

Royal orders endorse Oman Investment Authority Board



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal orders endorsing the structure of the Board of Directors of Oman Investment Authority under the Chairmanship of Sultan bin Salim bin Said al Habsi and the following officials as members.

The members are Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of Capital Market Authority; Abdullah bin Salim bin Abdullah al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance; Dr Nasser bin Rashid bin Abdullah al Maawali, Dean of College of Banking and Financial Studies, and an International member.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a valuable source of pride and inspiration to Omani people. — **ONA**

OMAN SECOND IN ARAB WORLD IN LOGISTICS INDEX

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is playing a leading role in advancing logistics services. This was reaffirmed by Savills, the leading global real estate advisers, in its second in-depth Middle East webinar, held here.

The seminar pointed out that the Sultanate ranked second in the Arab world in the London-based Global Logistics Index (GLI), based on World Bank data.

Ihsan Kharouf, Head of Savills Oman, who attended the session, said that improvement in the GLI (index) proves that the region is gaining popularity and superiority when it comes to

trade and logistics services, as revealed by commercial statistics.

“This only proves that the region is growing in popularity and superiority when it comes to trade and logistics”, said Kharouf, adding that “Trade statistics reveals exports from the Middle East grew by 21 per cent in 2018, totalling \$1.13 trillion. The size and capacity of deep-sea container ships on the Asia-Middle East route has also doubled from 9,000 containers in 2010 to 18,000 containers in 2020, indicating a significant improvement in capacity”. — **ONA**



Man held for tricking women with job, marriage offers

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) have warned against online fraudsters who act as recruitment agents for established firms to cheat unsuspecting applicants.

The warning follows the arrest of a conman who duped 56 female job-seekers with offers of jobs in an



airline company.

According to a statement from the ROP on its Twitter handle, as many as 56

women have been duped by him promising jobs in an airline company using a fake social media account.

“The Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested a person who defrauded 56 girls, impersonating as the head of the employment department in an airline company, by creating fake account in a social media platform”, the statement said.

TURN TO P2

OMAN

Man held for tricking women with job, marriage offers

FROM PAGE 1
In addition to lucrative job offers, the culprit also extended false marriage offers to the victims through social media accounts, the ROP

statement said.
“The victims were blackmailed after making the victims share profiles and personal photos”, it said. The scammer, after getting personal details

including the resume and photos, started blackmailing the victims, the police said, adding, “legal proceedings against the arrested have been completed”.

The police called upon both citizens and residents to be cautious while dealing with strange persons and fake accounts on social media that come out with several offers.

Shura panel discusses housing of expat singles

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The Social Services and Development Committee of the Majlis Ash'shura on Monday discussed the issue of housing single expatriate workers in residential neighbourhoods.

The meeting pointed out that there is a committee formed by the Council of Ministers to study this issue and also the fact that the Supreme Council for Planning is working on the national urban development strategy, which will create a long-term plan to organise all forms of urban growth.

The committee stressed the need to strengthen inspections by the competent authorities in addition to obliging commercial and industrial institutions to provide housing for the expatriate workforce with facilities as

per the Minister of Manpower Resolution 186/2020.

A Muscat Municipality official recently said that the need for having labour camps outside the residential areas has become more important now than ever.

For creating a city for workers close to their work-sites, Muscat Municipality has been coordinating with the Ministry of Housing to allocate a plot to build a Labour City in an area of 250,000 sqm for which the private sector will be invited to bid for the construction and management.

The local order 23/92 of Muscat Municipality states it is not permitted to establish complexes or buildings for single expatriate workers in residential or commercial residential areas.



TEAMS SHOWCASE CYBERSECURITY SKILLS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Sas Accelerator for Cybersecurity's first cohort, organised by the Ministry of Technology and Communications through its Sas Center for Entrepreneurship, and in partnership with the UK-Oman Digital Hub, CyLon and Oman Technology Fund, concluded on Sunday with a virtual demo day.

The programme was the first cybersecurity early-stage accelerator in the MENA region and attracted 55 applicants with their cybersecurity product ideas. Since February, the qualified teams have participated in intensive workshops and mentoring sessions, both in Oman and virtually with the UK's CyLon, to help them refine their product and business model.

The demo day event showcased the progress of these eight teams who worked tirelessly on product ideas ranging from cybersecurity gamification to a real-time security testing developer tool.

The eight ideas of first cohort are Cyber Warrior, a game to raise cybersecurity awareness; Dark Sniper, a machine learning behaviour detection product; Cryptic Chains, a tool that uses blockchain technology to strengthen the security in Data Management Record Systems; U Safe, a software that simplifies the assessment of security breaches by using visualisation and attack graphs; Octopus, a risk management system using built-in customisable per-vendor templates; Hidden Power, a tool that uses blockchain to not only track shipping more efficiently but also add an additional layer of security; Data Boat, a locally produced SIEM solution and NytoOwl, a real-time security testing developer tool.

On this occasion, Hamood al Hamadan, Director of Sas Center for Entrepreneurship at MTC, said, “The Sas Accelerator for Cybersecurity programme is a vital step in building the cybersecurity startup ecosystem in Oman and the region. We are excited to showcase the first eight teams who have developed their products and entrepreneurial skills over the last five months and look forward to watching them grow over the next few years”.

MALLS TO WORK FROM 10 AM TO 10 PM

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has revised the opening hours of commercial centres and malls. In a statement issued on Monday, the municipality said the work hours for commercial centres and malls, except for hypermarkets, will be 10 am to 10 pm. Earlier the timing was from 12 noon to 9 pm. The municipality, however, prohibited the opening and use of dressing or fitting rooms in all malls and stores.

Malls and commercial complexes were reopened last week after three months, with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as part of the preventive measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19.

The SOPs include no entry for elderly aged 60 years and above and children below 12 years, which will be revised by the government in the coming days.

All visitors will undergo a temperature test before entering the mall to ensure the safety of all.

As per the guidelines, all the malls shall remove seats from common areas, while prayer halls will remain closed until further notice.

Parking occupancy should not exceed 50 per cent and the same should be manned by security personnel and operations staff. It is strictly forbidden to sit in the mall's facilities, while cafes and restaurants will serve their meals for eating out. Hand dryers in the restrooms to be switched off and sealed.



Sultanate takes part in China-Arab forum

AMMAN: Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, led the Sultanate's delegation at the ninth ministerial meeting of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum held via video conference from the Jordanian capital Amman, on Monday.

The meeting reviewed the achievements of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum since its eighth term and discussed ways of developing the forum. The participants exchanged points of views on the regional and international issues of common concern particularly those relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and approved the documents of the ninth term.

Speaking at the forum, Oman's minister responsible for foreign affairs said the Sultanate and China are bound together by historical relations and they share a desire to enhance their bilateral relations and achieve common interests. He commended the Omani-Chinese economic and investment cooperation in a manner that benefits both sides, praising the Omani-Chinese cooperation to maintain international peace

and stability.

Alawi added that the Arab-Chinese cooperation strategy in various fields enhances the Chinese solidarity with the Arab issues particularly the Palestinian cause on the basis of the two-state solution and the establishment of the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the international resolutions.

The forum's objectives lie in the implementation of its programme for the 2020-2022 period which, Alawi said, will result in fruitful outcomes for both sides. He noted that the roll-out of an initiative to set up the joint future society for China and the Arab states will have a good effect in terms of enhancing joint relations.

In his speech, Alawi praised the great efforts of the friendly People's Republic of China in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic and the assistance it provided to contain it in addition to China's cooperation with the Arab states to coordinate efforts and maximise health cooperation with the Arab states. — **ONA**



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OMAN

Charter flights transport thousands of expats



KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Over 50 chartered flights have carried more than 10,000 expats to countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Philippines since May.

Embassies and diplomatic missions helped their citizens in Oman get back to their home with support from NGOs, community associations and companies.

“We put in service nearly 25 charters for various organisations especially KMCC in helping nearly 5,000 men, elderly, pregnant women and infants to go back to their homes,” said Reena Rahman, Head of Operations at budget airline Salam Air.

