seen good improvement in terms of women's cricket. Vaisali Jesrani has spearheaded the national team to good heights. Women's cricket team has got sponsors also and it shows their improvement over the years.

But again our task is to convince the parents of the young girls (19 to 22 years of age) to continue their career as most girls shift places and universities.

Q. Any overseas camp planned for the team?

A. As things go according to plan, we might host the double-header tournaments in September and after that we plan to have an overseas camp before the World Cup. The venue will be decided later.

As far as players are concerned we are keeping track of the national team players and they are staying fit with regular exercise routines.

Q. Do you feel the Associate nations are getting sufficient slots in big events like World Cup and Asia Cup?

A. The ICC have specific plans to develop cricket across the world. Already many programmes are in place for the Associate teams to lift their cricketing standards. We have many formats like World Cricket League so that the teams can come up and join the top ranked cricketing nations. Some good examples are Afghanistan and Ireland, who have got the Test status.

Q. As an ACC official what is your vision regarding the growth of the game in Asia?

A. In Asia we have the big five — India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Already the standard is world-class and other teams like Hong Kong, Thailand, Oman, UAE and Qatar are putting in hard work to improve their standards.

We have good opportunities in ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup and ACC Asia Cup and other junior tournaments to lift the game in Asia.

Q. After Oman being granted the approval as a Test venue are there any plans to upgrade the facilities further?

**ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH**
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Maintaining Oman's achievements in cricket is the biggest challenge of the Sultanate's cricket governing body, Oman Cricket (OC), according to board member Pankaj Khimji, who is all set to take over as Asian Cricket Council (ACC) vice-president in two-month time.

Oman have made giant leaps in terms of International Cricket Council world ranking by jumping from earlier 38th position to present 17th and reaching as high as 14th rank in the last three to four years.

Pankaj talked extensively to *Oman Daily Observer* on the latest status of Oman cricket after becoming the first Omani to be nominated for the vice-president post at the ACC.

MAINTAINING STANDARD OF OMAN CRICKET BIGGEST CHALLENGE: PANKAJ





Debutante's 6 wickets put Sri Lanka in command

Left-arm spinner Praveen Jayawickrama took six wickets on debut to dismiss Bangladesh for 251 and give Sri Lanka a commanding lead on Saturday on day three of the second Test. The 22-year-old Jayawickrama's six for 92 bettered Upul Chandana's record of six for 179 in 1999 when he made debut against Pakistan.



Bottas on pole to deny 100th for Hamilton

Valtteri Bottas took pole position for the Portuguese Grand Prix on Saturday and denied Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton a record-extending 100th. The Finn qualified 0.007 of a second faster than Hamilton for a Mercedes front row sweep at the Algarve circuit. Red Bull's Max Verstappen qualified third.

Hasan leads Pakistan's rout of Zimbabwe

HARARE: Fast bowler Hasan Ali registered career best figures of 5-36 to lead Pakistan to a comprehensive innings and 116 run annihilation of Zimbabwe in the first Test in Harare on Saturday.

The 26-year-old finished with 9-89 in the match as Zimbabwe's batting crumbled for the second time in the match, all out for 134 with an hour remaining on the third day at Harare sports club.

The victory gives Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. The second Test is also in Harare from May 7.

Zimbabwe, who were bowled out for 176 in the first innings, were facing an innings defeat at tea with the total at 118-5.

Hasan had already picked up the first wicket of the innings when he had Kevin Kasuza leg before for 28 to end a promising opening partnership of 48.

After tea he stepped up a gear as he bowled Donald Tiripano for two and Tendai Chisoro, caught in the slips off his second ball for nought, to mark his 50th wicket in Test cricket. That opened up the tail and Hasan ripped through them too, hitting Blessing Muzarabani's leg stump as the Zimbabwe pace bowler tried to slog his team out of trouble.



Finally, he bowled Richard Ngarava off a low full toss and with the last man Prince Masvaure unable to bat due to injury, Pakistan players celebrated the victory. Regis Chakabva remained

not out on 14.

It was Hasan's fourth five-wicket haul in 12 Tests, improving on the 5-45 he took against New Zealand in Abu Dhabi in 2018.

Spinner Nauman Ali earlier

picked up the wickets of Milton Shumba and Brendan Taylor before tea to finish with 2-27.

Pakistan's skipper Babar Azam praised Hasan and centurion Fawad Alam for

SCOREBOARD	
Zimbabwe 1st innings ----- 176	
Pakistan 1st innings	
Imran Butt c Chakabva b Ngarava	-----91
Abid Ali c Taylor b Chisoro	-----60
Azhar Ali c Musakanda b Tiripano	-----36
Babar Azam c Kaia b Tiripano	-----0
Fawad Alam c Chakabva b Muzarabani	140
Mohammad Rizwan b Muzarabani	-----45
Faheem Ashraf c Chisoro b Tiripano	-----0
Hasan Ali c Chakabva b Muzarabani	-----30
Nauman Ali c Musakanda b Muzarabani	-----0
Sajid Khan c Chakabva b Ngarava	-----7
Shaheen Shah Afridi not out	-----4
Extras: (b1, lb3, nb8, w1)	-----13
Total: (overs 133, all out) ----- 426	
Fall of wickets: 1-115, 2-176, 3-182, 4-226, 5-333, 6-334, 7-395, 8-395, 9-412	
Bowling: Muzarabani 31-8-73-4, Ngarava 29-4-104-2, Chisora 34-7-89-1, Tiripano 23-6-89-3, Shumba 9-3-29-0, Kaia 7-0-38-0	
Zimbabwe 2nd innings	
K Kasuza lbw Hasan	-----28
T Musakanda run out	-----43
M Shumba c Rizwan b Nauman	-----4
B Taylor c Hasan b Nauman	-----29
R Kaia lbw Ashraf	-----0
R Chakabva not out	-----14
D Tiripano b Hasan	-----2
T Chisoro c Butt b Hasan	-----0
B Muzarabani b Hasan	-----2
R Ngarava b Hasan	-----5
Extras: (b2, lb5)	-----7
Total: (46.2 overs; all out) ----- 134	
Fall of wickets: 1-48, 2-68, 3-92, 4-95, 5-117, 6-124, 7-124, 8-128, 9-134	
Bowling: Afridi 11-1-35-0, Hasan 12-2-2-36-5, Ashraf 10-2-22-1, Nauman 9-1-27-2, Sajid 4-0-7-0	

duck. "It was an outstanding finish by Hasan, he has been improving with every match."

