

HM GREETINGS TO MALDIVES PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldives, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president and the friendly people of the Maldives more progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

14-DAY LOCKDOWN COMES INTO FORCE

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Starting from Saturday, a two week-long lockdown in the Sultanate has come into effect as a measure to control movement of people to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases in the country.

“There is a complete closure from Saturday (July 25), and there will be no room for exceptions to cross through the checkpoints between the governorates from 7 pm till 6 am till August 8,” the Royal Oman Police (ROP) sources have said.

Accordingly, movement of people and vehicles between governorates has been regulated with entry and exit checkpoints at



We are regulating the movement of people and vehicles from other governorates to Muscat from 7 pm to 6 am and those who violate the rules will be booked

ROP OFFICIAL

each and every governorate, and violators will be subject to legal action, according to the ROP.

“We are regulating the movement of people and vehicles from other governorates to Muscat and back from 7 pm to 6 am, and those who violate the rule will be booked,” head of one of the checkpoints, told the Observer.

There are four checkpoints around Muscat at Jifnain, Halban, Barka and Qurayat, and no entry of people would be allowed nor will anyone will be allowed to go out from 7 pm to 6 am till August 6.

However, emergency medical cases, travellers heading to airport, or coming from a journey, transporting essential supplies are exempted from the lockdown.

TURN TO P2

UN hails Oman’s response to COVID-19

NEW YORK: A new report published by the United Nations said the Sultanate is among the best Arab countries in terms of preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report, titled ‘The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region, an Opportunity to Build Back Better’, said that the Sultanate's ranking has advanced in the major indexes of Human Development, Health System and Connectivity. The Sultanate has secured 0.834 points in the Human Development Index and its health spending has risen to 4.3 per cent of the GDP. The Connectivity Index has also advanced with an increase in mobile phone and fixed broadband subscriptions.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed serious fault lines and vulnerabilities in societies, institutions and economies all around the world. The Arab region, home to 436 million people, initially kept transmission and mortality rates lower than the global average, but recent trends are cause for concern, especially in the light of fragmented healthcare and insufficient primary care in many countries,” the report said.

TURN TO P2



OMAN

14-DAY LOCKDOWN COMES INTO FORCE

FROM PAGE 1

Those who are travelling abroad have to show their airline ticket or passports at the checkpoints while heading to the airport, and those who are going to drop a passenger need to get a return permission from the checkpoint itself.

All the commercial outlets have rescheduled their timings in accordance with the lockdown timings, and there won't be any trade or commercial activities at any outlet.

Vehicles carrying goods need to keep documents showing their need to cross the checkpoints, without which transporting will not be possible.

UN HAILS OMAN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

FROM PAGE 1

"The region is blessed with tremendous diversity and potential. Yet all Arab countries – whether oil-rich, middle-income or least developed – face difficulties in responding. The regional economy has suffered multiple shocks from the virus as well as the sharp drop in oil prices, remittances and tourism," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, noting that the regional economy is expected to shrink by more than 5 per cent with some countries facing double-digit contractions.

He added: "Those caught in armed conflict face particular challenges, especially the 26 million refugees and internally displaced persons, who are among the most exposed to the virus." — ONA

No exemption for dusk-to-dawn lockdown

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: By 6 pm on Saturday, roads began to see a slowdown in traffic. The first day of the lockdown had the shops hurrying up to draw their shutter down giving their staff ample time to reach their residences. Fitness enthusiasts took to the street to complete their daily walk and did not wait for the sun to cool or for the sunset.

The checkpoints will be at the borders between the governorates but not within the wilayats, however there will be patrolling and there will be no exemptions unless it is a medical emergency, said Major Mohammed al Hashami of Royal Oman Police.

"We thank the citizens and residents for their cooperation with the Royal Oman Police and for their understanding during the last period with the measures taken to contain the coronavirus crisis. There will be a comprehensive closure for all the governorates and this closure does not permit people to travel between the governorates and there are no exceptions. Checkpoints will be between the governorates to impose control and prevent traffic as well as movement during the eve-

nings from 7 pm going up to 6 am. "During this period, people are not allowed to move freely and fines are applicable in case they are found violating the rules," explained Major Al Hashami.

Should the private sector consider closing for the day by 5 to 5.30 pm? Major Al Hashami replied, "The sectors should give enough time to ensure their staff to reach home by 7pm. We are facing an exceptional situation and everyone should cooperate."

Another query public has been speculating on is whether health workers are exempted from the restriction of movements.

"There are no exceptions for movement between governorates and everyone should abide by this," he said.

He pointed out that during the day time business will continue as usual and individuals can go by their daily routine of working and even shopping.

During the evenings, as per the rule no one should step out of their house even to take a walk. Even venturing to drop garbage can attract fine.

"Everything other than health can be delayed till the next day. Even the emergency visit to the hospital must be with proof from the hospital," he said.



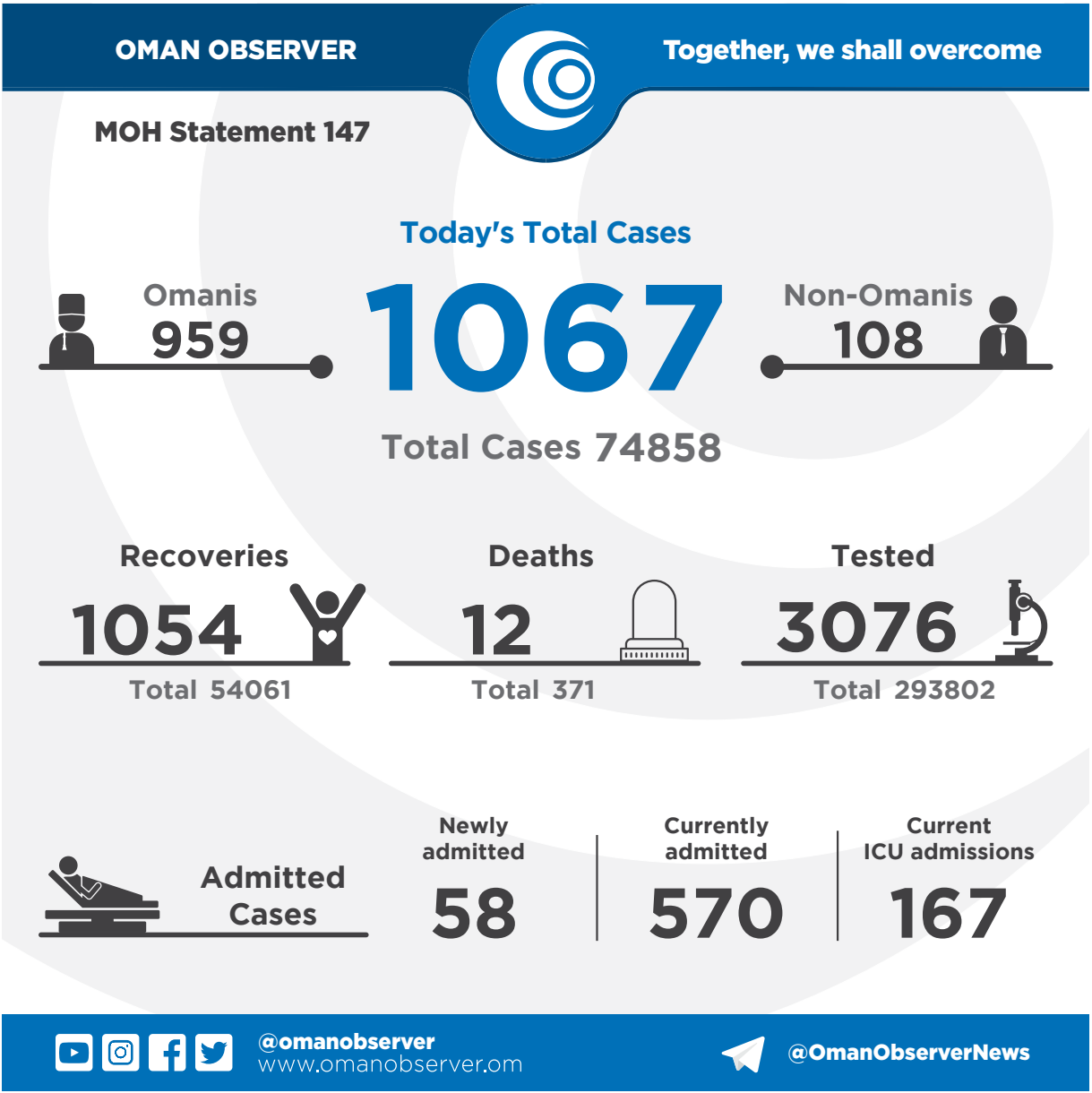
Sultanate second in conference tourism

MUSCAT: The Sultanate ranked second in the Middle East in the conference sector, according to the 2019 International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) annual report.

This achievement comes within the exerted efforts and the joint coordination between the stakeholders of the Oman Conference Office at the Ministry of Tourism and the

partners of the conference tourism sector in the Sultanate with the aim of increasing and attracting more regional and international conferences to the Sultanate.

The Sultanate seeks to be a distinguished destination for conference tourism in the region, because of its positive return on the tourism sector in particular and the national economy in general.



EXPATS CAN STAY IN HOME QUARANTINE

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: Foreigners who are coming to Oman can stay in home quarantine provided they have facilities for the same and follow guidelines set by authorities, an official said on Saturday.