“Our services have been a great relief to those who were stranded here in Oman to get home. Reassuring that we will always be with them during any crisis,” said Dr J Retnakumar, global coordinator of World Malayalee Federation, in Oman. Ammujam Raveendran (President), Ullas Cherian (Secretary), Sapna Anu B George, Anzar Jabbar, Sunil Kumar, George P Rajan, Madhumati Nandakishore, and Giji Puthaparambil helped to coordinate the chartered flights to Indian state of Kerala.

180 Indonesians fly home



MUSCAT: As many as 180 nationals flew home in the first Indonesian repatriation flight from Muscat to Jakarta on Sunday.

Most of the travellers were those who were stranded after visa expiry, medical cases, people who lost jobs and children.

“We are happy to be facilitating the return of 180 stranded citizens from Oman on a special Garuda Indonesia Airlines flight,” Musthofa Taufik Abdul Latif, Indonesian Ambassador to the Sultanate, told the Observer after bidding farewell to the passengers. The passengers thanked the Indonesiaan Embassy for arranging the flight.

Last 16 days see record COVID-19 spike among Omanis

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Omanis now accounting for more than 70 per cent new COVID-19 cases since the beginning of this month.

On Tuesday alone, out of 1,557 fresh infections, 1,057 are Omanis who now account for more than 75 per cent of the total caseload in a single day.

While the number of citizens infected with the virus was in single digit in the initial days of outbreak and most of the cases were occurring among expatriates, it is happening the other way round now.

The Sultanate recorded more than 47,735 cases till Monday with almost one-third of them happening in the last 16 days.

The figures from the Ministry of Health since April 16, show that in the first week Citizens accounted for only 36 per cent of new cases. The figure never rose above 45 per cent till the beginning of the current month.

This is putting a lot of pressure on the authorities as evident from the statement made by the health minister during the media briefing last week.

“The current situ-



ation is a far cry from our experience during the first months of the pandemic outbreak when we all managed to limit the number of infection cases. The past six weeks in Oman's pandemic scenario witnessed annoying, deplorable and frightening changes", Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health said.

An analysis of the situation shows that the number of expatriates appearing for the COVID-19 test has narrowed down since the lifting of the lockdown and closure of some of the testing centres.

“Some of the employers even do not reveal suspected cases among their workers, espe-

cially if they are asymptomatic. This is done to avoid disruption of the work", said an official familiar with the situation.

In addition, said the official, the number of expats appearing for the test has dropped since the closure of testing centres in places like Al Hamriya and Muttrah where migrant workers from Asian countries are predominantly staying.

Similarly, COVID-19 tests are not taking place at expatriate bachelor accommodations and camps which risk community spread due to their lax controls over social distancing and quarantine of suspected coronavirus infected people.

FIVE-YEAR HEALTH PLAN IN THE WORKS



MUSCAT: Despite COVID-19, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is preparing the tenth five-year health development plan (2021 – 2025). Dr Ahmed al Qasmi, MoH Director-General of Planning & Studies, pointed out that the concrete steps of preparing the plan began in the middle of last year with the forming a central committee headed by Dr Ali bin Taleb al Hinai, MoH Under-Secretary for Planning Affairs and a number of directors-general as members. Al Qasmi stressed that the plan is based on a set of pillars. The first of these pillars is Oman Vision 2040,

which is the first operational plan of health priorities in this Vision. Oman Vision 2040 has set five strategic goals for government and private health sectors. The plan is also based on the Health Vision 2040, the global and regional agreements, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN. Furthermore, the Director-General of Planning & Studies stated that the Central Committee has set 44 goals for the next five years. One of these is the Health for All from All initiative, which the MoH team has started developing the plan

with involvement of all authorities concerned. On behalf of the technical team of plan preparation, Dr Waleed al Nadabi clarified that the team has started a series of training meetings with the central authorities to complete the necessary steps. All directorates and departments in the ministry are working to achieve the 44 goals in five years. Each authority should play its respective role to achieve these results through a number of activities that contribute to reaching the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040. — **ONA**

UK visa application centre reopens

MUSCAT: The visa application centre for the UK in Oman has resumed operations on the first floor of Panorama Mall in Al Ghubra on Sunday. Customers who were unable to attend an earlier appointment will be able to log into their account to book a new appointment. Customers who have completed their application on GOV.UK, but didn't previously book an appointment at the Visa Application Centre, can do so from now. Customers visiting visa application centres should follow physical distancing, undergo temperature checks or be required to wear face masks, subject to local authority guidelines. Customers must have an appointment to visit the Visa Application Centre. Customers exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, including fever (higher than 37.3 degrees Celsius), cough, or difficulty breathing can reschedule their application submission for another day. Due to restrictions, the centre will not offer services such as Super Priority Visa, Priority Visa Service (visit), Priority Visa for Settlement or Migration Service and Walk-in Services. Customers have been urged to purchase courier return of their documents, so they do not have to visit the Visa Application Centre again. "If a decision has been made on your application, and you need to collect your passport from the Visa Application Centre, we will be contacting you to arrange this," the UK Embassy said.

12 start-up projects qualify for Upgrade-3

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The partners of Upgrade, a programme that transforms the best graduation projects in the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies into successful ICT start-ups, have announced that 12 projects were qualified to compete in the third stage. Forty-five projects from various higher education

institutions in the Sultanate were evaluated virtually by a jury during the second stage of the programme. The participants who are qualified for the next stage will be offered individual training from July 5 to August 20 on project management and entrepreneurship. Sas Center for Entrepreneurship of the Ministry of Technology and Communications, one of

the partners of Upgrade, along with The Research Council (TRC), Omantel, Riyadh, Oman Technology Fund (OTF), Al Raffd Fund and the National Youth Committee, will take charge of the individual training of the qualified participants. Upgrade during the previous years succeeded in transforming nine student graduation projects into start-ups,

providing opportunities for self-employment with continued financial support and commercial and marketing guidance. The programme was highly valued by those interested in graduation projects, especially those who seek to establish their own companies, as the programme opened the doors for them to achieve their goals and turn their projects into reality.

OMAN

MUSIC HERITAGE
NOW ON STAMPS

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Oman Post, an Asyad member company, launched four interactive stamps celebrating 'Maidan', one of the Sultanate's most celebrated art forms in poetry and traditional music. The stamps pay homage to time-honored country traditions, with each including a specific theme including 'Dance', 'The Poet and the Singer', 'Maidan Instruments', and 'Maidan Genre in General'. The new collection has been launched in a joint collaboration with the Oman Center for Traditional Music, of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Center for Culture and Science at the Diwan of



Royal Court, along with artists Mohammed al Maamari, Sami al Siyabi, Fahd al Maamari and Salim al salami. Rashad al Wahaibi,

Manager of Stamps & Philately at Oman Post, said, "The 'Maidan' is a war of words contest where Omani men gather in their villages, towns and cities to

cite poems and sing traditional music. This has been one of the backbones of Omani arts for millennia and Oman Post is doing its part in ensuring it is remembered, celebrated and engraved in our culture for generations to come." The new stamps can now be reserved by sending email to philatelic@omanpost.om. In 2019, Oman Post launched another set of interactive stamps celebrating the deep roots and variety of Oman's traditional music and performance arts, which included key instruments that defined Omani music heritage including the Al Azi, Al Rawah, Barghouth, and Kasir.