Zimbabwe's skipper Taylor, standing in for unfit Sean Williams, lamented poor batting.

"Getting bowled out in two sessions on day one let us down and to then field for 130 overs put us behind the eight-ball", said Taylor. "We need to work on our batting as a group."

In the morning Pakistan were bowled out for 426 with overnight centurion Alam the last man out for 140.

HASAN SHINES

Trailing by 250 runs in the first innings, Zimbabwe were off to a solid start before Hasan ran riot.

Openers Kasuza and Tarisai Musakanda reached lunch on 36 without loss and took their partnership to 48 before Hasan provided Pakistan with the breakthrough.

Hasan, who took 4-53 in the first innings, trapped Kasuza, who had already been dropped on 15, leg before for 28 while Nauman had Shumba caught behind by Mohammed Rizwan for four.

A well-set Musakanda was run out for 43 while needlessly attempting a third run. He hit five boundaries in a fighting 84-ball knock. — AFP

SRH look to turn tables under new captain Williamson

IPL STROKES
PRANAV MEHTA

It is the last game of the first round and both these teams would be looking to forget it as a bad dream. Prior to that, both the teams would fancy 2 points, before they go into the second round.

Sanju Samson led Rajasthan Royals stand at 4 points from 6 games. RR won their two games against KKR and the mighty Delhi Capitals. On the other hand, David Warner-led Sunrisers Hyderabad have just won a single game from 6 games. The win came against Punjab Kings. They did take the DC game to super over, but failed to convert it to a win.

The show is not all over for both teams and qualification still stands as a distant hope, but for that to be a realistic dream, this game carries a lot of weight.

SRH CHANGE CAPTAIN

SRH is a brilliant team, but the resources haven't been used well and after intense pressure the management has changed Warner as captain and put the responsibility on Kane Williamson.

So it will be some pressure off for the Australian opener who can now focus on his batting with the experienced Williamson taking the mantle.



DIFFICULT PHASE FOR RR

When you have 2 win from 6 games, it's almost impossible to keep the team environment positive. This is evident with a lot of players leaving and now RR have just four foreign players. Although, RR are waiting for some of their player loans to get approved, and get some fresh legs and energy.

Sanju Samson, hasn't shown a lot of maturity and his press communications is something that he really needs to work on. Cricket these days is not just a game of ball and bat, Communication plays a massive role.

Man management is another important factor, where Sanju Samson has been way below par. One wouldn't be wrong in saying that Shivam Dube's excessive use has let the team down. David

Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Riyan Parag and Chris Morris have exceptional striking capacity, but on most occasions, they have been held on for too long. There are rumours of Trevor Penny to be sacked pretty shortly and Amol Muzumdar to take over. This match will decide a lot of futures.

KEEN TUSSLE FOR PUNJAB AND DC

DC have not got a lot wrong this year with keeping place in the top part of the points table.

Rishabh Pant's decision-making has been the talk of the town for quite a while and he just keeps on giving more opportunities with consistent poor decisions.

The last game was just perfect for DC. Lalit Yadav made a good impact and was followed by some

brilliant striking from Prithvi Shaw.

Eventhough, this game is not going to be that easy.

Punjab Kings just won a crucial encounter against RCB and are coming full of confidence. It looks like, finally they have found the correct combination and they are soon going to be the team to beat.

The 'Gayle Storm' was launched early in the last game and we can expect the same in this match too.

Nicholas Pooran is expected to finally go to the bench and make way for someone else. If Dawid Malan can open with KL Rahul and Mayank Aggarwal, Jalaj Saxena might come in for Prabhsimran Singh. Lastly, the fans were very critical on Arshdeep's exclusion after his consistent good performances, so he might come in.

Rahul, Gayle and Brar lead Punjab to victory



NEW DELHI: Captain KL Rahul, West Indies superstar Chris Gayle and slow left-armer Harpreet Brar led Punjab Kings to a 34-run win over Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League on Friday.

Rahul hit an undefeated 91 from 57 balls in an innings which featured seven boundaries and five sixes.

Opening the batting, it was the third time that Rahul had ended his innings unbeaten in clashes with Bangalore.

Gayle, coming in at number three, made 46 from 24 balls with six boundaries and two sixes, sharing an 80-run partnership with Rahul.

Some impressive late hitting from Brar (25), batting at seven, helped boost Punjab's total to 179-5 off their 20 overs.

Kohli top-scored for Bangalore with 35 off 34 balls with three fours and a six before he became Brar's first victim of the game and of his IPL career.

"My first IPL wicket is Virat and that helps. Your body opens up, you get confident, and things fall into place", said Brar.

Harshal Patel contributed a late cameo of 31 off just 13 balls but the damage had been done by then as Punjab's spinners slammed the brakes on their opponents who finished on 145-8.

Wrist spinner Ravi Bishnoi finished with 2-17 off his four overs with the impressive Brar claiming 3-19.

Brar dismissed stars Kohli, Glenn Maxwell (0) and AB de Villiers (three) without conceding a run.

"We were preparing him (Harpreet), I can say that now after a game like this", said Rahul. "We needed a finger-spinner who could hit the hard lengths and get some spin. And we're happy it worked out."

Kohli admitted his team fell short in the chase.

"They got off to a decent start and we pulled things back decently. Probably we gave away 25 too many at the end, we should have been chasing 160", said the India skipper. — AFP
BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 179/5 (KL Rahul 91 n.o., Chris Gayle 46; Kyle Jamieson 2/32) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore 145/8 (Virat Kohli 35, Harshal Patel 31; Harpreet Brar 3/19) by 34 runs.