Earlier, the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) had set a mandatory 14-day institutional quarantine for non-Omanis and 14-day home quarantine for citizens arriving in Oman. In a circular issued to all aircraft operators in the country, PACA said that foreign travellers must present confirmation of accommodation and means to cover its expenses.

Speaking to the Observer, a PACA official said, "All arriving passengers in Oman, including residents, must follow the new rules. If a resident can prove he has facilities for a home quarantine as per the conditions laid by the authorities, he will be allowed to stay home, but what is important is that all guidelines will have to be followed."



Darwish, a resident, said, "My family (wife and a child) came to Oman recently after approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were not asked to do the home quarantine after the thermal checks and some instructions."

Senior manager of a leading Indian airline said, "We will start implementing the guidelines soon where the passengers will be asked to present documents such as details of their accommodation and health insurance."

Air India Express has issued an update for Oman-bound passengers travelling on Vande Bharat Mission as per the PACA guidelines.

According to an executive in SalamAir, "A resi-

dent can book tickets from us provided he brings all documents including the approval letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

While aircraft crew is exempted from the 14-day quarantine, the arriving passengers must download Tarassud+ mobile app and register before arrival as well as pay RO 5 for tracking bracelets to wear during the quarantine.

All visitors are required to have health insurance the full duration of their stay in Oman. PACA has also confirmed that residents are allowed to return to the country with a permit issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs via their embassy or sponsor or national airlines (Oman Air and SalamAir).

Oman-India investment webinar on Tuesday

MUSCAT: Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will host Oman-India Investment Webinar "Invest in Duqm" on Tuesday.

The virtual webinar will be led by Yahya bin Said al Jabri, SEZAD Chairman, and Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to Oman.

This webinar is aimed to highlight the bilateral trade agreements between India and Oman that support economic growth and prosperity. It will present the trade and investment opportunities as well as the package of advantages and incentives offered by SEZAD for foreign investors.

STAY
HOME
STAY
SAFE

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provision of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law, The Company **A'MAR ALMDN ALMTMYZT LTJART WALMQAWLAT (LLC)** which is registered with the Commercial Registration No. 8085072, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 250,000,000 to 50,000,000.

Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

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TWO WORKERS DIE IN BAUSHER



MUSCAT: Two Asian workers have died when a pit they were excavating collapsed over them in Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos in the Wilayat of Bausher.

The search operation for the bodies lasted more than 10 hours, the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) said on Twitter.

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) said the first body was pulled out from 6-metre depth while the second body was found hours later.

PACDA has called on companies operating in such projects to follow the safety rules in order to protect the workers from accidents.

HABTA ABUZZ ONLY IN MEMORIES



SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The historic Habta marketplace in the Wadi Kabeer area in Muscat, which is used to be thronged by Eid shoppers, is wearing a ghostly look due to the ban on gatherings as part of the government measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

A market where both citizens and expatriates used to converge to buy not only the livestock, but also everything from toys to household items, has been closed for the second time this year due to the restrictions.

“In the living memory, this is the only year that would pass by without any activity at this traditional market. Normally, during this season, the place used to resonate with the sounds of both men and animals,” said Abdullah al Balushi.

The Sultanate is known for its traditional markets which have their presence in every governorate. And shopping in this cultural market is a famous tradition for many Omanis and is revived from one generation after another.

This unique seasonal market

called Habta, which means coming down to the market in Arabic, is usually organised before Eid celebrations and hosts local goods and products including livestock, fruits and vegetables, as well as sweets and spices.

“The Eid celebrations are not complete without buying a lamb from this market which has been serving both buyers and sellers. People from far flung places used to bring their animals to market,” said Abdullah.

The Eid shopping season usually starts from the beginning of Ramadhan, runs through Eid Al Fitr and ends after about three months with Eid Al Adha.

Habta markets in all the governorates have been cancelled to avoid gathering of people as a measure to contain the coronavirus spread.

The General Directorate of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources has already announced that Habta markets will be cancelled in all wilayats of South and North Al Batinah governorates for this year in compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.



شركة نزوى للسياحة ش.م.م
Nizwa Tourist Company LLC

Announcement “Invitation to Bid”

Nizwa Tourist Company (Falaj Daris Hotel) announces the auction for the sale of used furniture, electronic equipment and others, as follows:

1. You can preview the items within 5 days from Sunday, 16 August 2020 to Thursday 20 August 2020, (9:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm) at the hotel’s yard located in Farq at Wilayat Nizwa.
2. Your offers to be submitted in a sealed envelope, addressed to the Chairman, Nizwa Tourist Company LLC. The last date for submission of bids is **Monday, 31 August 2020.**
3. The winner has to take delivery of the items within 5 days of the auction date falling which a charge of RO.5 per day will be levied.
4. 4. The materials are sold in “ as is where is “ condition and for the total materials in full and cannot be sold partly and the hotel does not accept responsibility after the inspection.



Ministry of Higher Education
College of Applied Sciences, IBRI

DECLARATION OF TENDERS

COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES, IBRI

Ministry of Higher Education (COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES, IBRI) invites Tenders Contractor firms for the:

Tender No	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for buying Tender papers	The deadline for submission of bids
2/2020	Operation and Maintenance of Sewage Treatment Plant at CAS-Ibri	Specialized in providing regained service and registered with the Tender Board	RO. 25/- (Twenty Five Rial Omani)	04/08/2020	16/08/2020

- Companies Specialized in such activities who have valid Tender Board Certificate may collect Tender Documents starting from Sunday 26/07/2020, starting at 8:00 am from the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bids must be submitted online through the above mentioned website and must include a copy of a temporary insurance in the form of a bank bond or a certified check from a bank operating in the Sultanate of at least (1%) of the tender value and valid up to (90) days from the date of submitting bids.
- The Original bid bonds of (1%) must be submitted in an enclosed envelope to Ibri College of Applied Sciences (Finance Affairs Section) before the deadline date for submission of bids.
- For any enquires or explanations about the Tender: Please do it through the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- For any enquires or Technical Support about E-Tendering System: Please contact number: +968 241 66670 or E-mail: etenderhd@mtc.gov.om.
- The College is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.



Lockdown guidelines issued for fishermen, truckers

MUSCAT: In line with the decisions taken by the Supreme Committee, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries issued a set of guidelines that should be followed during the period of the lockdown.

Fishermen who venture out in the evening for fishing should carry their licence and boat licence.

Transporters should carry a licence for the transportation and marketing of fish while travelling when the traffic movement is allowed.

Companies wishing to export via the logistic zones should obtain an in-transit permit from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The in-transit permit can be obtained from the ministry upon displaying a licence for the transportation and marketing of fish.

The trucks owned by the big firms and commercial stores should carry the in-transit permit issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Trucks will be allowed to unload their fish shipments during the working hours from 6:30 am to 12 noon every day except the official Eid holiday.

US journal hails Oman's FDI rules

CALIFORNIA: JD Supra, a US economic information and consultancy institution, has hailed the Sultanate's efforts and regulations to attract foreign investment and diversify the national economy.

In a report published in its website recently, JC Supra said that the Foreign Capital Investment Law (FCIL) is considered a major step forward in investment growth.

The report referred to the executive regulation issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on June 14, saying that, "By removing the requirement for Omani companies to have at least 30per cent Omani ownership (as was generally the case under the old 1994 Foreign Capital Investment Law), the New FCIL is geared towards attracting foreign investors into Oman who can now invest in Oman without the need for any local shareholder."

The report said it has set a timetable for the execution of the investment project, a date of start of operations, a feasibility study and an accreditation certificate from an approved bank and any other information that

“By removing the requirement for Omani companies to have at least 30 per cent Omani ownership, the New FCIL is geared towards attracting foreign investors into Oman who can now invest in Oman without the need for any local shareholder.

JD SUPRA

the licensing authority concerned might specify.

JD Supra observed that the executive regulation states a set of other procedures, including dates for issuing licences, clearances and licences, noting that these requirements also figure in the InvestEasy electronic system made available to all investors as determined in the Investment Guide issued by the Minister of Commerce and Industry.

The report said that investors are awaiting the Investment Guide or Manual for further details.

"Article 9 of the Regulations

refers to various conditions and rules that need to be satisfied in respect of investment projects which can benefit from the new FCIL, with such conditions and rules being set out in an "investment manual". The investment manual has not yet been made available by the MoCI and so we await further information on this," said the report.

In addition to encouraging foreign investment in Oman, the regulations also aim to attract investment in certain locations and sectors. For example, Article 17 of the regulations sets out that a project established in the least developed regions of Oman, which have not been detailed in the regulations, will benefit from certain privileges such as low rentals on usufructs (for a period of investment not less than 5 years) and exemptions from 2-year Omanisation requirements (and exemption from all or some of the prescribed fees). Furthermore, Article 19 of the Regulations provides exemptions from taxes and customs duties for projects established in, amongst others, the IT and logistics sectors.