Sinyar runs 294
ferry services
to Musandam



MUSCAT: To help citizens and merchants to travel between governorates of the Sultanate, Asyad Group's Sinyar Oman operated 252 voyages to Musandam Governorate (out of a total of 294) since the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic to ship commodities and building materials, from March to June 2020. Sinyar, which operated voyages at a regular rate of 16 a week, also helped 11,055 citizens and residents travel to and from the governorate. In the meantime, Rashid al Shuhi Establishment operated 42 voyages to Musandam (passing by ports of Shinas, Khasab and Daba) between March 24 and June 30 and shipped 8,172 tonnes of goods. Its contribution comes as part of efforts exerted by the private sector to provide solutions for cargo operations and lend support to

companies and establishments in Musandam. Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabai, Acting CEO of Sinyar, said that the company's operations over the past three months included the transportation of 1,134 tonnes of commodities, trade supplies and building materials to Musandam. It also transported 2,670 vehicles since the outbreak of the pandemic and facilitated the movement of citizens and residents. He explained that the services were offered at a discount of 50 per cent to help alleviate the economic and social impact of the pandemic. Sinyar operates 16 voyages a week to the ports of Khasab, Daba and Lima to ensure the sustainability of business flow and assist citizens and residents to move without hurdles during all days of the week, Al Nadabi added. — ONA



NEW FRENCH PM TO UNVEIL RESHUFFLED CABINET

PARIS: France's new Prime Minister Jean Castex was expected to unveil a reshuffled government tasked with helping the economy brave its worst crisis since World War II and injecting fresh momentum into the presidency of Emmanuel Macron.

Castex, a senior bureaucrat and provincial mayor almost completely unknown to the French before his appointment Friday, is seeking to move quickly and decisively to convince sceptics he is the right choice for the job.

The 55-year old was appointed by Macron in place of Edouard Philippe as the president seeks a fresh start for the final two years of his mandate ahead of 2022 presidential elections.

France's economy has been battered

into a historic recession by the coronavirus crisis while Macron's Republic on the Move (LREM) party is reeling from its drubbing in local elections late last month.

Macron wrote on Twitter Sunday that a

"new path" was needed, listing the new government's priorities as "reviving the economy, continuing an overhaul of our social protection and the environment, re-

establishing a fair republican order and defending European sovereignty".

The failure of LREM — founded in the run-up to Macron's presidential bid in 2017 — in local elections again showed up its lack of a grassroots base.

Analysts have said that by appointing a low-profile figure in place of Philippe — whose popularity was outstripping Macron's — the president wants to tighten his grip on the reins of government ahead of 2022.

French parliament speaker Richard Ferrand said he expected the new government to be announced on Monday morning after an intense week-end of exchanges between Castex and Macron.

— AFP

AN AIDE TO MACRON, WHO ASKED NOT TO BE NAMED, SAID THERE WOULD BE "NEW TALENT" AND "PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME FROM DIFFERENT HORIZONS".

IN BRIEF

India, China agree to withdraw troops from borders

NEW DELHI: Chinese troops were seen removing structures from a Himalayan valley where they fought a deadly battle with Indian soldiers last month, Indian army sources said on Monday, after high-level talks between the nuclear-armed neighbours. Brutal hand-to-hand fighting in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh on June 15 left twenty Indian soldiers dead and sent tensions between the countries soaring. China has acknowledged it suffered casualties but has not given figures. The two sides agreed on Sunday to "completely disengage" from the border flashpoint and ensure "a phased and stepwise de-escalation in the India-China border areas," India's foreign ministry said on Monday. In a CCTV readout of the meeting, China's representative Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing would "effectively defend its territorial sovereignty, while maintaining peace in the border areas".

Trudeau spurns Trump summit with Mexican president

MEXICO CITY: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will not attend talks in Washington this week to mark the start of a new North American trade deal, but Mexico's president said the two will talk by telephone later. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is due to meet US President Donald Trump at the White House on Wednesday, on his first trip outside of Mexico since taking office. Lopez Obrador had publicly urged Trudeau to join him in Washington. The Canadian leader will be attending cabinet meetings and a sitting of parliament in Ottawa, his office said in a statement.

Malawi's new president inaugurated, calls for national sacrifice

LILONGWE: Malawi's new president Lazarus Chakwera called for national sacrifice to transform his country as he was inaugurated on Monday, completing a remarkable turnaround after losing last year's election. That vote was annulled by Malawi's top court over "widespread and systematic" irregularities and a re-run election was held on June 23. Chakwera, 65, comfortably beat Peter Mutharika with 58.5 per cent of the vote, marking the first time in African history that an election re-run led to the defeat of an incumbent. — Agencies

WORLD

Virus pushes US hospitals to the brink, India hits record new cases

WASHINGTON: Officials at the epicenter of the worsening coronavirus crisis in the United States warned their hospitals were in danger of being overwhelmed by the upsurge, as India registered a record number of new cases.

In signs of progress, Formula One returned with the season-opening Austrian Grand Prix held behind closed doors, while the Louvre museum in Paris will reopen on Monday after a 16-week shutdown.

The US has struggled to respond to the devastation wrought by the virus, with its national death toll rising to near 130,000 out of 2.8 million confirmed cases, and many states hit by increasing infections after lockdowns were eased.

Hospital beds are full in parts of Texas, while calls for fresh stay-at-home orders are growing. Some mayors say their cities reopened too early, as President Donald Trump tries to downplay the disease that has gripped much of the country.

India faces similar challenges as it clocked a record daily number of cases across a vast nation where medical facilities are uneven and many COVID-19 infections are likely to be



People in queue at a swab collection centre, during the total lockdown imposed by the Assam government in Guwahati, India. — AFP

undiagnosed.

The pandemic has killed at least 531,789 people worldwide since it surfaced in China late last year, according to an AFP tally on Sunday based on official sources.

More than 11 million people have been infected in 196 countries and territories.

After the United States, Brazil is the hardest-hit country with 64,867 deaths, followed by Britain, Italy and Mexico.

The US' annual July 4 holiday weekend was overshadowed by growing evidence that its fractured response has exacted a heavy price across the south and west, after previous hotspots such as New York emerged from the worst of the virus.

"Our hospitals here in Harris County, Houston, and 33 other cities... they're into surge capacities. So their operational beds are taken up", said Lina Hidalgo, Chief

Executive of Harris County, which includes Houston, Texas.

"Restaurants are still open. Indoor events can take place no matter the size", she told the ABC TV channel. "What we need right now is to do what works, which is a stay-home order". Steve Adler, the mayor of Austin, Texas, also expressed concern that the healthcare system could buckle as the disease spreads rapidly. — AFP

Britain to give \$2 billion to virus-hit culture sector

LONDON: Britain will spend nearly \$2 billion to help theatres, art galleries and other cultural institutions survive the coronavirus crisis, the government has said. The British arts and culture sector has been hit hard by the pandemic, with live performances still off the cards for now and venues facing an uncertain future under ongoing social distancing measures. A fund of £1.57 billion (\$1.96 billion) will help museums and historic palaces as well as companies involved in live music and independent cinema.

Australia moves to seal off virus-hit state as outbreak worsens

MELBOURNE: Australia will effectively seal off the state of Victoria from the rest of the country, authorities said on Monday, announcing unprecedented measures to tackle a worrying surge in coronavirus cases. For the first time since the epidemic began, the border between Australia's two most populous states — Victoria and New South Wales — will be closed overnight on Tuesday, officials from both states said. Home to more than 6.6 million people, Victoria announced a record 127 new cases on Monday as the virus spread through Melbourne.

Fiji reports first coronavirus case in 78 days

SUVA: Fiji's 78-day run without coronavirus is over, with Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama confirming on Monday a 66-year-old man tested positive after returning from India. It is the 19th case in the small South Pacific island nation, and more are now expected. "We've confirmed a border case of COVID-19 among a returning citizen while he was securely in the confines of government-funded quarantine", Bainimarama said. All arrivals to Fiji have to undergo 14 days of quarantine. — Agencies



Children watch digital learning videos from home in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. — Reuters

MAKE A VACCINE? I'M TRYING TO TEACH MY KIDS THE ALPHABET

KATE HOLTON & EMMA THOMASSON

It's tough to do any useful work when you're stuck at home, struggling to home-school bickering kids, let alone when you're trying to produce a COVID-19 vaccine.

British drugmaker AstraZeneca had spent years preparing for a pandemic, but when the moment finally came it was caught cold on a crucial front: stressed parents working from home struggled to focus.

So the company recruited up to 80 teachers to run online lessons and repurposed a car parking app to book virtual classes. It also lined up personal tutoring and helped to locate some childcare spaces for those battling to adapt to the abrupt change to their lives.