OMAN TO PLAY SOMALIA ON SEPT 1 IN FIFA ARAB CUP QUALIFIER

FIRST PHASE OF DUBAI CAMP TO END ON WEDNESDAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The organisers of the first Fifa Arab Cup Qatar 2021 announced the dates of the qualifiers. Oman will meet Somalia on September 1 in Doha ahead of the tournament group stage that will be held after two months.

Six fixtures will be played on September 1 as Bahrain will take on Kuwait in a top Gulf clash while Jordan will meet South Sudan. Lebanon will clash with Djibouti while Palestine will take on Comoros and Libya will face Sudan. The date for Mauritania and Yemen match is not yet confirmed.

The winners of the play-off will qualify for the finals of the showpiece event.

Meanwhile, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) announced the venues of the joint qualification of the 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Championship.



The fifth group (E) matches will be held at Al Sadd club's Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha.

Oman will play against Qatar on June 7 while they will take on Afghanistan on June 11 and will

face Bangladesh in the concluding match on June 15.

Oman are currently positioned

The second phase of the preparation plan will resume after Eid holidays as the next overseas camp is scheduled from May 16 to 30

second in Group E with 12 points while Asian champions Qatar are topping the group with 13 points from five games. Afghanistan are placed third with four points. India (3 points) and Bangladesh (1 point) are in the third and fourth positions respectively.

18-DAY TRAINING CAMP IN DUBAI

Oman national football team will conclude on Wednesday the first part of the overseas training camp which is under way in Dubai.

The 18-day external gathering did not feature any friendly matches

and involved evening period technical and tactical sessions. The main purpose of the camp is to keep the players fit especially with the decision to cancel 2020-21 top domestic league.

The 'Red Warriors' are performing the daily training classes under supervision of the experienced Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic.

The second phase of the preparation plan will resume after Eid holidays as the next overseas camp is scheduled from May 16 to 30. Two matches are arranged during the second part of the camp — against Thailand and Indonesia on May 25 and 29 respectively.

The Dubai external warm-up camp is part of team's preparation for the joint qualification of the 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Championship that will be held in Doha next June, Fifa Arab Cup Qatar 2021 in December and Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq.

OFA to organise futsal event at AWJ Sports Festival



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Oman Football Association (OFA) signed an agreement with the organising committee of the AWJ Sports Festival at the headquarters of OFA in Seeb Stadium recently. The contract will allow OFA to organise an internal futsal

tournament during the AWJ Sports Festival which will begin by earlier of June until end of July. The agreement was signed by Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, Chairman of OFA, and Salim al Habsi, head of the organising committee of the AWJ Sports Festival.

OFA will take part in the domestic sporting festival in

accordance to the guidelines of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth on participation of the associations and committee in this top sporting local event. According to the OFA announcement, the futsal tournament will be organised this summer under strict medical protocol to ensure the safety of all the participants from on going

Covid-19 pandemic.

On January 24, the organising committee of the AWJ Sports Festival had launched the festival in presence of officials from Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, representatives of the sports associations and committees and club's representatives.

The duration of the festival is 60



days and will be held during June and July and as part of the summer sporting activities.

Fifty sporting events will be organised in different individual and group sports including some regional and international profile championships. Many of the sports associations and committees had announced their partnership in

this summer sporting festival with the AWJ Sports Festival Company including: Oman Hockey Association (OHA), Oman Cycling Association (OCA), Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA), Oman Committee for University Sports (OCUS), Oman Basketball Association (OBA) and Oman Tennis Association (OTA).

ramadhan

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Wiea' Fakhari Jamil: The Beautiful Clay Pots of Bahla and Oman

TEXT BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN

You will not venture far without seeing those ubiquitous Omani clay pots that adorn every kitchen and garden of the Sultanate, small enough to contain salt, sugar, spices or large enough to fit a cactus or a desert rose in the garden, the clay pot is an ever present sociological, anthropological and archaeological link to the past.

A visit to Bahla, the clay pot capital of Oman could never be complete without seeing a traditional potter at work, as he has, and those before him have done, for 4500 years, the only difference being that in days of old a 'kick wheel' or 'hand-spinning', was used, rather than today's electric wheel. An ancient potter's wheel found in the Sumerian City of Sur, in Iraq, has been carbon-dated to 3129 BC, making it 5150 years old.

But back to today, where the age-old

craftsman's, or maybe they should be recognized as artisans, skills are evident, as they throw the clay on the spinning platform and draw the shape and form of the clay pot out, moulding, caressing and weaving the shape with a steady hand, magic fingers, and a keen eye, adding water only as needed to continue the shaping. Though the numbers of such craftsmen in Bahla are dwindling now, there was a time when everyone in the old city was engaged in the craft.

In the wilayat the brown clay is taken from the wadi beds of the district, while the more distinctive red pottery is made from clay sourced in the nearby mountains, from locations known only to a few. Once the artisan has produced his work, it, and many others will be 'fired', or baked in a kiln, or oven. Once only small, dome shaped kilns, they are mostly much larger today, by far.

The heat inside the kiln can reach 1800degF to 2400degF, in a process that bakes the water molecules out of the clay and hardens the clay molecules. This allows the pottery to retain its

porosity, allowing air and moisture to penetrate the baked clay, while retaining water. The water in an earthen pot soaks into the pores of the pot and evaporate from its outer surface. The heat for this evaporation is taken from the water inside the pot keeping it fresh and cool.

The clay pots are also widely used in food storage and cooking as the clay is alkaline, and interacts with the acidity, neutralising the pH balance, making the food healthier. They are, being heat resistant, perfect for long slow cooking. The porous, naturally insulating nature of clay pots causes heat and moisture to circulate freely, distributing the heat evenly and retaining heat for consistent temperature cooking.

A recently retired, Nasser al Yahai, observed that the pottery factory in the town has been "an amazing national initiative, established with the objective of perpetuating the craft, the art." It does appear however, that from an outside perspective, economics will eventually prove the demise of the artist, as in many other crafts, as plastics assume much of the market. Of course, the plasticware does not have the same artistic, aesthetic, or environmental qualities of plastic.