— ONA



ROYAL OMAN POLICE

DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF MEDICAL SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender Number	Tender Name	Tender Fee (R.O)	Last Date For Collection	Last Date For Submission
ROP/DGMS/PR/64/2020 Dated 26 th July 2020	Personal Protective Equipment	200/- (Cash)	27-07-2020	10-08-2020

- Only Registered Manufacturer/Approved suppliers can participate in the Tender.
- The Tender documents may be obtained from the office of Director General of Medical services, Royal Oman Police, Qurum, upon receipt of non-refundable payment of respective amount.
- Bid bond certificate of 1% of the total bid amount valid for a total period of 90 calendar days must be attached.
- The response received from bidders must be submitted in 2 hard copies and 1 electronic soft copy on a CD or memory stick (flash drive), all in a sealed envelope showing the Tender name and Number. No company names or hints of any sort should be shown on the envelope.
- Submissions received after the designated closing time (12:00 noon) on the due date may not be considered regardless of the circumstances.
- The DGMS reserves the right to reject any or any part of, or all tenders and also reserves the right to award to a bidder other than the bidder submitting the lowest total acquisition cost.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of tender document	Last date for tender submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
7/2020	Maintenance service for database and Takaful system for IT department in Ministry	Excellent & One	Thursday 13-8-2020 01:00 PM	Thursday 3-9-2020 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at theTender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On Sunday 26/7/2020.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- For Inquiry , please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402222 or 24166670)

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry “

www.mosd.gov.om

BREED NATIVE BEE SPECIES FOR BETTER HONEY



MUSCAT: Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan: Beekeeping is considered one of the old Omani professions, and one of the main sources of income for many families. It supports the national economy through exports.

An annual Omani honey market is held in the Sultanate with the participation of many beekeepers from various governorates in the Sultanate. The market represents a platform for honey producers to share expertise in the field of honey bee breeding.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, represented by the Directorate-General of Agriculture and Livestock in the governorates of South and North Al Sharqiyah in Ibra, is seeking to encourage the beekeepers to breed native bee species, to obtain abundant production of high quality honey.

Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Director of the Department of Beekeeping at the Directorate-General of Agriculture and Livestock in South and North Al Sharqiyah, said, "The Directorate provides the necessary support to beekeepers by providing tools that contribute to the breeding of indigenous bees, and the production of

abundant quantities of Omani honey of high nutritional value. It also conducts many awareness programmes, lectures and seminars for beekeepers on the accurate methods of beekeeping. It distributes manuals about healthy methods for beekeepers. There are 488 beekeepers and 290,36 hives in the governorates of South and North Al Sharqiyah according to the Directorate's statistics of 2019. "Among the conditions that must be met when establishing an apiary is that it should be in an agricultural area devoid of other bee apiaries, with no more than 100 hives, and that the area is quiet and away from pollution and noise. It is important to put the hives under trees to avoid exposing the bees to high temperatures in summer."

Khamis bin Salim al Ghaithi, one of the beekeepers in the Wilayat of Ibra, said, "The honey beekeeping project yields good revenues. It creates job opportunities. Beeswax is used in many industries, the most important of which are the manufacture of wax structures, pharmaceuticals, candles and some types of cosmetics."

More chartered flights to different countries

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: There has been a steady increase in the number of charter flights with more carriers flying to South Asian countries and African cities.

The flight to Zanzibar, operated by Oman Air and Jet Set Travel, will take off on July 30, while India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have flights to carry their citizens home.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of migrants from India in Oman were transported back

to their home country through various charter flights organised by the Indian Embassy, NGO's, corporates and the like in the past two months since the first flight on June 9. The Indian Embassy has added three flights to the fourth phase of the repatriation programme with two services to Trivandrum and one to Chennai this month.

Pakistan diplomatic mission informed it has been operating an average of 13 flights per week and carried not less than 8,000 to back home.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
117/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Respiratory Care)	30/July /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 19/August/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 30.800 Per set
118/2020	Supply of Pharmaceuticals for The Royal Hospital	30/July /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 26/August/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 52.500 Per set
119/2020	Provision of Cleaning, Laundry & Pest Control Services at Blood Bank Building in Bousher	30/July /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 26/August/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O. 25.000 Per set
121/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Orthotic & Prosthetic and Rehabilitation)	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 26/August/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
122/2020	Validation & Certification of Biological Safety Cabinets at Central Public Health Laboratory in Darsait	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
123/2020	Supply & Installation of Additional Medical Gases Terminal Outlets at Al Nahdha Hospital	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
124/2020	Maintenance Works of Medical Store and Laboratory at Bukha Hospital in Musandam Governorate	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in The First Grade	R.O 25.000 Per set
125/2020	Provision of Maintenance and Operation of Equipment at Al-Buraimi Hospital and Health Establishments in Al-Buraimi Governorate	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	R.O 190.000 Per set
126/2020	Provision of Maintenance and Operation of Equipment at Al-Rustaq Hospital and Health Establishments in South Al-Batinah Governorate	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/September/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	R.O 295.000 Per set
127/2020	Provision of Loading and Unloading Services for Directorate General of Medical Stores at Ministry of Health	06/August /2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 26/August/2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Spotlight on Joe Biden as his VP reveal nears



WASHINGTON: With the White House campaign heading into its coronavirus-hobbled home stretch, Democratic nominee Joe Biden is preparing to announce his vice-presidential running mate, a woman likely to play an outsize role in a new administration.

Some 100 days before his showdown with President Donald Trump, Biden, himself a former VP, is juggling competing pressures as he narrows his choice.

The big reveal — expected in early August, weeks before a mostly virtual Democratic National Convention — could be seen as more consequential this year given that Biden reportedly said he views himself as a “transition candidate” who could stock his administration with a new generation of leaders.

Biden, 77, would be the oldest person ever elected president. He has said he would not serve a second term if his mental or physical health declined, fuelling speculation that his running mate would likely top the ticket in 2024.

He has publicly committed to choosing a woman, and with recent protests against racial injustice following the police killing of George Floyd, many Democrats are calling on Biden to name an African American.

Will he pick Senator Kamala Harris or former national security adviser Susan Rice, both 55, as a nod to a black constituency crucial to his primary victory and the Democratic Party?

Does she elevate Senator Elizabeth Warren as a way to energise the party’s progressive wing, even though at age 71 she is hardly seen as the face of a new generation?

Or does Biden choose Asian American Tammy Duckworth, 52, the war-hero-turned-US-senator who could appeal to frustrated Republicans, former Trump supporters or independents looking for a moderate alternative?

Complicating matters, the coronavirus pandemic that has killed 145,000 Americans will certainly deny Biden a splashy in-person running mate rollout and threatens to remain a number one priority for the White House next year.

“He has to make choices, and all of the arguments and all of the pressures don’t point in the same direction,” Joel Goldstein, a vice-presidential scholar at Saint Louis University School of Law, said on Friday.

“My guess is that Biden doesn’t know who he’s going to pick yet,” the professor said in an interview.

— Reuters

IN BRIEF

Norwegian singer sets new record for singing

STOCKHOLM: A Norwegian man on Saturday laid claim to the world record for singing non-stop Elvis songs, with a performance lasting 50 hours, 50 minutes and 50 seconds. Kjell Henning Bjornstad, known as Kjell Elvis, set the record at a pub in central Oslo, Norwegian news agency NTB reported. “I’ll never do this again,” the 52-year-old said after completing the marathon. He began his attempt on Thursday morning, and it was streamed by Osloblad VG, among others. Kjell Elvis switched between sitting and walking around on stage. When he completed the catalogue he started over again. “His favourite was ‘An American Trilogy’ and I’ve heard ‘Teddy Bear’ quite a few times,” Bjornstad’s manager Helge Johansen told NTB.

Gunmen kill at least 20 farmers in Sudan’s Darfur

KHARTOUM: Gunmen killed at least 20 people, including children, who were visiting their farms in Sudan’s war-torn Darfur region for the first time in years, a tribal chief said on Saturday. “Two months ago the government organised a meeting between the original landowners and those who took their fields” during the long-running war in Darfur, Ibrahim Ahmad told AFP by telephone. “An agreement was reached whereby the landowners would return to their fields — but armed men came on Friday and opened fire, killing 20 people, including two women and children.” Darfur has been plagued by a bitter conflict that broke out in 2003 between ethnic minority rebels, complaining of marginalisation, and forces loyal to now ousted president Omar al Bashir, including the feared Janjaweed militia, mainly recruited among Arab pastoralist tribes. The fighting killed 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million others, according to the United Nations.

Singapore PM Lee flags delay to retirement

SINGAPORE: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 68, said on Saturday that he may have to delay his plans to step down as leader by the time he is 70 because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. “I had expressed a hope that I would be able to hand over by the time I celebrate my 70th birthday but I do not determine the path of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Lee, son of Singapore’s modern day founder Lee Kuan Yew. “A lot will depend on how events unfold and all I can say is I will see this through and I will handover in good shape as soon as possible to the next team.” Lee’s People’s Action Party have ruled Singapore unbroken since independence in 1965.

— Agencies

WORLD

Virus surges worldwide as public loses faith in authorities

WASHINGTON: A surge in coronavirus cases across the United States and Europe has forced governments to strengthen containment measures as a survey released on Saturday showed support for the handling of their pandemics has slipped.

The disease has now killed almost 635,000 people around the world and infected more than 15.5 million, according to an AFP tally, with America the hardest-hit nation.

For the second straight day on Friday the US reported more than 70,000 new cases and over 1,000 deaths as the virus takes hold in the country's south and west.

A similar resurgence in Europe prompted the World Health Organization to sound the alarm over the spread, as Britain joined France, Germany and Austria in tightening rules on masks and rolling out greater testing.