The move by Britain's biggest drugmaker, and similar efforts by companies the world over to host everything from magic classes to yoga for children, shows the lengths businesses are going to help staff work through the coronavirus crisis.

"It was quite apparent that it

was going to be really challenging for those with small kids and with two parents working," AstraZeneca's HR chief Fiona Cicconi said.

"People were starting to say they were feeling really anxious, I've got so much to do, how am I going to get it done?"

The new corporate attitude towards home-working could help lead to higher productivity and loyalty, according to experts, and ease moves towards more flexible working as companies rethink whether staff need to be in the office, and as schools take time to return to normal.

The march of the pandemic has upended normal life, forcing companies to shut offices, schools to close and grandparents and childcare providers to stay away.

That has left many exhausted parents juggling work demands while helping their children with school work to prevent them from falling behind or spending too much time online, not to mention having to feed, entertain and care for them. — Reuters

Traditions versus science



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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The eclipses in 2020 turned out to be yet another learning experience.

The missing of the sun or the moon even for a few seconds creates a variety of emotions even today so we can imagine what it would have been like thousands of years.

Take planting for example. Apparently seeds absorb more water during the full moon nights. And this is because more moisture is pulled to the surface of the soil during a new moon or full moon – apparently this results in the germination of the seed.

When it comes to solar and lunar eclipses the rules are a bit different. We are asked not to go out during the solar eclipse and not to eat during that period. During the lunar eclipse we are asked not to have food during that time. Yesterday although it was a full moon it was also a lunar eclipse and as always one group of my friends were urging me to enjoy the sight of the full Moon, Jupiter and Saturn (forming a triangle) and the other group was advising me

not to look at the moon because it was going through the eclipse even if it was not visible in Oman.

So did I lose an opportunity? Breaking from traditions is hard as well even though it is brushed aside as superstitions. It is interesting to explore why it is a challenging task to move ahead from traditions.

Could it be that we have a comfort in following traditions as it has been tested and practiced for generations or is it just easy to follow what has been established? Could it be that many have felt there is a truth to ancient knowledge?

My personal experience to go out and cover a solar eclipse must have been comical for my colleagues but standing on the hill surrounded with light was surreal.

I ended up seeing my first solar eclipses through the solar glasses on June 21, 2020. It was exciting but only gave a sigh of relief after reaching home. But it is one threshold crossed but does not mean I have closed the doors to traditions of solar eclipse.

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

Special Prizes

Umrah Prizes March 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	Ramdan Prizes May 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	Khareef Season Prizes July 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners	National Day Prizes November 2,000 OMR each for 6 winners
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Oman upbeat about investor interest in PPP projects

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: With the Executive Regulations underpinning the landmark Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and Privatisation laws now officially published, local and international investor interest is now riveted on an initial handful of projects the success of which will bode well for the long-term sustainability of the Omani government's groundbreaking efforts to rope in the private sector in the delivery of public works and services.

According to experts, Oman's experience with PPP goes back more than 25 years, especially in the utilities and energy sectors. Over this period, the Sultanate has successfully established more than 20 operational ventures in the form of Independent Power Projects (IPPs), Independent Water and Power Projects (IWPPs) and Independent Water Projects (IWP).

But a new chapter in PPP-based projects is now being kicked off in the Sultanate. Expressions of Interest (EoIs) were opened here recently for a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) planned at Misfah just outside Muscat Governorate — the first-ever PPP project announced for qualification for development under the auspices of the newly established Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PAPP).

The sizable number of preliminary offers was a heartening sign that the PPP model, notwithstand-



POSITIVE APPETITE:

The sizable number of preliminary offers is a heartening sign that the PPP model, notwithstanding the current economic downturn and the pandemic, is generating keen interest locally and regionally.

maiden portfolio of PPP offerings — 49 projects spread across nine sectors — has been positive from the outset.

"All of these projects will test the appetite of local, regional and international investors, depending upon the timing and complexity of the projects," said the CEO. "But ever since we announced the first PPP project last December — the STP Plant of Haya Water at Misfah — interest has been positive."

He further added: "We have other projects in the pipeline over which we are continuously engaged with potential investors. Outside of this portfolio, we have also been receiving a number of proposals from

local and regional investors eager to participate in a number of infrastructure sectors."

According to the official, economies around the world are increasingly adopting the PPP model to deliver infrastructure projects and services in partnership with the private sector rather than go it alone through standard EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) contracts.

“There is proven historical evidence that PPP models, when carefully crafted and managed, can deliver projects on time and within budget when compared to traditional government-driven projects.

TURN TO PAGE 11

All of these projects will test the appetite of local, regional and international investors, depending upon the timing and complexity of the projects.

**DR DHAFIR AWADH
AL SHANFARI,
CEO, PAPP**

ing the current economic downturn and the pandemic, is generating keen interest locally and regionally.

In comments to the **Observer**, PAPP Chief Executive Officer Dr Dhafir Awadh al Shanfari said investor interest in Oman's

Oman upbeat about investor interest in PPP projects

FROM PAGE 10

So whether it's a school, hospital or road project, if the viability and economics make sense, then it's prudent for the private sector to step in. Plus the risk is allocated between the government and private sector in an equitable way based on each other's capabilities and expertise. At the same time, the quality, technology and overall solutions available under PPP models are better than anything offered in the traditional way of implementing these projects."

At the same time, PPP is not simply an opportunity to ease the fiscal burden on the government at a time of budgetary constraints, Dr Al Shanfari pointed out. "It's only part of the objective; but the underlying goal is to tap into private sector finance, capabilities and expertise as well. Take a school project, for example. The private sector may be more creative in designing, financing and optimising the use of the land space, while delivering it at a lower budget and in less time. On top of all this, the private partner may come up with a plan for the use of the facilities, thereby generating more value from the project when compared to traditional school development, while the core teaching component remains with the Ministry of Education."

Importantly, knowledge transfer is a key spinoff of PPP, the CEO noted. "While Omani investors will have the expertise to undertake some of the projects themselves, they may have to join hands with international players in the delivery of others. In addition to gaining knowhow, the local community will benefit as well through the procurement of local talent, materials and services – which is part of the overall objective behind PPP."

DIAM MULLS SOLAR DESALINATION PROJECT IN OMAN



(Picture for illustration only)

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Water (Diam) is weighing the potential to harness solar energy for water desalination in line with a strategy to embrace renewables, as well as innovation and energy efficiency in its delivery of its services.

The state-owned utility, which is responsible for potable water distribution across the Sultanate, says it is exploring desalination via solar evaporation to help sustain supplies to remote communities located beyond the reach of the country's water distribution grids.

"Diam is working with a partner to develop a solar desalination plant, where the solar energy is harnessed directly to produce fresh water through evaporation.

A number of sites are being assessed to enable the development of this innovative technology," said the company in its 2019 Annual Report issued recently.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Mahrouqi, Chairman – Diam, stated: "Diam has instigated a number of projects to increase the efficient utilisation of energy in the organisation which include optimising the overall production and pumping energy use, utilising solar power for some pumping stations and investigation to harnessing solar desalination."

Furthermore, in areas that are not cov-

ered by electricity networks, Diam is pressing ahead with efforts to utilise solar energy for power generation as a substitute to expensive diesel-based generation for well-water pumping.

"Locations to further expand this project have been identified following the successful pilot project at Alsjjani. These projects are expected to complete during 2020," said Diam in its report.

Building on its energy conservation efforts, the Authority recently entered into an energy optimisation performance-based contract with a specialised company to optimise the production and supply of water to our customers in Muscat.

"In the first phase of the project, the company carried out a detailed analysis of the production and supply network and estimated the reduction in energy bills that could be achieved by monitoring and controlling the network in an automated and optimal process," said Diam.

"The analysis showed that minimising pumping and reducing water production during the peak summer electricity tariff periods together with abstracting water from the most cost effective plant will generate significant savings for Diam (and may negate the need to build additional peak power capacity in Oman). The target level of savings has now been guaranteed by a specialised company and we are now moving to the implementation phase," the Authority added.