Plastic, however, lacks that craft, that art, and that romance and passion the potter has for the clay. The potter says...

"Carefully I have taken you from the wadi, a shapeless lump, trodden and neglected, yet...

I have cast you in just the right place upon my spinning potter's wheel, and...

With my tender, loving hands I have drawn out all your imperfections, I have woven, and caressed you, to a beautiful creation,

To a finished article to be admired for centuries. You are... wiea' fakhari jamil."



Q

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

We have warned you of a near punishment – the Day when a person will observe what his hands have produced, and the faithless will say, "O, I wish I were dust".

Al Naba'

F

FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER

HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

QUESTION

A traveller gets sick while on his way, the doctor advised him to stop his Ramadhan fasting as it may affect his health? What is he supposed to do?

ANSWER

Better to break. However, he should make up for the missed days.

H

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

If anyone forgets that he is fasting and eats or drinks he should complete his fast, for it is only Allah Who has fed him and given him drink.



Five-metre, 3D-printed twin of Michelangelo's David unveiled as stunning centrepiece of Italy's pavilion

A spectacular 3D replica of Michelangelo's world-famous David sculpture has been installed at the centre of the Italy Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai – a cultural highlight of the next World Expo and an exciting addition to the UAE's vibrant and thriving artistic scene.

The unveiling follows months of painstaking work by artists and innovators, which included 40 hours of digital scanning of the original 16th-century marble artwork in Florence; the creation of a three-dimensional digital model with a resolution of 146 thousandths of a millimetre; production by one of the world's largest 3D printers; and hours of finishing touches by hand.

It was revealed at a ceremony to mark the completion of the exterior of the Italy Pavilion, attended by Luigi Di Maio, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation as well as Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak al Nahayan, Cabinet Member, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, and Commissioner General of Expo 2020 Dubai; Reem al Hashimy, UAE Minister of State for International

Cooperation and Director General, Expo 2020 Dubai; Noura al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth; and Hala Badri, Director General of Dubai Culture and Arts Authority; as well as Dario Nardella, Mayor of Florence; and Paolo Glisenti, Commissioner General of Italy at Expo 2020 Dubai.

Luigi Di Maio said: "Italy and the UAE have long enjoyed a close relationship, based on the solid foundations of shared visions and interests, including innovation and culture. As the hosts of the most recent World Expo in Milan, in 2015, Italy recognises the significance of Expo 2020 as an important opportunity for cultural exchange, knowledge sharing and the formation of new and fruitful connections.

We look forward to welcoming the world to the Italy Pavilion later this year, to enjoy an unprecedented journey through our country's extraordinary past, present and future."

The David replica will be a highlight among the many rich and diverse cultural experiences that Expo 2020 and its 190-plus participating countries will showcase during the six-month celebration of human creativity,

innovation and ingenuity. Noura al Kaabi said: "The original David has captivated the world for centuries and is an iconic symbol of the Renaissance, and of Italian culture, heritage and artisanship more widely.

As the region's hub for arts and culture and with its own vibrant and dynamic artistic scene, the UAE is excited to welcome this most accurate and sophisticated replica of the masterpiece ever created and share it with millions of visitors to Expo 2020 Dubai."

Hala Badri said: "We take great pride in helping promote a cultural and creative environment by enhancing a thriving sustainable ecosystem that will support Dubai's economic growth and its stature as a major arts and culture hub.

Encouraging an ecosystem of creative talent helps integrate art and creativity within Dubai's landscape and makes it accessible for everyone everywhere, thereby enhancing Dubai's position on the global cultural map."

"The cutting-edge digital and visual technology used to create the David artwork, combined with the demanding work undertaken by the

team of highly skilled restorers, perfectly illustrates how history and technology can seamlessly merge to create something truly beautiful. Such innovations align with the Dubai Creative Economy Strategy that seeks to expand upon the emirate's global creative influence by attracting talent from all over the world to establish themselves in Dubai as well as through mechanisms, strategies, legislative frameworks, regulations and policies to ensure the ease of doing business in the creative field."

During the ceremony, attended by Dario Nardella, Mayor of Florence and Paolo Glisenti, Commissioner General of Italy at Expo 2020 Dubai, the Italy Pavilion's three overturned hulls that form the country's tricolour flag were also revealed.

Based on the theme 'Beauty connects people', the Italy Pavilion is located in Expo's Opportunity District. From 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, it will invite visitors from across the world to discover an engaging story that touches upon the nation's achievements in diverse fields including art, technology, engineering and sustainability.

Food Talk

WITH SHARIFA
AL BUSAIDY



Our family's Ramadhan Iftar Essentials

There is so much that is beautiful about the Holy month of Ramadhan. Strengthening our spirituality and connection to Allah, the spirit of charity and giving and connecting with friends and family are a few of them. With that said, one of the aspects of Ramadhan that is truly essential is the Ramadhan Iftar.

We patiently wait all day with much anticipation for the beautiful feast that will be laid in front of us when it is finally time to break our fast. Now it is worth noting that though various households will have different dishes that are served daily, there are certain essentials that are a part of every Omani's Iftar table every year.

Breaking the fast will always start with dates, Laban and water. We then go and pray, and once we return we begin eating our favourite Ramadhan dishes.

SHOURBA FIRST



The first of these would have to be Shourba, which is a thick stew that can be cooked with meat or chicken, and it is made with oats and/or barley and some lovely spices like cardamom, cumin, and curry. Shourba is arguably the most essential of Iftar meals in most Arabic households.

THE TRUSTED PAKORA

Next on the list would have to be the Pakora or the Bagia. This is a fried appetizer that can be made from beans, or gram flour and is served with either a Tamarind or a coconut chutney. There are families that like to get creative and put vegetables in their pakora, whereas in other households like mine, the bagias are made with beans and only onions inside. However you choose to make them; they are a daily Ramadhan essential in most Omani households.

THE FLEXIBLE SAMOSAS

It is very rare to come across a household in Ramadhan that does not have those beautiful triangular heavenly appetizers, Samosas. Whether they are stuffed with Kraft cheddar cheese as they are made in my house, or kiri cream cheese, or beef, or chicken, or eggs, it is absolutely essential that Samosas are available on the Iftar table.