Governments worldwide have struggled to contain the coronavirus despite long and arduous lock-



downs imposed on millions of people, and a survey released on Saturday showed faith in authorities to be dwindling in six rich nations.

Populations in France, Germany, Britain, Japan, Sweden and the US widely believed death and infec-

tion figures to be higher than recorded, according to the study, which polled 1,000 people in each nation.

"In most countries this month, support for national governments is falling," the report by the Kekst CNC communications consulting group said.

Europe accounts for a fifth of the world's case count so far.

The WHO's European chapter expressed concern on Friday about the rise in cases on the continent in the past two weeks and warned tighter restrictions may be needed. — **AFP**

Greece to 'prioritise' virus vaccines for elderly, at-risk

ATHENS: Greece will prioritise giving coronavirus vaccines to the elderly and high-risk groups if and when they become available, the country's health minister said on Saturday. "If and when a vaccine comes, we will prioritise those who must take it above all," Vassilis Kikilias told Skai TV. "Who is that? Our very aged fellow citizens, the very elderly, high-risk groups... we will protect those in danger." He added that vaccines will not be compulsory but they will be "strongly recommended." Greece has so far recorded 201 COVID-19 deaths and more than 4,100 infections. Last month the country began progressively reopening its land borders to selective countries, before allowing mostly European flights on July 1.

Ukraine reports highest daily cases in a month

KYIV: Ukraine reported 1,106 new cases of the coronavirus within a 24-hour period, the highest daily toll since a record on June 26, when it reached 1,109, Health Minister Maksym Stepanov said on Saturday. The number of new daily infections has increased sharply in the past two months following the gradual lifting of restrictions that began in late-May. Stepanov said that 205 people had been admitted to hospitals. "It means their lives are under threat and we have to understand that this disease is very serious," he told an online briefing. The total number of cases rose to 63,929, including 1,590 deaths, while 35,497 patients recovered as of July 25. Stepanov appealed to people to stick to rules aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

South Korea sees surge in new coronavirus cases

SEOUL: South Korea reported a surge in new coronavirus infections on Saturday, recording its highest figure in nearly four months with dozens of imported cases. The country added 113 new cases, including 86 among people who arrived from overseas, bringing the total to 14,092, according to the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It was the second highest figure since March 31, when the country reported 125 new cases. It was also the first time it has seen more than 100 cases since April 1. All overseas arrivals are required to undergo a two-week quarantine. South Korea endured one of the worst early outbreaks outside China but brought it broadly under control with an extensive "trace, test and treat" programme while never imposing a compulsory lockdown that was put in place in much of Europe and around the world. — **Agencies**



A demonstrator holds up a poster with a rendition of George Floyd on May 30 in Denver. — AFP

America divided two months after death of Floyd

CHARLOTTE PLANTIVE

One after another, statues recalling slavery in America keep coming down, and night after night demonstrators taunt police in a groundswell of anger over brutality against people of colour. Two months after African American George Floyd died when a white policeman knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes, triggering a nationwide and global outcry for justice, the United States is being shaken by an anti-racism surge that, more and more, is dividing its political class. The days of huge, boisterous nightly marches in cities from New York to Los Angeles may be over but things are still happening. Overnight on Thursday, two statues of Christopher Columbus — for many a symbol of colonisation and cruelty to native people — were taken down in Chicago.

And that same night protesters in Portland, Oregon again clashed with police in a wave of unrest that is now nearly two months old. With the presidential election 100 days away, this unsettled atmosphere is seen in diametrically opposed ways by the people on either side of it. For Democrats, taking down Confederate-era statues is a way to acknowledge a racist past and stop glorifying white men who played a part in the oppression of African and Native Americans. President Donald Trump, appealing to his white, working class base as he seeks re-election with a strong law and order message, calls this practice an act of vandalism and an insult to the heritage of the American South. As for the protests in Portland, Republicans welcome the administration's sending in federal agents to restore order disrupted by people they label as anarchists. — AFP

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: Last dance, last chance!



RAY PETERSEN
petersen_ray@hotmail.com

So, we have moved into a genuine lockdown situation at last! The travel restrictions from earlier in the year are re-imposed, but the curfew from 7 pm to 6 am is the real game changer, and maybe this will shake the populace from its apathy, its lack of concern, and its dismissal of the pandemic. Would you treat your responsibilities for housing, feeding, clothing and your family with the same apathy you have demonstrated over COVID-19? **No!** Would you continue to embrace your faith in the same lack-luster manner as you embrace the Supreme Committee directives on COVID-19? **No!** Can you continue to ignore the realities of COVID-19, now that it is reaching, affecting, and harming, so many Omani families? **No!** Can you continue to dismiss COVID-19 as a media-inspired conspiracy, as an Asian thing, or even as a 'Trump,' or 'Western' thing? **No!** Can you continue to try and find ways around the COVID-19 restrictions, wearing masks, visiting families and friends, attending gatherings, whether to pray or celebrate births, deaths, and marriages? **No!** Can the youth of

Oman fail to embrace a genuine 'care-factor' in terms of the community and society response to COVID-19 because among you, and your friends, "there is no corona?" **No!** I wish, with all my heart, that I could agree with what many of you are saying, and ignore the threat, but facts are facts, and the rising death toll is proof we all need the love, care, concern of each other, and to share the responsibility for beating this aggressive foe. "A lack of love," said a religious scholar recently. "Can cause people to have no help when they need help, no friends when they need a friend. So, in a sense, the most dangerous thing in the world is apathy, and once our apathy takes hold of us, we can no longer avoid it." I believe lockdown should have been imposed earlier, and have even been more restrictive, but this, what we have, to be sure is your last chance to avoid carnage. COVID-19 is indiscriminate, a scientific abomination, unleashed on an unsuspecting, unprotected generation. Ignorance of its potency, and apathy in the face of its intensity, are third world, medieval responses, unworthy of this nation and its people.

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

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Oman’s biggest hatching eggs project nearing completion in Haima



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Construction work on Oman's biggest breeder poultry project – an investment that seeks to eliminate the country's longstanding dependence on imported hatching eggs for its rapidly expanding poultry industry – is nearing completion at Haima in the desert heartland of the Sultanate.

Osool Poultry, a project conceived as part of a government-driven strategy to develop and strengthen the country's food security, is dedicated to the production of hatching eggs – the source of baby chicks for poultry farms proliferating around the Sultanate.

Annual output at full capacity is envisioned at a world-scale 150 million fertilised eggs per annum – a target set to be achieved by 2040. At this capacity, Oman is set to be more than self-sufficient in meeting its domestic requirement of hatching eggs, and will also have surplus volumes to supply overseas regional mar-

SELF-SUFFICIENCY:

Annual output at full capacity is envisioned at a world-scale 150 million fertilized eggs per annum – a target set to be achieved by 2040.

kets.

Osool Poultry was first unveiled in 2015 with the backing of key stakeholders, including A'Namaa Poultry, a subsidiary of Oman Food Investment Holding Company, which is developing the Sultanate's biggest white meat project at Ibri in Dhahirah Governorate.

The list of promoters include A'saffa Foods, Sohar Poultry, Delmon Poultry as well as multilateral organisations Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC) and the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID).

Facilitating speedy approvals for the project has been the Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit (ISFU), which has the government's mandate to fast-track projects deemed critical to supporting Oman's economic diversification.

Following a significant reduction in the initial RO 60 million capital outlay for the project, well-known civil engineering design firm Semac and Partners Oman LLC was roped in by the promoters to oversee the delivery of a leaner version of the same venture, while ensuring that all of the key project and biosecurity specs were met. Semac is credited with playing a key role in the implementation of the great majority of Oman's major poultry farm projects.

Adding to the uniqueness of Osool Poultry is its location in the arid desert wastelands of central Oman – a setting that contributes to the project's overall biosecurity, according to project officials.

The farm complex, featuring a network of four plots, has been constructed at Ghaftain, far removed from any urban

setting.

While three of the plots feature poultry houses for rearing and egg production, a fourth plot will be equipped with a small-scale processing plant for the culling of chickens and production of small quantities of white meat.

A feed-mill designed to meet the chicken feed requirements of the entire project is also planned on the fourth plot.

In addition to natural biosecurity and favourable wind direction afforded by its location in Haima, Osool Poultry will also benefit from the presence of groundwater in aquifers in the area.

Suited to poultry projects, the groundwater will help also sustain the project over its operational life.

Various contractors associated with the execution of the project are now in the final stages of handing over their respective sites – a process due to continue over the third quarter of this year, paving the way for the plant to commence operations in earnest.

Tender soon for installation of rooftop solar PV systems in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Ahead of the start of a tender for a contract to install solar photovoltaic (PV) systems atop residential buildings in the capital region, the Authority for Electricity Regulation (AER) Oman which is driving the initiative, dubbed Sahim-II, engaged with potential developers in a virtual forum last week.

The Sahim-II programme envisions the roll-out of small-scale solar PV systems on potentially up to 3,000 residential buildings in Muscat Governorate in the first phase.

Their installation, as well as operation and maintenance over long-term agreement with the local distribution and supply company (Muscat Electricity Distribution Company), will be undertaken by a successful bidder with the financial and technological wherewithal to deliver such wide-scale deployments.