THRUST ON RENEWABLES:

The utility is working with a partner to produce fresh water through solar evaporation.

BUSINESS

OAB LISTS SHARES ON MSM

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) saw its recent transformation into a public joint-stock company by listing its shares on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) on July 6, 2020. This is the final step after the completion of its merger with Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB), which began nearly two years ago.

The ceremony saw the attendance of Khalid bin Mohammad al Zubair, Chairman of Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST), Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al Balushi, Board Member of OAB, and Rashad bin Ali al Musafir, CEO of OAB. Also in attendance was Ahmed bin Saleh al Marhoon, Director General of Muscat Securities Market (MSM).

The total number of shares listed was 1,669,410,000, at a listing price equivalent to 213 baisas per share, with a total value equivalent to RO 355,584,330.

Rashad al Musafir stated, "We are proud to have the OAB shares listed on the MSM, following the success of our merger with AIB. The merger will see the creation of a major financial entity, comprising of both traditional and Islamic banking



arms, allowing it to compete at local and regional levels. OAB's decision to move forward with this important strategic step stems from our vision for the future of the national economy. This is built on stability and safety, thanks to the efforts of both the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may his soul rest in peace, and the present leader of the Omani Renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The merger is also in line with efforts by the pri-

vate sector to support the acceleration of the local economy."

The shareholders of OAB currently include Arab Bank (49 per cent), Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST) (31.63 per cent), with the remaining 19.37 per cent owned by AIB shareholders and others. After OAB's shares were listed on the MSM, everyone will be able to continue the trade process as usual.

Omran gears up for 'Within Oman' campaign

MUSCAT: Omran Group, the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, is gearing up to roll out the second edition of 'Within Oman', the nation-wide promotional campaign designed to boost domestic tourism by providing special packages and experiences at the Group's diverse hospitality assets across the country.

As the tourism sector now looks into moving towards recovery post-COVID-19, the campaign aims to stimulate staycation by offering attractive experiences that drive occupancy rates and encourage meaningful expenditure for local travellers. Additionally, Omran has diligently worked on applying all precautionary measures across its property portfolio to ensure operational readiness to welcome guests as soon as



official restrictions are lifted. Building upon the success of last year, the 2020 edition of 'Within Oman' will encourage Omanis and residents alike to benefit from a wide array of tourism offers, enjoy the heavily discounted room rates and experiences in OMRAN-owned hotels.

As part of the on-going preparations for the soon-to-be-launched campaign,

Omran has considered offering a wide variety of products to cater for the needs and tastes of families and friends to encourage overnight stays at drive-to destinations. The participating hotels range from 5* to 3* with an exciting array of experiences that celebrate Oman's culture and hospitality. As part of the plan, an integrated marketing commu-

nications campaign will be launched to showcase the diversity of the landscape as well as promoting the cultural essence of destinations and tourist sites across the country such as virgin beaches, popular wadis, traditional souqs, palm trees oases, historical forts, sand dunes and the eye-catching abandoned villages.

Most essentially, Omran Group has exerted all efforts to ensure that precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are adhered to within hotels to ensure the maximum safety of visitors and that they enjoy an unforgettable experience while staying.

The official announcement of the campaign will be made soon through Omran digital platforms detailing the ways to get on-board.

Bankruptcy Law is effective from today

Bankruptcy is a proceeding under law that grants partial or complete relief from the payment of your debts. Is it good or bad?

Bankruptcy law, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 53/2019, will be effective from July 7, 2020, in Oman. This is an important enactment during this time of financial crisis due to the pandemic and low oil price. Economic slowdown or total breakdowns are happening all over the world. Business failures are inevitable, and the law will promote more robust legal framework for the entrepreneurs in distress. By legal and legislative support, the interests of all parties will be safeguarded in an amicable manner.

A Bankruptcy Law is in action in many other GCC countries. The United Arab Emirates enacted the Bankruptcy law in September 2016, which came into effect subsequently. Later in 2018, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia enacted their bankruptcy laws respectively. The new law gives clear and definite measures to help businesses in distress, especially preventive and restructuring possibilities to continue their business ventures. This will be of great assurance to the investors, especially foreign investors.

Instead of going into a complete



JOSE CHACKO

wipe-out, this progressive enactment will give business owners an opportunity for restructuring with the debtors, settlement of creditors in a civil manner and overall a simplified liquidation process, if required.

A key feature of the Bankruptcy Law is 'Restructuring'. With restructuring, the parties have to work together for a pre-preventive measures to settle the dues by restructure their business and help to continue operations by encouraging investments and entrepreneurship. The better option will always be business continuity instead of business termination.

Bankruptcy proceedings no longer necessarily end up in liquidation of the businesses, as the situation before. The major objective is now to restructure the debts of an insolvent debtor with a chance to continue the business as a going concern after the restructure. Here also a trustee will be appointed by the competent court to oversee the affairs of the debtor as in the case of liquidation. But the procedures would certainly differ from that of liquidation. Normally, in bank-

ruptcy proceedings, it will end up either in liquidation or restructuring. The appointed trustee will prepare the state of affairs of the debtor and see the possibilities of restructure after reviewing the resources of the debtor. If the restructure possibilities are not there, court will declare the debtor as bankrupt.

When we see the pros and cons of bankruptcy proceedings, major disadvantages are: (i) According to the structure of your business unit, wherein liabilities are limited or unlimited, some of your personal properties will be taken away to pay your creditors; (ii) Probably your bankruptcy status will be noted by banks and financial institutions while evaluating your credit worthiness for further facilities; (iii) Once bankruptcy is noted, it will be difficult to get new credit facilities and the status may continue for subsequent years; and (iv) Your insurance costs may go up.

Advantages are: Your business will continue as a going concern by avoiding liquidation; Bankruptcy filing will protect you from your creditors taking over your assets; This will stop many of the creditor's rights such as evictions, utility shutoffs etc; Finally, this will also be a lesson in survival without further borrowing.

[Jose Chacko is Partner, Forensic Technology Services, Crowe Oman]

German industrial orders rebound in May

FRANKFURT: New orders for German manufacturing firms rebounded in May as coronavirus lockdowns eased, official data showed on Monday, but the smaller than expected increase highlights the long road ahead for pandemic-hit economies.

The closely-watched indicator of future industrial activity climbed 10.4 per cent month-on-month, federal statistics agency Destatis said, after a historic 26.2 per cent slump in April.

Economists surveyed by Factset had predicted a 17 per cent jump in May orders.

The economy ministry said the latest data suggested "that the industrial recession has bottomed out" in Germany.

But with order intake still almost 30 per cent lower than in May 2019, "the catch-up process is far from over", it added.

Domestic orders and those



A worker assembles an engine at the Daimler Powertrain plant in Bad Cannstatt, Germany. — Reuters

from inside the eurozone rose sharply in May, but demand from non-euro nations only climbed two per cent compared with April as countries emerge from lockdown at different speeds.