SWEETENING THINGS WITH ASABE ZAINAB



'Asabe Zainab', which translates to Zainab's fingers, is an absolutely delicious salty sweet pastry that is very popular during Ramadhan. It is a pastry that is filled with kiri cream cheese, and rolled up like a spring roll. It is then fried and drizzled with some sinfully delightful sugar syrup (called Sheera in Arabic), which is often flavoured with cardamom and saffron. The finishing touch, in my home, is a sprinkle of crushed pistachios. Yum!

OLD FASHIONED LUQAIMAT

Finally, just before we leave the table and go off to pray Ishaa and Tarawih, the final treat we indulge in would have to be Luqaimat, which are sweet dumplings that are made of flour, and spiced with cardamom and saffron. They are then rolled into round ball-shaped dumplings and fried. Traditionally, most households would then drizzle a sugar syrup over them and serve. Nowadays, Luqaimat has evolved and comes with many different toppings. Luqaimat with condensed milk, Luqaimat with Date Syrup, Luqaimat with Nutella, and Luqaimat with caramel are just a few examples of the new variations of Luqaimat. At my house we like it the old fashioned traditional way with the sugar syrup.

And that concludes the list of delicious dishes and essentials that are on most Omani Iftar tables. Kindly note, that all of the treats above are then washed down with a nice cool glass of Vimto. And that's it until we get ready for Suhoor.



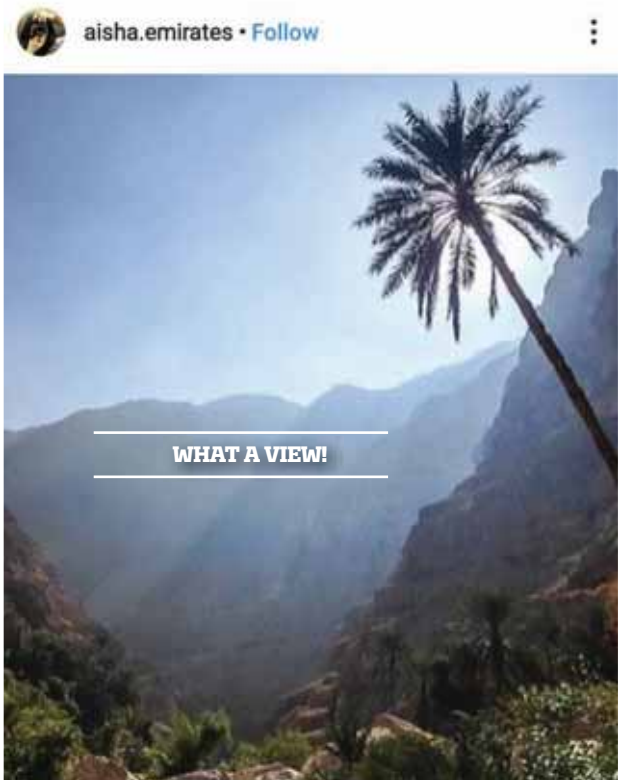
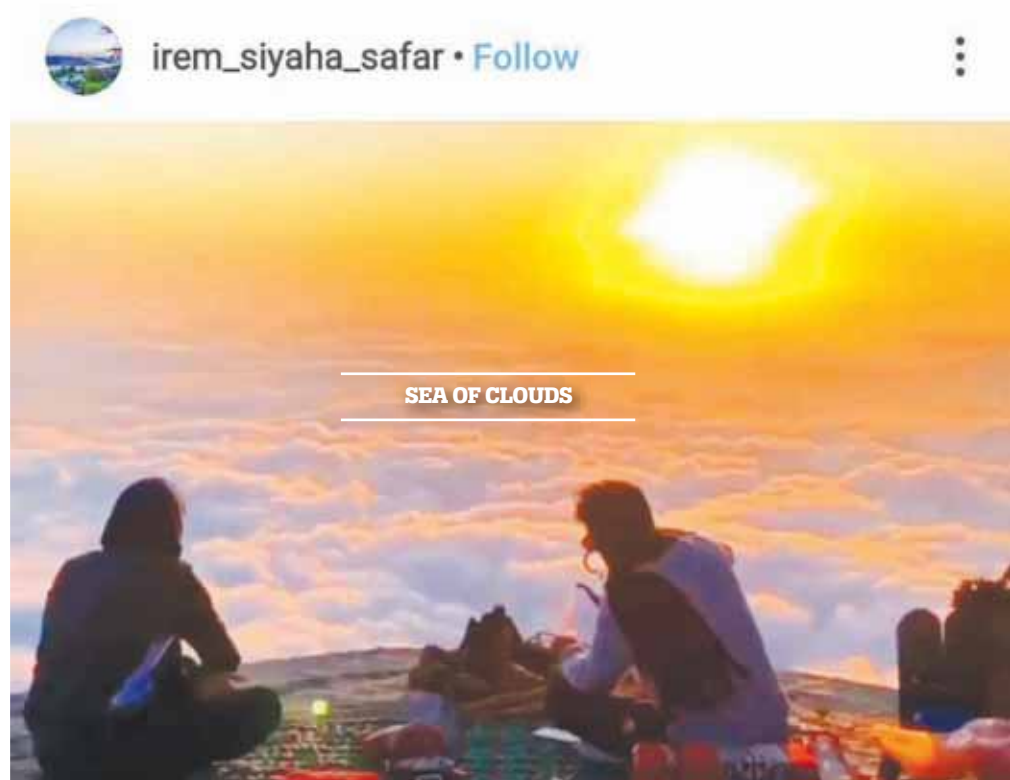
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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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COOK LIKE A CHEF RAMADHAN EDITION

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

Impress the loved ones with this home-made lamb shuwa



In Oman, shuwa is perhaps the king of comfort food. It's the kind you prepare for special occasions or even a simple family gathering. To not learn how to make your own version is a disservice to the flexibility of this amazing dish. Just because you don't have your underground oven at home doesn't mean that shuwa is no longer feasible to

make. The traditional sense of making shuwa is a meticulous one but over the years, recipes had been simplified so that it can also be done at home.