A formal Request for Proposals (RfP) from interested developers is proposed to be floated next month, the Authority said in a statement. It noted that a number of local and international developers



SUSTAINABLE ENERGY:
Initial tranche of 1,000 residential homes in Muscat Governorate to be covered under Sahim-II programme of Authority for Electricity Regulation Oman.

specialising in residential-type solar PV installations had participated in the forum.

“As the concept behind Sahim-II is being applied for the first time in the region, interested developers had the opportunity to get acquainted with the specifics, objectives and structure of the project.

They were also given an overview of the tendering criteria and other requirements that must be met as part of the competitive process. The Authority aims to launch the tender for the project in August,”

it explained.

Following the unveiling last year of Sahim-II – representing the second stage of the Sahim programme – interested homeowners were invited to register their interest to participate in the initiative.

A smartphone app launched by the Authority for this purpose garnered around 1,200 registrations. Of this number, an initial batch of 1,000 whose rooftop settings were found to meet the conditions for solar PV installations were notified that they have been short-

listed to be among the first candidates to receive the systems. They have until the end of this month to make an initial down payment to confirm their participation in the programme.

“The Authority invites subscribers who received the initial offers to accelerate the completion of the procedures for accepting the offer and paying the value of the contribution before the end of the current month of July, in order to be included in the tender that will be launched in August,” it further noted.

Customers are assured an attractive reduction in the monthly electricity bills once their rooftop solar systems are integrated into the local network.

Boeing to delay 777X as demand drops for big jets

SEATTLE: Boeing Co is preparing to delay its all-new 777X jet by several months or up to a year, three sources said, as the COVID-19 crisis exacerbates a drop in demand for the industry’s largest jetliners.

Boeing hopes to bring the jet to market as passenger travel rebounds after a downturn caused by the pandemic. It would also hope for a detente in a trade war between Washington and Beijing, which has sidelined crucial Chinese aircraft buyers.

But stretching out the development opens up fresh risks for Boeing, such as losing engineering attention and

momentum, and tougher scrutiny from the US Federal Aviation Administration during the years-long certification process.

Delay could also cause problems in Boeing’s supply chain. An announcement of the delay could come as early as next week when Boeing announces earnings, one of the people said.

It said it was continuing flight tests and “working closely with our customers around the world as they continue to adapt to the evolving COVID-19 situation”.

Boeing has been working to get the 777X, a larger version of the 777 mini-

jumbo, into the hands of customers in 2021. That’s already a year later than originally scheduled after snags with its General Electric GE9X engines among other issues.

Now Boeing is preparing to delay the timeline by perhaps a year, two of the people said. A third said a delay was likely but that Boeing wanted to get production “going hard” to put planes in the air by 2022-2023.

“There are so many widebody aircraft being retired, mothballed”, the third person said. “If air travel comes back to 2019 levels, many new planes will be needed”. — Reuters

BUSINESS

MSM WITNESSES SHARP RECOVERY

MUSCAT: OMSM30 closed the week up by 3.29 per cent on the back of a recovery across all sub-indices led by the financial index at 4.72 per cent. The Shariah index was up by 0.04 per cent.

Foreigners continued to remain net sellers and sold \$10.9m worth of securities while Omanis and GCC investors remained net buyers of securities.

During the week, Majlis Ash'shura discussed the Value Added Tax (VAT) Draft Law, referred by the Council of Ministers as an urgent matter. The members voted on each article separately after extensive discussions, in light of the report of the Economic and Financial Committee in Majlis Ash'shura.

The report took into account the importance of the project's compatibility with the economic and financial situation of the Sultanate and future aspirations that may have impact on the national economy.

Our analysis of Oman bank results for 1H20 / 2Q20 indicates that the total operating income for 2Q20 of Bank Muscat (BKMB), Bank Dhofar (BKDB), National Bank of Oman (NBOB), Oman Arab Bank (OAB), Sohar International Bank (BKSB), Ahli Bank (ABOB), HSBC Oman (HBMO) and Bank Nizwa (BKNZ) is down 7.5 per cent YoY and 5.8 per cent QoQ on likely reduction in net interest income due to interest payment deferrals mandated by the CBO in its efforts to support borrowers under covid-19 pandemic.

Other operating income for the quarter is also under pressure most likely as a result of CBO's guidance to freeze or reduce fees and ban on introduction of any new fee in 2020, aside from slow new loan origination fee income growth on tepid loan & Islamic finance growth.

Operating profit for the combined entities is down 9.3 per cent YoY and 1.1 per cent QoQ as operating expense reduction outpaced income reduction on QoQ basis vs YoY basis across the board. Combined operating expenses reduced by 5.3 per cent YoY and 10.5

per cent QoQ. Combined net impairment or ECL charge is up 103 per cent YoY, which is expected under the current scenario and banks' complete adoption of the more forward-looking reporting standard, IFRS-9.

Combined net ECL is down 6.4 per cent QoQ primarily because of a slower quarterly rise posted by BKMB and HBMO, having already booked large provisions in 1Q20.

BKDB, NBOB, OAB, BKSB and BKNZ continue to build provisions from the previous quarter. This excludes ABOB as it has not reported Net ECL charge and taxes separately.

On a combined basis, the 8 banks have posted RO 70.1m in total profits for the second quarter of 2020, down by 33 per cent YoY and yet up by 1.8 per cent QoQ on drop in provisions by the largest bank, BKMB, and HBMO.

QoQ profit rise also results from improvement in efficiency (measured by cost-to-income ratio) of some banks, significantly so from BKMB, OAB, BKSB, ABOB and BKNZ and some improvement from HBMO as well.

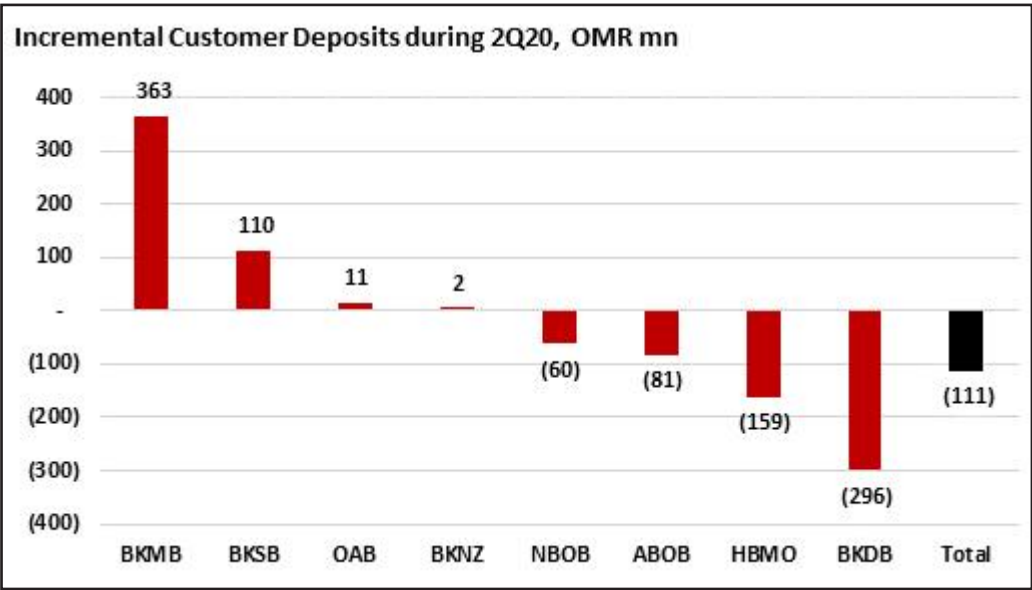
BKDB and NBOB posted deterioration of their cost-to-income ratios as drop in operating income surpassed operating expense decline for the quarter.

The combined Islamic financing & net loans have risen by 1.9 per cent YoY but dropped by 0.6 per cent oQ, with fastest quarterly growth posted by BKNZ at +3.3 per cent QoQ.

Customer deposits are up 4.6 per cent YoY and down 0.5 per cent QoQ. Fastest YoY growth in deposits has been posted by BKSB at 15.1 per cent YoY and BKNZ at 14.4 per cent YoY followed by BKMB at 7.3 per cent YoY and ABOB at 1.7 per cent YoY while both BKDB and HBMO posted YoY declines. On QoQ basis, BKMB, BKSB, OAB and BKNZ have posted growth while the rest have posted declines.

This indicates changes in market share as overall loans & deposits declined in 2Q20.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]



The report took into account the importance of the project's compatibility with the economic and financial situation of the Sultanate and future aspirations that may have impact on the national economy.

Mexico moves to launch world's largest oil hedge



General view shows Mexican state oil firm Pemex's Cadereyta refinery, in Cadereyta, on the outskirts of Monterrey, Mexico — Reuters

MEXICO CITY: Mexico has asked top Wall Street banks to submit quotes for its giant oil hedging programme, sources familiar with the matter said, while trading in crude oil options has increased this week ahead of the megadeal.

The finance ministry has asked banks for price quotes, one source with direct knowledge of the matter said, signalling the beginning of the process to execute the hedge. The ministry was not immediately available for comment.

Every year, Mexico buys as much as \$1 billion in financial contracts, the world's largest oil hedge program, to protect its oil revenues. Bankers and officials on both sides of the deal expect a smaller hedge this year because the options used to protect oil profits are more expensive than last year.

The oil market crashed earlier this year, with the US crude benchmark falling to negative-\$40 a barrel in April. It was trading around \$43 on Friday.