ING bank analyst Carsten Brzeski said industrial orders had staged a "comeback" in May. "But the return to pre-crisis levels will not be easy." — AFP

Majan University College partners with Fortinet

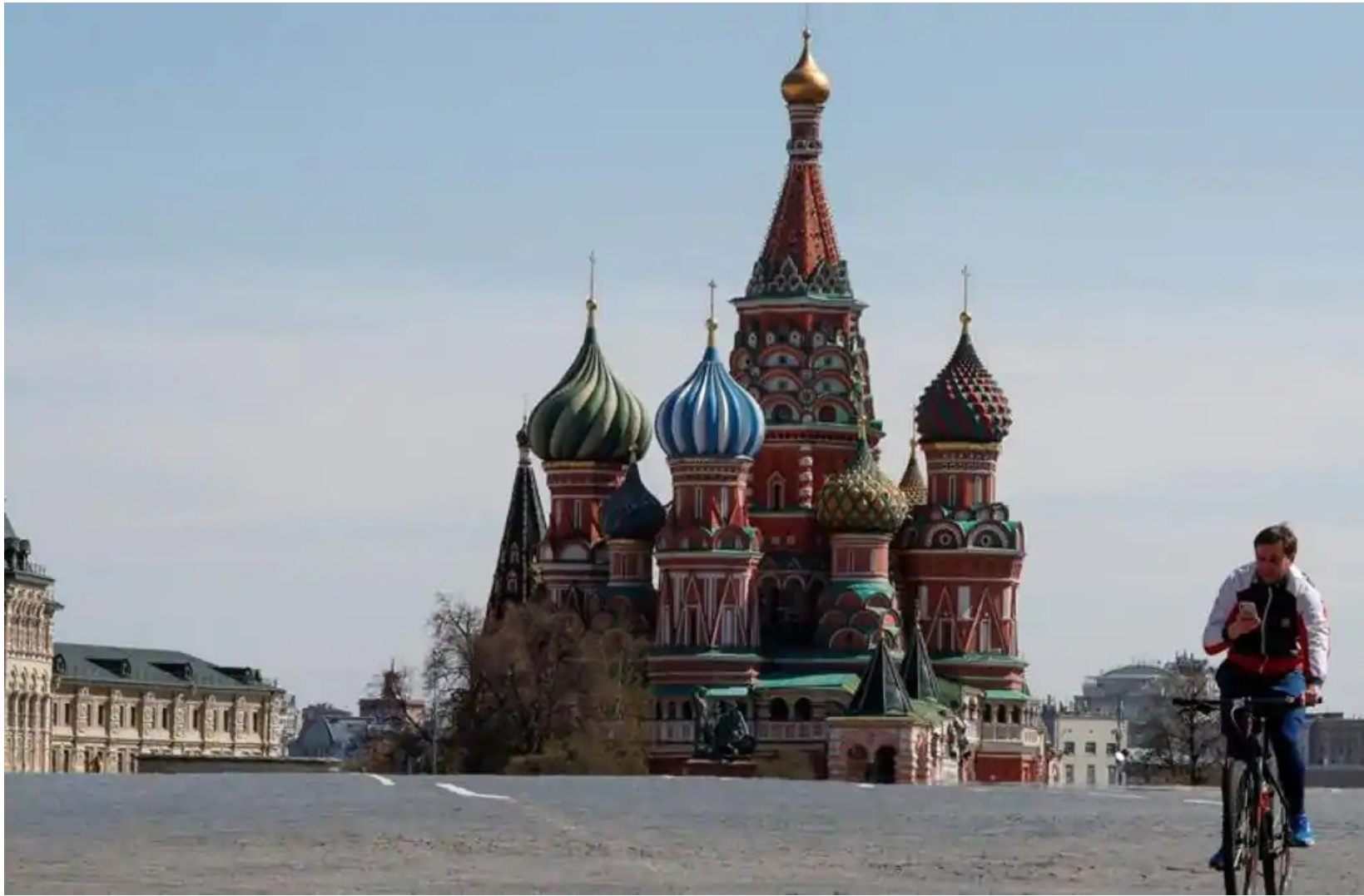
MUSCAT: Majan University College (MUC) signed an agreement with Fortinet, the major IT security solution provider. Through this agreement, MUC can embed the latest industry-recognised cybersecurity technology solu-

tions into the curriculum. The initiative will enable MUC students to enjoy hands-on practical applications with state of the art cybersecurity appliances. Additionally, students can benefit from free exam vouchers that they can redeem to achieve industry-recognised network security certifications and enhance their technical skills.

MUC's Dean, Dr Maha Kobeil, sees this as a significant step forward in MUC's efforts to provide young people with cutting edge technological skills in the cybersecurity domain. In her view, the partnership will greatly assist MUC students in finding employment in the cybersecurity industry, which currently lacks sufficient skilled Omani staff.



BUSINESS



A man rides a bicycle along empty Red Square near St. Basil's Cathedral in central Moscow, Russia. — Reuters

RUSSIAN ECONOMY WILL SHRINK 6 PER CENT IN 2020: WB

MOSCOW: The World Bank expects Russia's economy to shrink 6 per cent this year, the most since 2009, under pressure from the coronavirus pandemic and falling oil prices, before returning to growth in 2021-2022.

Russia's economy has been pummelled by a health crisis that has slowed business activity and demand for oil, its main export, across the globe.

Russia's unemployment has soared after lockdowns were imposed across the country earlier this year. Gross domestic product is now projected to shrink at its fastest pace in 11 years, the World Bank said on Monday, as it predicted the global economy would contract by 5.2 per cent this year.

In 2021, Russia's GDP is expected to expand 2.7 per cent and 3.1 per cent in 2022, the World Bank said.

Gross domestic product is now projected to shrink at its fastest pace in 11 years, the World Bank said, as it predicted the global economy would contract by 5.2pc this year.

"Even with positive projected GDP growth ahead, GDP levels in 2022 would have barely caught up to pre-pandemic levels," the World Bank said.

In the absence of a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic that could force Russia to reimpose restrictions on business, a moderate recovery could get under way in the second half of 2020, led by household consumption, according to the

World Bank.

Although the Russian economy has suffered from the crisis, support measures announced by the government, if fully implemented, could help Russia contain the increase in poverty caused by the crisis, the World Bank said.

"In the absence of any support from the government, our estimate shows that we would have seen a net increase in the poverty level in Russia," Renaud Seligmann, the World Bank's country director in Russia, said.

Seligmann said poverty in 2020 could have jumped to nearly 15 per cent of the population from a baseline projection of around 12 per cent, the level seen last year, had the government not rolled out tax subsidies to support small and medium-size enterprises, benefits for families and other anti-crisis measures.

— Reuters

Oil prices up on tighter supply, expectations for positive data



A gas station worker wearing a protective face mask sits next to a petrol station in Qatif, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Monday, supported by tighter supplies and a string of data expected to show economic recovery across the globe and despite a spike in coronavirus cases in the United States and other countries.

Brent crude was up 73 cents, or 1.7 per cent, to \$43.53 per barrel by 08:08 GMT US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 28 cents, or 0.7 per cent, at \$40.93.

"The market appears to be shrugging off the surge in COVID-19 cases in the United States," ING said, adding that data for several cities in affected states did not show a significant reduction in road traffic week on week.

Market sentiment was also positive as investors expected a string of improving economic data.

In China, the economy is recovering while its capital markets are attracting money, setting the scene for a healthy bull market, the official China Securities Journal said in an editorial on Monday.

Traders were also keeping an eye on US non-manufacturing activity, German industrial orders for May, and retail sales for the euro zone, all due on Monday and all expected to be positive.

The implied volatility for Brent crude has dropped to its lowest level since prices started collapsing in March as markets remain focused on tightening supplies as production by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) fell to its lowest in decades.

Opec and other producers including Russia, collectively known as Opec+, have agreed to lower output by a record 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) for a third month in July. — Reuters

SEEB CHIEF APPRECIATES OFA DECISIONS

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Chairman of Seeb Club, appreciated the efforts and decisions taken by Oman Football Association (OFA) to cope with the tough condition of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In his statement, the Seeb chief on the outset, thanked OFA to stop the season in full adherence to the instructions of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19 in tune with the



global scenario.

Sayyid Shihab pointed out that it is wisdom that all of us including the youth and sports organisations comply with all the government

directions and raise the awareness to the community and people and keep them away from any risks.

The veteran sports administrator called on the sports fraternity in the Sultanate to come together to guide the youth in taking the right steps during the pandemic situation. He thanked all the top officials in the local clubs for complying with the decisions of the OFA in accordance with the Supreme Committee directions taken for the benefit of the nation.

The Muscat home team's

chief appreciated the close follow-up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the working of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19 works.

In his concluding remarks, Sayyid Shihab congratulated the youth for various accomplishments during the several past years.

He affirmed the youth's role in the future of the nation. He added that Seeb club is in full compliance to the OFA's decisions in accordance with the government instructions to deal with the pandemic.