In today's Cook Like a Chef, we're breaking down some of the shuwa processes and simplifying them for you so that you can do it home just by using your electrical oven.

PREPARATION

Combine all the dry spices, add oil to the dry spice mix and vinegar. The texture of the spice mix should be wet rub consistency.

Trim off the excess fat from the lamb shank, apply the spice mix cover the meat completely with the spice, cover the lamb shank with the butter paper and then with the aluminium foil (keep in the chiller for about 3 hours more time the better)

Set oven on steam at 68°C place lamb shank in the oven and cook for about 5 hours.

Once the lamb is cooked, remove it from the oven and keep it aside for 15 minutes. Be careful when opening the aluminium foil, as the steam trapped inside is very hot. Gently lift the shank without touching the bone as it's so soft and tender. If you try to hold the bone the meat will fall apart, place it on top of rice garnish with some fried onion and nuts.

ABOUT THE CHEF

Sultan was born in Oman and was always passionate about cooking. After graduating from the National Hospitality Institute, he started his career with the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa in Muscat, in 2005. In 2009, Sultan was offered the opportunity to join the Culinary Art and Cuisine Academy at Shangri-La, in China, to continue his culinary studies and enhance his skills and techniques in the kitchen. After completing his training and certification, Sultan returned to his roots and joined Michelin Star Chef Alfredo Rosso in his Italian restaurant Capri Court. After honing his skills under Chef Rosso, Sultan joined the Radisson Collection at Hormuz Grand, in Muscat, as a sous-chef in the all-day-dining restaurant. Under his guidance, the restaurant went on to gain much acclaim. In 2018, he joined the prestigious Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, as a sous-chef supervising banquet operations, crowning 14 years of experience in culinary and kitchen management within a luxury hotel.



INGREDIENTS



- 300 gram to 350 gram lamb shank
- 10 ml white vinegar
- 5 gram chili flakes
- 5 gram cumin powder
- 5 gram coriander powder
- 2 gram black pepper powder
- 3 gram cardamom powder
- 30 ml olive oil

DISCOVERY

Egyptologists uncover rare tombs from before the Pharaohs



EGYPTIAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS working on the Nile Delta have uncovered dozens of rare pre-dynastic tombs dating to the period before Egypt's Pharaonic kingdoms first emerged more than 5,000 years ago.

They also found tombs nearby from the later Hyksos period (1650 to 1500 B.C.), when Western Asian migrants took over the country, putting an end to Egypt's Middle Kingdom.

The findings in the Dakahlia province north of Cairo could shed light on two important transitional periods in ancient Egypt, Egyptologists said.

The tombs include 68 from the Buto period that began around 3300 B.C. and five from the Naqada III period, which was just before the emergence of Egypt's first dynasty around 3100 B.C., according to a statement from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. They also include 37 tombs from the time of the Hyksos, who first began migrating across the Sinai into Egypt around 1800 B.C.

"This is an extremely interesting cemetery because it combines some of the earliest peri-

ods of Egyptian history with another important era, the time of the Hyksos," said Salima Ikram, an Egyptologist at the American University in Cairo.

"Egyptologists are working to understand how the Egyptians and the Hyksos lived together and to what degree the former took on Egyptian traditions."

The Buto tombs were oval-shaped pits with the corpses placed inside in a squatting position, mostly on their left sides with the head pointing west, the ministry statement said.

Some of the tombs from the Naqada period contained cylindrical and pear-shaped vessels.

The Hyksos tombs were mainly semi-rectangular with the corpses lying in an extended position and the head also facing west.

"The mission also found a group of ovens, stoves, remnants of mud brick foundations, pottery vessels and amulets, especially scarabs, some of which were made of semi-precious stones and jewellery such as earrings," the statement said.

— Reuters



Brought in by humans, beavers threaten Patagonia forest

Tierra del Fuego , Chile: The Karukinka natural park on Chile's side of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago guards a treasure trove of ancient beech trees saved from the chainsaws of loggers. Today, the leafy giants face a new threat: a flourishing community of beavers brought to Patagonia from Canada 75 years ago with the idea of promoting human settlement, centred on fur trade, on the sparsely populated tip of South America. While the pelt project never really took off, the beavers did. The first 10 pairs introduced to the area have become more than 100,000 individuals. And a single rodent has enough gnawing power to fell a tree that took a century to reach maturity in just a few days.

"Beavers, just like humans, are eco-

This included loss of biodiversity in a conservation zone, impeding wood production and farming due to flooded grazing areas, as well as carbon released into the atmosphere. If nothing is done, the study warned, Chile's losses to the beavers could amount to another \$260 million over 20 years. In this peaceful landscape at the end of the world, as desolate as it is imposing, beavers have no natural predators among the local fauna of sheep and penguins, but also few friends. Chile allows the critters to be hunted, and at one point the forestry department offered a reward for each animal shot. Trapping is also allowed, but neither method has made much dent in the population explosion, and have given rise to cruelty concerns.



system engineers... In order to inhabit an environment, they modify it to adapt to the conditions they need to survive," Cristobal Arredondo, a researcher at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), said. In so doing, the beavers have wreaked havoc on the 300,000-hectare (741,000-acre) park. The beavers chew down trees to build dams in rivers and lakes, but now in a part of the world where the forests regenerate much slower than in their native North America. The dams also cause a secondary harm — flooding the soil the beeches grow in and drowning them from the roots up.

CRUELTY CONCERNS

Studies have shown more than 90 per cent of the rivers and streams on the Chilean half of the Tierra del Fuego has been redirected by beaver activity, with a massive impact on ecosystems, said Arredondo. They also contribute to global warming, with downed trees and soil releasing carbon sequestered for centuries or more as the beeches rot. The socio-economic impact of the rodent invasion was estimated at about \$73 million in a recent University of Chile study.