Having the hedge in place protected Mexico from the plunge. The 2020 hedge, arranged in 2019, was completed at \$49 a barrel, according to the country's finance ministry, and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said in April that the hedge would yield roughly 150 billion pesos (\$6 billion).

Because volatility is higher this year, Mexico is expected to pay more for less coverage for the insurance policy for 2021. However, it is expected to go ahead to avoid further damaging its financial standing with international investors, sources have said. The country's credit rating has been cut in recent months and is in danger of additional declines. — Reuters

Bank Muscat launches Woqar scheme for pensioners

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to financial inclusion and provision of banking facilities to all segments of society, Bank Muscat the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate has announced the launch of Woqar Banking Package for pensioners. The package provides a range of banking facilities and services which can be used to meet their needs during retirement. It will allow them to live life with dignity on their own terms, allowing retirees to enjoy a financially secure life.

The products launched

under Woqar Package include flexible-term soft loans for a period ranging from one to 10 years and credit cards based on the value of the pension. Woqar products are available to those under the age of 65 years and have been launched as part of the bank's vision, "To serve you better, everyday" and to provide banking and

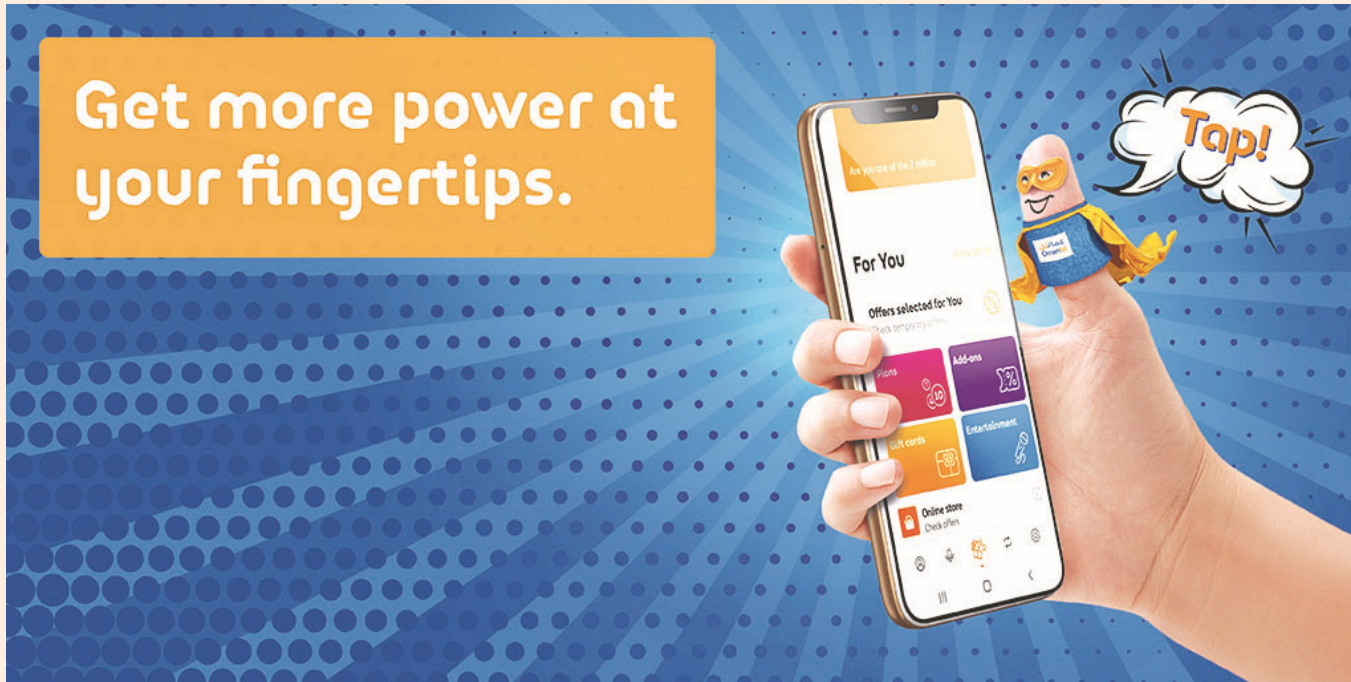


financial products and services to different segments of customers in line with the bank's values of leadership, partnership and innovation.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani (pictured), Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales & Products Development, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to extend financing to pension-

ers and meet their financial requirements and needs. As the nation's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat attaches great importance to social responsibility initiatives aimed at sustaining the country's progress and development and greatly improve financial inclusion. Bank Muscat is focused on continuous endeavours to further strengthen relations with our valued customers and the extension of Woqar reiterates the bank's commitment to provide innovative banking services to all members of society".

Hayyak SIM card can be ordered via Omantel App



MUSCAT: Omantel has announced the introduction of a new service by which customers can buy Hayyak SIM cards through Omantel App. This value-added service recently introduced by Omantel is expected to become the trendsetter for enriching customers' experience. Omantel App has become a one-stop shop through which customers can opt for mobile, fixed and Internet services at their convenience. The App has been fully revamped recently offering even better features and services to Omantel customers including ease of use, simplicity in addition to finger and face recognition.

Commenting on the introduction of this service, Dr Jihad al Ansari, Senior Manager Digital Operations at Omantel said, "We are pleased to announce this additional service to the list of services that customers can enjoy

through Omantel App. We strive at Omantel to enrich our customers' experience through the use of digital channels enabling them to enjoy a truly an improved level of service".

"This service is exceptionally important during the current situation due to the restriction of movements to combat the spread of Coronavirus COVID-19. Customers can now buy new Hayyak SIM cards and select their preferred numbers by following very simple steps in the App without the need to register. Instead, they can simply enter their ID or passport numbers, customer then will be presented with a list of five numbers to select from and then pay the SIM card charge (RO 2). After purchasing, customers can track the status of their order all the way until the SIM card is delivered to their doorstep", Dr Jihad added.

BankDhofar unveils self-service banking solution

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its position as one of the leading banks in Oman and delivering on its commitment to deploy the latest technologies, BankDhofar will begin implementing DN Series self-service solution to deliver best-in-class customer experience across its ATM network. This renovation of BankDhofar's existing self-service network, will enable the bank to deliver next-generation of self-service banking experience. BankDhofar is the first bank in the Sultanate, as well as one of the first banks across the Gulf, to install DN Series as it activates a future-first approach to its consumer service offering.



Commenting on that, Ahmed Said al Ibrahim (pictured), Chief Operating Officer at BankDhofar said: "Customer's expectations are constantly evolving and we have a very clear strategy to deliver agile and innovative technology solutions that will add real value to our customers' daily lives and financial requirements. By partnering with Diebold Nixdorf, we will be able to deliver exactly what our customers need now, as well as a flexible technology solution that will allow us to continue to exceed our customers' expectations in the future".

Managed in partnership with CNS, Diebold Nixdorf's partner in Oman, the DN Series implementation will include both lobby and through-the-wall ATMs enabled with cash recycling capabilities. As a partner to the majority of the world's top 100 financial institutions and top 25 global retailers, Diebold Nixdorf's integrated solutions connect digital and physical channels conveniently, securely and efficiently for millions of consumers each day.

BUSINESS



The 'Fearless Girl' statue is pictured outside the New York Stock Exchange. — Reuters

US economic outlook darkens, job recovery risks reversing

WASHINGTON: The US economic outlook has darkened in the past month amid renewed lockdowns in some states from surging coronavirus cases, according to economists in a Reuters poll who warned of a high risk the job recovery under way reverses by year-end.

US coronavirus cases approached 4 million on Thursday, with over 2,600 new cases every hour on average, the highest rate in the world, and some state governments have reimposed restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

That has raised concerns about the sustainability of the recent rebound in hiring and other economic data, as the world's largest economy, which was propping up global growth before the pandemic, climbs out of a deep hole.

The July 13-22 poll showed the economy contracted 33.8 per cent last quarter on an annualised basis but while it was expected to bounce back with 17.8 per cent growth this quarter and expand 6.5 per cent in the following three months, that was weaker than the 18.5 per cent and 8.0 per cent respective growth predictions made a month ago.

"The current situation presents two risks: Some states might need to shut down more consumer activity to get the virus under control, and the stall in the reopening process might cause longer-term damage to businesses and

The current situation presents two risks: Some states might need to shut down more consumer activity to get the virus under control, and the stall in the reopening process might cause longer-term damage to businesses and the labour market.

the labour market", said David Mericle, chief US economist at Goldman Sachs.

Goldman recently lowered its Q3 growth forecast to 25 per cent, still well above the poll median, from 33 per cent previously. Several banks have reduced their Q3 forecasts in succession in recent months.

In the latest poll, a majority either downgraded or left their forecasts unchanged from last month, with the magnitude on average of those downgrades much bigger than the upgrades, disputing the "V"-shaped recovery expected by financial markets.

Asked for the worst-case scenario

for the world's largest economy, the median response was for a 40.4 per cent contraction in Q2, no growth in the following two quarters, a 9.0 per cent contraction in 2020 and no growth in 2021.

The wider poll suggested weaker growth next year, with medians downgraded for the first half of 2021 compared with the June poll.

Nearly two-thirds of economists, or 35 of 56 who responded to an additional question, said it would take two or more years for the US economy to reach its pre-COVID-19 levels.