Oman to take part in Asian senior online chess tourney

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Oman Chess Committee (OCC) will take part in the first edition of the Asian Seniors Online Chess Championships which is scheduled to be held during July 13 to 21. The eight days virtual tournament will target the players who are above 50 years and over 65 years. Salim Shimas and Abdul Karim al Balushi will represent the Sultanate team in the Asian event which will witness participation of players from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Iran and the Sultanate. Oman national team players took part in a similar tournament for the same category of players last year in Kazakhstan.

The technical system of the e-matches at the virtual championship will be through approved application by the Asian Chess Federation. The e-tournament will be hosted at www.chess.com website and all the chess players will be placed based on the zonal tournaments and the latest



rankings. The 'Swiss' system is the approved way for the matches of e-tournament during the pre-qualification stage while nine rounds will be played in the finals in a 10 minutes + two seconds system.

In April and May, Oman players had participated in e-camps with Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan players. The virtual camp featured the participation of 12 players in junior and general categories.

The OCC had decided to take part in these e-camps to raise the technical level performance of the national team players.

Several top Oman players had participated at the virtual camps. The players from the general category are: Salim al Omari, Amin al Ansi, Mohammed al Omari, Salim Shamas and Mohammed al Omari. The women's team includes Al Anwood al Ghafri, Anaa al Eisaei and Kamila al Ghafri

and the junior list included Hamoud al Busaidi, Abdul Rahman al Zadjali, Anas al Darwoushi, and Suhaib al Rubei.

The e-tournaments for chess were opted as several tournaments were cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Oman national chess team (U-19) took part at the Virtual Asian Youth Chess Championship with a squad of six men and women players each.

SPORTS



STOKES, HOLDER FACE OFF
AS CRICKET RETURNS

LONDON: When the players of England and West Indies walk out onto the lush Ageas Bowl pitch on Wednesday it will be a landmark moment for international cricket after a 117-day hiatus.

It will also be a milestone in the career of England's talisman Ben Stokes as he captains the side for the first time.

The circumstances will be surreal with the COVID-19 pandemic meaning no fans will be present in the bio-secure environment — the only sounds being the thump of leather on willow, the chit-chat between the players and some piped-in crowd effects.

Once the strangeness of the 'new-normal' sinks in, however, an intriguing series looks on the cards between the sides ranked fourth and eighth on the ICC's Test list.

With England captain Joe Root missing for the birth of his second child, Stokes will get to pit himself against West Indies counterpart Jason Holder.

Holder, embarking on his 33rd Test as captain, is first on the ICC's all-rounder rank-



Jason Holder

ings while Stokes is second.

Both have similar problems to solve, namely fragile batting lineups that could be at the mercy of top-class bowling attacks.

West Indies won the last series between the sides in 2018-19 on home soil, but have not won a series in England since 1988.

They will be buoyed by virtually the same pace attack that England found such a problem in the Caribbean with Kemar Roach, Shannon Gabriel, Alzarri Joseph and Holder complimented by



Ben Stokes

Bajan quickie Chemar Holder.

"It's an exciting time for us. We've got a group of fast bowlers we think can challenge any team in the world," West Indies assistant-coach Roddy Estwick said.

"The fast bowling is key to us and we're beginning to get blessed again."

The batting is more problematic and the form of Shai Hope, who scored two centuries when West Indies claimed a famous victory at Headingley two years ago, will be vital.

Holder has barely made a

run in the practice games while a likely top five of Kraigg Brathwaite, John Campbell, Shamarh Brooks, Hope and Roston Chase managed just 29 runs between them in West Indies' second intra-squad warm-up match.

With Root missing, England's shaky top-order will be under scrutiny. Rory Burns and Dom Sibley look set to open with Joe Denly or Zak Crawley likely to bat at four. Whatever the pairings, West Indies bowlers will fancy their chances.

Stokes will have numerous pace bowling options with James Anderson and Jofra Archer, both of whom struggled with injuries in England's 3-1 win in South Africa last winter, refreshed.

One of the first tough decisions he will have to make, along with head coach Chris Silverwood, is which of his seamers will miss out. Stuart Broad is close to 500 Test wickets, the rapid Mark Wood has taken 18 wickets in his last three Test outings and Chris Woakes revels in English conditions.

— Reuters

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Athletic Bilbao 0
Real Madrid 1
(Ramos 73-pen)

Espanyol 0
Leganes 1
(Silva 53)

Osasuna 0
Getafe 0

Villarreal 1
(Gerard 14)
Barcelona 4
(Torres 3-og, Suarez 20, Griezmann 45, Fati 86)



GRIEZMANN

ANSWERS CRITICS IN STYLE

MADRID: Antoine Griezmann answered his critics in style on Sunday by scoring with a sensational chip as Barcelona thrashed Villarreal 4-1 to keep their faint La Liga title hopes alive.

After the humiliation of being brought on in the 90th minute against his former club Atletico Madrid, Griezmann was back in the starting line-up at La Ceramica and

repaid the faith with a stunning goal, teed up by Lionel Messi.

"It was the kind of goal only great players can score," said Barcelona coach Quique Setien. "He played a spectacular match."

Messi also laid on a curling Luis Suarez shot into the top corner after Gerard Moreno cancelled out a Pau Torres own-goal that had put Barca in front. Ansu Fati then

added a fourth late on.

An impressive victory for Setien's side reduces the gap back to four points behind Real Madrid, who earlier ground out another 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao at San Mames, with a Sergio Ramos penalty proving the difference.

Madrid's resilient performance, and their third 1-0 victory in a row, offered a stark contrast to a goal-fest from Barcelona

that was certainly easier on the eye but instructive on the title race too.

An end-to-end contest, full of chances for both sides, showed Messi, Suarez and Griezmann at their free-flowing best yet the defence was opened up with ease by Villarreal, who might have scored more. Madrid's discipline and organisation has made them firm favourites with four games remaining. — **AFP**



SPORTS

BOTTAS WINS DRAMATIC AUSTRIAN OPENER

■ LECLERC SECOND FOR FERRARI, NORRIS ON PODIUM FOR FIRST TIME
■ HAMILTON FOURTH AFTER TIME PENALTY, VERSTAPPEN RETIRES

LONDON: Formula One came back with a bang on Sunday as Finland's Valtteri Bottas won a dramatic Austrian season-opener for champions Mercedes in a race with only 11 finishers and no spectators.

Charles Leclerc finished a surprise second for struggling Ferrari with McLaren's Lando Norris celebrating his first F1 podium after a time penalty dropped Mercedes' six-times world champion Lewis Hamilton to fourth.

"I managed to keep it together and control the race from my side and it's a good start to the season", said Bottas, who started on pole position and had to keep his cool through three safety car periods.

Norris, at 20 the youngest driver in the race and now the youngest Briton to stand on an F1 podium, also claimed a bonus point for fastest lap.

The race, on a sunny afternoon at the scenic

Red Bull Ring was behind closed doors -- a Formula One first -- due to the COVID-19 pandemic that had put the season on hold since March.

The drivers gathered on the grid before the start in a show of unity against racism, with Hamilton and 13 others taking a knee in solidarity.

Spaniard Carlos Sainz made it a double points haul for McLaren in fifth, with Sergio Perez sixth for Racing Point and Pierre Gasly seventh for AlphaTauri.

Esteban Ocon, who last raced in 2018, took eighth for Renault on his return while Antonio Giovinazzi bagged ninth for

Alfa Romeo and Sebastian Vettel, who had another nightmare, completed the top 10 for Ferrari.

Canadian Nicholas Latifi was the last car running with 11th for Williams.

There was drama even before the race when stewards performed a U-turn after a Red Bull challenge and dropped Hamilton from the front row to fifth on the grid for a qualifying error.

That also promoted Red Bull's Max Verstappen to the front row alongside Bottas.

Any hopes the Dutchman had of completing a hat-trick of Austrian wins disappeared when he suffered an early technical problem and became the season's first

Austria		Spielberg	July 5		
1	V. Bottas (FIN)	1h30:55.739	25	Driver rankings	
		Mercedes		Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	25
2	C. Leclerc (MON)	at 2.7 secs	18	Charles Leclerc (MON)	18
		Ferrari		Lando Norris (GBR)	16
3	L. Norris (GBR)	at 5.491	16	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	12
		McLaren		Carlos Sainz (ESP)	10
4	L. Hamilton (GBR)	at 5.689	12	Constructors	
		Mercedes		Mercedes	37
5	C. Sainz (ESP)	at 8.903	10	McLaren	26
		McLaren		Ferrari	19
				Racing Point - Mercedes	8



retirement.