BIODIVERSITY THREAT

The creatures, said Valeria Munoz, president of Chile's UDDA animal rights group, "are brutally killed with traps that are not selective and in which other animals are also caught." Hunting has not worked, she stated in an interview posted on the group's website, and "we have not seen any solution that would result in effective control of this species." Felipe Guerra leads a study funded by the Global Environment Facility to try and find a solution once and for all, seeking ways to improve "management, prevention and control" of Patagonia's beavers. The creatures, said Guerra, are emblematic of a global, under-appreciated problem, of invasive species releasing carbon "that had been captured by trees for hundreds of years." Eve Crowley, representative of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization in Chile, underlined that invasive species were "one of the main causes of biodiversity loss, degrading our ecosystems." This threatens not only the environment, but also the economy, she said, with the World Economic Forum stating that nearly half the world's GDP depends on nature. — AFP



The beavers have wreaked havoc on the 300,000-hectare (741,000-acre) park. They've chew down trees to build dams in rivers and lakes, but now in a part of the world where the forests regenerate much slower than in their native North America.

A marketplace for service providers

This week I spoke to Nelson, a foreign citizen who partnered up in Oman with an investor to design and release an interesting app called Sihalat. The app is meant to be an aggregator of service providers: A place where anyone could find plumbers, cleaners, electricians etc. to perform services in a professional and transparent way.

When Nelson contacted me I immediately thought that the idea was great. I too have lived in Oman and experienced the situation where I needed urgent help at home, but did not know who to call.

So I decided to schedule a call with Nelson, considering an

investment in the project.

The call went well. Nelson shared his professional presentation with me over Zoom and exposed the business case clearly.

Before writing this column, I have asked for his permission, because like every project that I look into, there are good points mixed with other not so good ones.

The first question I asked Nelson was where was the app developed. He mentioned that it was developed by a solid tech team in India. This was a bit of a red flag to me. Nelson explained to me that they have signed a 2 years contract with the developers and at the end of the project, the code will be hand over.



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

THE APP IS MEANT TO BE AN AGGREGATOR OF SERVICE PROVIDERS: A PLACE WHERE ANYONE COULD FIND PLUMBERS, CLEANERS, ELECTRICIANS ETC. TO PERFORM SERVICES IN A PROFESSIONAL AND TRANSPARENT WAY

In my mind, given the number of tech talents in Oman, he should start immediately hiring a CTO (Chief Technology Officer) in-house and transfer the code to a local Omani data centre. My reasoning is that, since Sihalat is currently fund-raising, investors might be more open to fund a company that owns the code, not that leases it.

The second concern that I had was with regards to payments. I might not be up to date with the latest fintech development in Oman, but in Nelson's shoes I would first of all made sure that all payments can be performed seamlessly.

Ideally, when the appointment is booked, a deposit could be held in escrow. Then — when the service provider completes

the job — the full payment could be released by the customer scanning a QR code displayed on the screen of the service provider's smart phone.

Nelson and his team have covered well the whole idea, with geolocation, reviews and a neat design. Customer experience seems to be well taken care of.

The service is certainly needed in Oman and in many other part of the world, especially in the GCC, where Sihalat could expand quickly once that all systems are integrated.

One last concern I expressed was with regards to the onboarding strategy. Like every marketplace — and I have talked about this topic times and again — in order to generate enough demand and supply, there is

the need to get out of the initial chicken and egg situation. Not enough suppliers means that clients would not find who they are looking for.

Not enough clients means that suppliers would not find this innovation useful to grow their business.

Ideally, in order to advance, the app should not only be a meeting point between two parties, but a set of tools designed for service providers to improve their productivity, regardless of the marketplace opportunity. For instance, the ability to instantly issuing invoices.

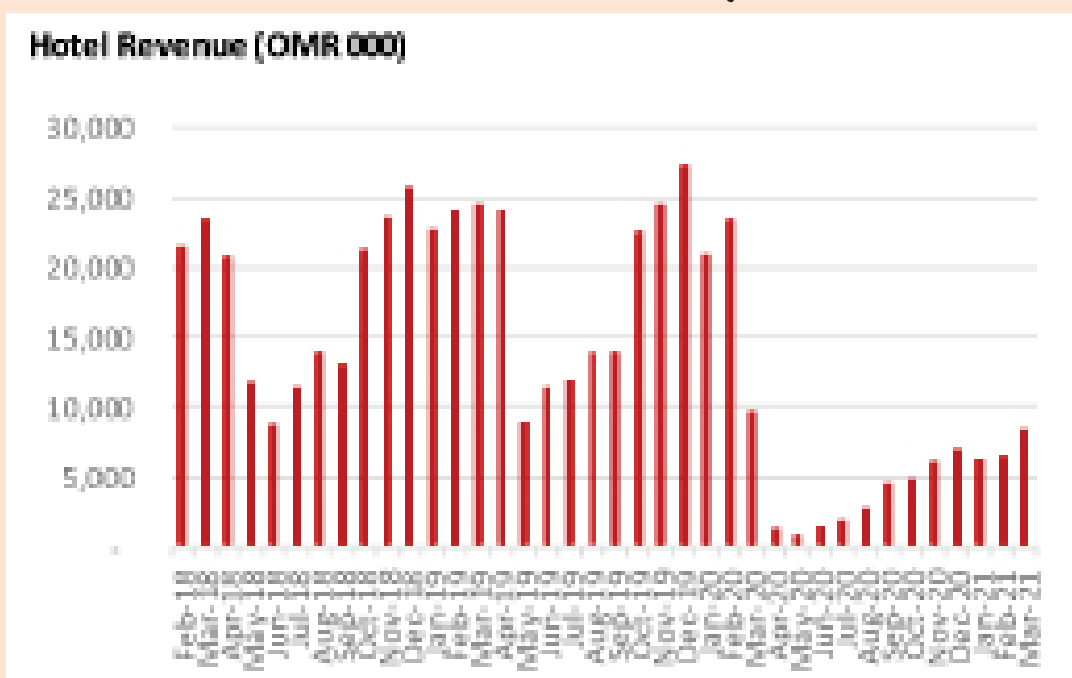
I wish success to Nelson and team.