The others said it would take place in one to two years, with no respondent predicting it to take less than a year.

Following an unprecedented amount of monetary easing and fiscal spending, discussions about additional government measures are under way.

In the meantime, the Federal Reserve is expected to keep the federal funds rate unchanged at a record low of 0-0.25 per cent until at least 2023. Forecasts for all measures of inflation barely changed in the latest poll.

"Even as the Fed maintains its ultra-loose policy stance and Congress provides further fiscal support, ongoing social distancing requirements are likely to keep GDP well below its pre-virus trend and the unemployment rate elevated over the coming years," said Paul Ashworth, chief US economist at Capital Economics. — Reuters

SPORTS



THOMPSON,
WERENSKI
SHARE 3M
OPEN LEAD

Michael Thompson hits a tee shot on the 11th hole during the second round. – USA Today Sports

WASHINGTON: Michael Thompson, the 2012 US Open runner-up, fired a five-under par 66 to share the lead with fellow American Richy Werenski after Friday's second round of the US PGA's 3M Open.

Thompson, whose lone tour title in 228 starts came at the 2013 Honda Classic, matched Werenski on 12-under 130 after 36 holes at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota.

"I feel comfortable with the sight lines and visuals and that helps off the tee," said Thompson, who shared second to countryman Webb Simpson in his best major showing.

Werenski, ranked 30 spots below Thompson at 248th in the world, made his best 36-hole US PGA start, one stroke lower than his first two rounds at the 2018 Mayakoba Classic.

Americans Tony Finau and Talor Gooch shared third on 131, one stroke back, with China's Zhang



Richy Werenski hits a tee shot on the 8th hole during the second round. – USA Today Sports

Xinjun fifth on 132 after a second-round 67. "You can always build off that going into the weekend," Finau said of his 65-66 start. "I've given myself a chance to win out here."

US defending champion Matthew Wolff and Australian Cameron Davis shared sixth on 133. Wolff is trying to match Daniel Berger from 2016 and 2017 in Memphis by winning his first two US PGA titles at the same event.

Thompson sank three

birdie putts in a row on the front side, making a 12-footer at the par-3 fourth, a 13-footer at the par-4 fifth and rolling in from eight feet at the par-5 sixth. He followed a birdie at 11 with his lone bogey at the par-5 12th, finding a greenside bunker on his approach.

Thompson answered at 14 with a stunning 60-foot chip in for birdie and added another on a 20-foot putt at the par-3 17th. — AFP

USPGA 3M OPEN SCORES

- Second round (par 71; USA unless stated):
- 130 - Michael Thompson 64-66, Richy Werenski 63-67
 - 131 - Tony Finau 65-66, Talor Gooch 66-65
 - 132 - Zhang Xinjun (CHN) 65-67
 - 133 - Matthew Wolff 65-68, Cameron Davis (AUS) 67-66
 - 134 - Bo Van Pelt 66-68, Charl Schwartzel (RSA) 66-68, Patrick Rodgers 66-68, Nick Watney 65-69
 - 135 - Danny Lee (NZL) 67-68, Ryan Moore 65-70, Scott Stallings 71-64, Dylan Frittelli (RSA) 68-67, Harris English 70-65
 - 136 - Tom Hoge 69-67, Adam Schenk 67-69, Bronson Burgoon 66-70, Robby Shelton 68-68, Charles Howell 71-65, Kim si-woo (KOR) 71-65, Alex Noren (SWE) 67-69
 - 137 - Sepp Straka (AUT) 70-67, Austin Cook 67-70, Max Homa 65-72, Brice Garnett 70-67, Stewart Cink 69-68, Robert Garrigus 66-71, Chris Kirk 66-71, Kramer Hickok 67-70, Matthias Schwab (AUT) 70-67



POPE FALLS SHORT OF MAIDEN HOME TEST TON, ENGLAND SCORE 369 IN FIRST INNINGS

Broad batters Windies

MANCHESTER: West Indies claimed early wickets against England on Saturday but then allowed Stuart Broad to smash a quick-fire half century before the hosts were dismissed for 369 at lunch on the second day of the third and final Test at Old Trafford.

Broad hit the joint-third fastest Test half century for England off just 33 balls as he bludgeoned the West Indies attack and put the skids on their early breakthrough after Shannon Gabriel and Kemar Roach, who passed 200 Test wickets, had both made good use of the second new ball.

Only Ian Botham (twice) has got to a Test 50 for England quicker than Broad, who equals past exploits by Allan Lamb and Andrew Flintoff.

Broad was eventually out for 62 off 45 balls, caught at midwicket off the bowling of



Royston Chase, as gave a reminder of his batting ability in a 76-run partnership with Dom Bess, who was 18 not out.

England started poorly as Ollie Pope failed to add to his overnight 91 and was left agonisingly short of a maiden home Test hundred as England resumed on 258-4 but within an hour's play had slumped to 280-8.

Pope was clean bowled by Gabriel, having been beaten by several balls in the opening overs of the day and then dropped at first slip as he edged through to Rakheem Cornwall, who could not hold on to a regulation catch.

But Pope had no answer to the next delivery he faced as it crashed into his off stump.

Chris Woakes became Roach's 200th Test victim

as he played on and was bowled for one and Jos Buttler, who was 56 not out overnight, became the third wicket in just 17 balls as he was taken at second slip by Jason Holder off Gabriel.

The West Indies skipper then repeated the feat as Jofra Archer edged Roach and departed for three runs.

The tourists were then expected to finish off the England innings but Broad turned the pressure back on West Indies as he took to their bowling.

After he departed, tail-ender James Anderson added more to the visitors' frustration by getting to double figures before being the last wicket to fall.

The Test series is level at 1-1 after West Indies won by four wickets at Southampton but England replied with a 113-run victory at Old Trafford.

— Reuters



F1 DEBUT FOR
PORTUGAL'S
PORTIMAO TRACK
AND RETURN FOR
GERMANY'S
NURBURGRING
AND IMOLA
IN ITALY



SCRAPS

US, BRAZIL, MEXICO, CANADA RACES

PARIS: The Grands Prix in the United States, Mexico, Brazil and Canada have been scrapped this year but three races in Europe have been added to the coronavirus-affected season, Formula One said on Friday.

There will be an F1 debut for Portugal's Portimao track and a return for Germany's Nurburgring and Imola in Italy.

The US Grand Prix in Austin, Texas, had been scheduled for October 23, with a race in Mexico City a week later and Brazil on November 13, but with coronavirus infections rising in all those countries, organisers have abandoned attempts to hold races there.

The race in Canada had originally been scheduled for June, but plans to hold

it later in the season have been scrapped due to Canadian travel restrictions.

The race at the historic Nurburgring circuit, which last saw F1 action in 2013, will take place on October 11.

F1 said it still intended to hold between 15 and 18 races "and end in the Gulf in mid-December".

The sport was hit hard by the pandemic, with the season postponed just hours before the opening practice of the traditional curtain raiser in Melbourne in March.

The season finally got underway this month with two races in Austria before moving to Hungary last weekend. The next two races will take place at Silverstone in England on August 2 and August 9.

All events so far have been behind closed doors.

"We are pleased that we continue to make strong progress in finalising our plans for the 2020 season and are excited to welcome Nurburgring, Portimao and Imola to the revised calendar," said Chase Carey, chief executive of Formula One.

"We also want to pay tribute to our incredible partners in the Americas and look forward to being back with them next season when they will once again be able to thrill millions of fans around the world."

Imola, whose race will be on November 1, last held an F1 race in 2006 while Portugal's most recent Grand Prix was 24 years ago at Estoril near Lisbon.

— AFP

REVISED 2020 FORMULA ONE CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR:	
July 31-Aug 2:	British GP (Silverstone)
Aug 7-9:	70th Anniversary GP (Silverstone)
Aug 14-16:	Spanish GP (Barcelona)
Aug 28-30:	Belgian GP (Spa-Francorchamps)
Sept 4-6:	Italian GP (Monza)
Sept 11-13:	Tuscan GP (Mugello)
Sept 25-27:	Russian GP (Sochi)
Oct 9-11:	Eifel GP (Nurburgring)
Oct 23-25:	Portuguese GP (Portimao)
Oct 31-Nov 1:	Emilie-Romagna GP (Imola)

SPORT



PARIS: Paris St Germain's Neymar struck early to secure a 1-0 win over 10-man St Etienne as they claimed a record-extending 13th Coupe de France on Friday in a near empty stadium as French soccer came out of a four-month break due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Brazilian scored on the rebound in the 14th minute after PSG fellow forward Kylian Mbappe sprinted clear and saw his shot blocked by goalkeeper Jessy Moulin, with only 5,000 fans in the 80,000-seater Stade de France due to strict health protocols.

Earlier, French President Emmanuel Macron had met the players on the pitch but kept his distance and wore a face mask.

The atmosphere in the run-up to the first professional game in France after the long hiatus was far from festive with only a handful of people around the stadium before the match.

The contest got off to an eventful start with Yvann Macon felling Neymar in the opening seconds to earn a yellow card and St Etienne's Denis Bouanga hitting the post in the fifth minute.

But it was the Parisians who scored when Neymar pounced on Moulin's save to fire in.