"I think it would have been an easy podium and third would have been a decent start to the season but what can you do?", he said.

SAFETY CAR

The first safety car was deployed when Haas's Kevin Magnussen spun off on lap 26 and it then came out again when George Russell parked up his stricken Williams.

The third was after Kimi Raikkonen's Alfa Romeo turned into a three-wheeler, a loose wheel bouncing off and across the track. — Reuters

FEATURES

SURI TRADITIONAL CLOTHES STILL A FAVOURITE DURING SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Every piece takes around 90 hours to make making it a labour of love, persistence and tradition. While the day to day use of Suri traditional clothes is rarely practised nowadays, it is still the favourite go-to dress for special occasions among the locals... **page 20**

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OMAN OBSERVER NEWS

WHAT'S INSIDE

With no paparazzis or parties, Paris prepares for virtual fashion week



P21

Miner becomes million-aire after finding biggest tanzanite stones



P22

SUR TRADITIONAL CLOTHES STILL A FAVOURITE DURING SPECIAL OCCASIONS

MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

The traditional clothes in Sur tell a complete story about the people in that part of the Sultanate; a story of persistence and struggle where the tailor spends 90 hours making just one piece.

Every piece is stitched manually with love and with different styles for different ages. Looking at a finished piece is like taking a trip down memory lane back to the ancient times when tradition and heritage just got formed. The stitches record a long colourful history refined by the creative hands of women – grandmothers, mothers, wives and sisters – who perfected them to what and how we see them today.

Tailor Salha al Farraji specializes in traditional tailoring of Sur cloths that is locally called Al Kidma As Suriyah.

“I see myself as a substantial part in preserving the Suri heritage,” said Salha.

In the past, the women role alongside cooking and housework included also tailoring of daily clothes for all family members. Women take a long time at tailoring especially the Eid clothes. Mothers teach tailoring to their daughters and all women of the neighbourhood cooperate to sew together.

Over the years, due to modernity, wearing a traditional dress has become less and only limited for occasions, weddings, and Eid. “Very few people are wearing traditional clothes but it is still in demand for special occasions. Traditional dress

is impractical nowadays,” shared al Farraji.

“There are several types of sewing that differ for men and women. Qiyaal, Boohabbah and Mmtewuweeyah are some of the names of tailoring types.

The tailoring pattern changed over the years.

“The pattern in the past was smaller than now and the type of fabric is different. The women fabric was light Chintz but nowadays the type used changed to Kashmiri chintz. the pattern is sewn with cotton threads instead of Zari threads that were used in the past,” Salha added.

One of the oldest used fabrics is Gisraati fabric, which is named after the Indian Gujarat city from which this fabric is imported. There are varieties of fabrics used, such as Duryahi, Boomshatha and Abo Zari.

“Order time starts two months before Eid and I stop receiving orders two weeks before Eid. Dresses for special occasions should be prepared one or two months before the occasion. The average cost of tailoring depends on gender, age and type of sleeves pattern that customer chose. Tailoring prices starts at 25 riyals to 50 because it is purely sewn manually without any machine to assist,” Salha said.

Wafa al Ghilani, a mother of four children shared her opinion, “I think it is important to preserve the traditional clothes that reflect our cultural identity”.

“In my opinion, the demand will decline in the future, and it will be limited for weddings only and may become unnecessary,” said Salha.



FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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FreeDiving





roy.subhajit9 • Follow

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With no paparazzis or parties, Paris prepares for virtual fashion week

PARIS IS USUALLY abuzz during its prestigious Haute Couture presentations in July, its hotels heaving with fashionistas and monuments turned into catwalk venues. But in a makeover caused by the coronavirus crisis, top designers will instead be experimenting next week with online showcases to try to keep clients hooked. Brands from Christian Dior to Valentino are pressing ahead with collections and shows through an organised schedule of videos running from July 6-8.

week, a select club of designers display one-of-a-kind, handmade outfits. “I will miss the audience, I will miss my friends,” said couturier Stephane Rolland. But Christophe Josse, another French couturier who has also produced a film, said he had enjoyed being able to highlight the intricacies of his designs differently and would consider doing it again. “I was a little hesitant at first, wondering what we’d be able to say in a digital fashion week,” Josse said. It is still unclear whether

Paris’s multiple fashion weeks generate some 1.2 billion euros (\$1.35 billion) for the local economy every year, the federation grouping couture houses estimates

That has helped keep some textile suppliers and artisans going, though other businesses are feeling the absence of a larger event keenly. “The impact of a virtual fashion week on our business is serious, because there are no more clients to drive around,” said Guillaume Connan, whose limousine company usually ferries A-listers around between shows. Paris’s multiple fashion weeks generate some 1.2 billion euros (\$1.35 billion) for the local economy every year, the federation grouping couture houses estimates. At the Haute Couture the format will be a hit with his clients, who include wealthy Americans who would normally travel to a show, Josse added. Physical catwalk displays are likely to be back on the agenda in Paris by September and brands are already booking venues, said Frederic Hocquard, who oversees tourism and some cultural affairs at Paris’s city council. He added that the hiatus this time could have some positive side effects, despite the economic hit - including as an inspiration for greener formats in future, which would not generate as much congestion or waste. —Reuters

FEATURES


Miner becomes millionaire after finding biggest tanzanite stones

A TANZANIAN small-scale miner has become a multi-millionaire after uncovering two of the biggest of the country's precious tanzanite stones ever found and selling them to the government.

Saniniu Kuryan Laizer, 52, found the stones weighing 9.27 and 5.1 kilogrammes (20.4 and 11.2 pounds) respectively in the northern Mirerani hills, an area which President John Magufuli had fenced off in 2018 to stop smuggling of the gem.

He sold them to the government for 7.7 billion Tanzanian shillings (nearly \$3.3 million/2.9 million euros)

Tanzanite was first found in the foothills of Kilimanjaro in 1967, and the northern Tanzanian region of Manyara is the only known place where the stones, coveted by jewellers by their remarkable violet-blue sparkle, are found.

At a function celebrating the find in Manyara on Wednesday, mining minister Dotto Biteko said the stones were the biggest ever uncovered in the country.

"Laizer is our (shilling) billionaire and let us make sure that he is safe," he said.

"We are now moving from a situation where the small miners were smuggling tanzanite, and now they are following the procedures and paying government taxes and royalties."

Laizer said he hoped to use the money to develop his community.

"I plan to build a mall in Arusha and a school near my home," he said.

"I thank God for this achievement because it's the first time to get this size. When I found these, I notified government officials who

valuated the stones and today they called me for payment."

Jewellers Le Vian, which during the 1980s and 1990s acquired half the entire production of Tanzanite, said the amount paid to Laizer was only a fraction of its retail value.

"While the \$3 million paid to the miner has undoubtedly changed his life forever, it is only a twentieth of the potential retail value of the gemstones he discovered," said chief executive Eddie LeVian in a statement.

"The miner Saniniu Laizer defied all odds to unearth these world record-busting gemstones. The artisanal miner dug out these stones by hand and they remained intact. Mining can be a very rough process with enormous amounts of breakages along the way."

However it appears the stones will not be destined for the market, as the government wrote on Twitter they would be placed in the national museum.

Magufuli made a call to Laizer during the ceremony that was broadcast on loudspeakers, to congratulate him.

"This is the benefit to small miners and testifies to the fact that Tanzania is rich," he said.

When the 24km (14-mile) perimeter wall was unveiled around the mining site, Magufuli said that 40 percent of all tanzanite produced at the site was being lost to smugglers.

Magufuli has taken multiple steps to regulate the mining sector, which has faced allegations of fraud and underreporting of production and profits.-- **AFP**