[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]



MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

Industrial index buoys MSX



Source: NCSI

The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 1.12 per cent. Industrial Index was the major support to the market. Industrial & services sector ended in green up by 6.04 per cent and 1.31 per cent respectively while the financial sector closed up by 0.90 per cent. MSX Shariah Index close higher by almost a per cent.

ACWA Power has announced that it has recently received a short-term Request for Offer (RFO) from OPWP in relation to its two RO plants. OPWP has indicated its willingness to procure around 16MIGD of water capacity from May 2022 until December 2023.

They may extend this term by another three months at their discretion. The Company is reviewing the RFO document in detail and will provide further details including the timelines.

Oman National Engineering announced that it has been awarded Tender worth RO 1.27 million for operation and maintenance of Al Buraimi Hospital by Ministry of Health. The contract period is for three years.

Al Anwar Ceramics says their medium-term outlook is encouraging. The company expansion plan to add a further 3 million sqm of capacities is well on its way and they hope to commission the new plant by the end of this year.

Company believes that the additional capacities is coming in at right time and will aid our cost competitiveness by better amortisation of our fixed cost. The expansion will be to ensure capacity utilisation by adopting the necessary price points across different markets. Our medium-term outlook is encouraging. The demand in Saudi Arabia is strong and we continue to benefit from a good dealer network in that country. Business in Oman has also grown well cementing our position as the market leaders here. These two markets remain pivotal to our growth plans.

Karwa Motors, the Sultanate's first bus assembly plant, is set to commence operations at Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZ), with plans for the manufacture of around 200 buses this year, rising to between 500 and 700 buses annually in subsequent years.

According to Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO, initial output is primarily targeted at schools. In an interview published in *Duqm*

Economist, he said the project is a strategic partnership between Qatar Transport, the national transport company in Qatar with a 70 per cent stake, and a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, owning the balance 30 per cent.

OQ, formerly Oman Oil Company, which earlier announced issuance of seven-year bond, announced its pricing details on Bloomberg.

Company which initially gave guidance of 5.625 per cent got it bond priced at 5.125 per cent. The issue size of the bond was \$750 million. The bond will mature in May 2028.

The total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in the Sultanate increased 86 per cent to 129,389 in March 2021, compared to 69,520 guests for the same period of 2020.

The occupancy rate rose by 46.3 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Total revenues of these hotels fell to RO 8.468 million in March 2021, compared to RO 9.647 million during the same period of the previous year.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Oman and Sri Lanka explore food sector cooperation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Eng Saleh al Shanfari, CEO — Oman Food Investment Holding Company SAOC, the wholly government-owned food sector investment and development vehicle (part of Oman Investment Authority), held talks with Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, on cooperation in the food sector between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman.

They also explored new areas for mutual cooperation in the food sector and agreed to connect B2B links between Oman Food Investment Holding Co (OFIC) and food sector companies in Sri Lanka.

OFIC is a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) owned by



Oman Investment Authority, mandated to promote Oman's food security, through partnerships with government agencies, private operators and investors. OFIC aims to boost Oman's food security and economic well-being by investing in domestic and international food projects in partnership

with food companies, investors and other stakeholders. OFIC is a group of companies consisting of more than 10 prominent food sector companies in Oman.

Ambassador Ameer Ajwad was accompanied by First Secretary of Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman Dilini Abeysekara.

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Italy submits its Recovery Plan to EU Commission just before deadline



Prime Minister Mario Draghi sits after presenting a Recovery Plan to the parliament, at Montecitorio palace in Rome. — Reuters

ROME: Italy submitted its Recovery Plan to the European Commission late on Friday, a government spokesman said, just getting the document to Brussels within the April 30 target date set for all 27 European Union countries.

The plans are a prerequisite to receive cash from the EU's one-off, 750 billion euro (\$902 bn) fund set up to help members recover from the pandemic and give the continent a greener, more digital and more resilient economy.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi intervened, calling Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to smooth negotiations, after which he amended the document before presenting it to his cabinet.

— Reuters

US consumer spending rebounds as households receive relief money

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending rebounded in March amid a surge in income as households received additional Covid-19 pandemic relief money from the government, building a strong foundation for a further acceleration in consumption in the second quarter.

Other data on Friday showed labour costs jumped by the most in 14 years in the first quarter, driven by a pick-up in wage growth as companies competed for workers to boost production.

The White House's massive \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus and rapidly improving public health are unleashing pent-up demand.

"While we aren't completely out of the woods yet, today's report shows the beginning of an economic rebound", said Brendan Coughlin, head of consumer banking at Citizens in Boston. "Assuming no setback in the continued rollout of the vaccines, US consumers are well-positioned in the second half of the year to stimulate strong economic growth across the country."

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity,



A man wearing a respirator mask searches for an item in a Safeway grocery store in Tucson, Arizona. — Reuters

increased 4.2 per cent last month after falling 1.0 per cent in February, the Commerce Department said. The increase was broadly in line with economists' expectations.

The data was included in Thursday's gross domestic product report for the first

quarter, which showed growth shooting up at a 6.4 per cent annualised rate in the first three months of the year after rising at a 4.3 per cent pace in the fourth quarter. Consumer spending powered ahead at a 10.7 per cent rate last quarter.

Most Americans in the

middle- and low-income brackets received one-time \$1,400 stimulus cheques last month which were part of the pandemic rescue package approved in March. That boosted personal income 21.1 per cent after a drop of 7.0 per cent in February. — Reuters

Exxon tops earnings estimates as oil prices rebound

NEW YORK: Exxon Mobil Corp topped Wall Street quarterly earnings estimates with its first profit in five quarters, boosted by higher oil prices and strong chemicals margins.

Earnings from Exxon and rivals this year have been rising with crude oil prices, up by a third this year, as a global oil surplus from the pandemic drains and fuel demand recovers. The swing to a profit comes as European rivals also posted results that exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

Quarterly results show Exxon's deep cost cuts have allowed it to turn the corner on last year's historic annual loss and deliver strong cash flow need to reduce debt. Exxon is fighting a hedge fund's over board seats and its fossil fuel direction.

— Reuters

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