Loic Perrin's rough tackle

NEYMAR

SECURES FRENCH CUP FOR PSG

MBAPPE SUFFERS ANKLE INJURY IN FINAL AGAINST ST ETIENNE



in the 26th put Mbappe out of the game. The St Etienne captain was sent off in his last game and four other players were booked as tempers briefly flared.

With Ligue 1 champions PSG chasing a quadruple of titles this season, the few fans in the stands breathed a sigh of relief when Mbappe returned on crutches to the bench after the interval, joking and laughing with his team-mates.

"It went crack," Mbappe was heard telling Macron of his injury during the trophy ceremony. Macron then asked whether anything was broken and Mbappe said "No, I don't think so."

St Etienne kept finding ways into the PSG box even after going a man down but missed out on adding to their six Cup wins.

"We won the final and that is what matters," PSG coach Thomas Tuchel said. His team had lost last year's final to Stade Rennes on penalties.

The German was also angry with the way St Etienne had played from the start.

"It was complicated with all the fouls to Thilo Kehrer, Neymar and Mbappe. In the last three matches against St Etienne they get a red card in the first 30 minutes. I don't know what is being said in their dressing room. It is horrible. I can't understand it. — Reuters

FEATURES

WITH PEOPLE IN LOCKDOWN, THE SEA TURTLES IN RAS AL JINZ ARE THRIVING



Hundreds of sea turtles are currently nesting in different beaches in Oman particularly the sea turtle reserve in Ras al Jinz. A yearly attraction that pulled in more than 50k visitors annually, this year's visitor record is perhaps the lowest in the last 5 years and it's not necessarily bad for the sea turtles... **page 20**

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With people in lockdown, the sea turtles in Ras al Jinz are thriving



YERU EBUEN

There were eight of them on the beach when we arrived. Four were burrowing holes while the others were already quietly laying their eggs.

The tide was high and the waves were crashing on the rocky shores a few meters away but the sea turtles had adapted and moved a little farther inland creating nests where the waves wouldn't reach the eggs.

On the sand are dozens of drag marks. The eight we were looking at were just some of the hundreds who nest on this secret beach in Ras al Jinz every year.

Unknown to the masses, all the beaches between Ras al Hadd and the Ras al Jinz hotel are nesting sites. Whether they are long beaches close to coastal villages or small coves formed between crevices of cliffs, the sea turtles find nesting sites where they can and it is for this very reason why the area was declared a protected site.

The sea turtle season is an annual attraction that pulls in thousands of people interested to learn and see these fascinating sea creatures. By the end of 2019 alone, government agencies including the Ministry of Tourism recorded around 70,000 visits to the Ras al Jinz Scientific Centre.

The most popular seasons for the visits are the nesting and egg hatching seasons but while the rest of the months they don't come to the beach, many of the sea turtles can be seen by the water either

feeding or mating.

The lockdown this year, a response prompted by the growing Covid19 cases, has resulted in a lesser number of people visiting the sea turtle nesting sites. Even the nesting beach at the famed shores of Shangri-la Barr al Jissah Resort and Spa has been off-limits for viewing as per the hotel's social media team.

A turtle ranger who requested not to be named said that without the human disruption, the sea turtles "are enjoying the peace and quiet of their surrounding."

The site we visited received nearly 40 mother sea turtles all ready to lay eggs in 24 hours. It was, by far, the most number of sea turtles we saw in the last three years of the visit to the same spot.

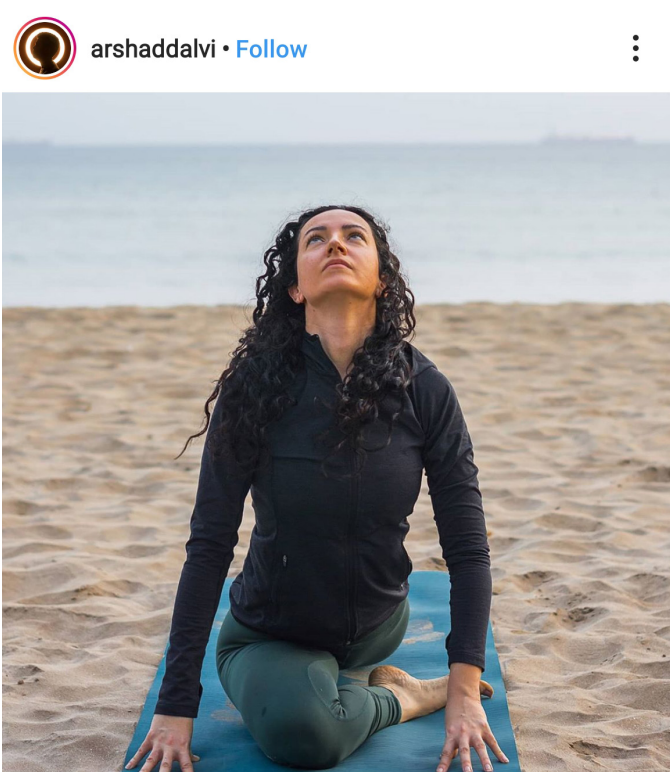
Even in the morning as we reinspected the nesting grounds, we found 8 turtles waiting for the tide to rise as they use the power of the waves to help them propel forward back into the water.

"Personally, I think there were more sea turtles who nested this year. I find several of them in almost all the beaches I stop over for a visit. With less disturbance from human visitors, they seem to have gotten comfortable laying their eggs," the ranger said.

And our Oman Observer team would have to agree. With the new lockdown in place, however, many would have to miss the nesting season this year. Hopefully, though, we will be given an opportunity to watch the hatchlings emerge from their nests as they rush back to the ocean for their first swim. Even that too, is something definitely worth seeing in a few months.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Norway quarantine is no obstacle for secret agent Ethan Hunt



OSLO: The Norwegian government will make an exception for Tom Cruise and his crew to shoot parts of a new “Mission: Impossible” movie in Norway this autumn without imposing quarantine requirements, a minister said on Friday.

Production of the seventh and eighth instalments of Paramount Pictures’ lucrative action movie franchise was halted in February due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The seventh movie is currently scheduled for release in November 2021 and the eighth in November 2022.

Cruise will reprise his role as secret agent Ethan Hunt in both movies with Christopher McQuarrie returning as director.

“It (the filming) will be carried out under a comprehensive infection (prevention) regime,” Minister of Agriculture and Food Olaug Bollestad told

a news conference.

“The participants will be separated from others during their stay in Norway, and that means that not everyone will get to see these heartthrobs,” she added.

The production crew must have COVID-19 tests before and after arrival in Norway, and have medical personnel and a mobile test lab on hand.

Norwegian media said Cruise personally appealed to Norway’s Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Culture Minister Abid Raja to allow filming, which has been interrupted by the virus outbreak in Italy.

In a video call with Cruise confirmed by Raja’s office, the minister said: “We are so much looking forward to have you back.”

Cruise replied: “Oh man, me too. I cannot wait.”

He added: “I love the people, the culture, the views, your fjords, mountains, every part

of Norway. It’s a gorgeous country...”

The culture ministry said the quarantine exception was made because the movie had already received a grant of 50 million Norwegian crowns (\$5.44 million) from the Norwegian Film Institute to be shot in Norway.

The “Mission: Impossible” movies are one of the biggest franchises in Hollywood, with 2018’s “Mission: Impossible-Fallout”, which also had scenes filmed in Norway, taking more than \$791 million at the worldwide box office.

With the exception of people from about 20 European countries with low infection rates, visitors have to go into a 10-day quarantine when arriving in Norway. On Friday, the Norwegian government re-imposed quarantine requirements for Spain, but lifted them for Hungary. — **Reuters**

Taylor Swift changes it up with ‘Folklore’ and earns rave reviews



LOS ANGELES: Taylor Swift on Friday won some of the best reviews of her career with an album produced entirely during the coronavirus crisis that breaks new ground for the Grammy-winning artist.

“Folklore” features the 30-year-old singer, who began as a country star then turned to pop, showing a quieter indie folk sensibility that took fans and music critics by surprise.

Rolling Stone said the album, with dreamy forest cover art, contained “the most head-spinning, heart-breaking, emotionally ambitious songs of her life.”

“‘Folklore’ really feels like the debut album of a whole new Swift,” the music publication said. The album went to No. 1 on the worldwide iTunes chart within hours of its release.

Working with alternative artist Bon Iver and Aaron Dessner, guitarist with indie rock band The National, the 16 songs on “Folklore” arrived with just 24 hours advance notice. Its release comes less than a year after Swift’s 2019 album “Lover,” which included the dancy lead single “Me!” Billboard called “Folklore” a “daring new vision of her artistry without a bad song in the batch,” while the Los Angeles Times called it the perfect quarantine album. — **Reuters**

FEATURES

Rembrandt and Picasso entice life back to auctions after lockdown

LONDON: Works by Rembrandt, Miro and Picasso are being offered to entice life back to the auction world next week when Sotheby's holds its first face-to-face sale since the coronavirus in London with a line-up from the Renaissance to the European Avant Garde.

With art collectors locked down from Moscow to Manhattan and some fortunes in peril from the worst economic hit in centuries, the art auction world is trying to bring back some sparkle after the gloom of the pandemic.

Sotheby's will on Tuesday hold its first face-to-face auction at its Bond Street sale-rooms since the outbreak, with 71 works spanning half a millennium of European art history, from Gerhard Richter to Rembrandt.

The Rembrandt is a self portrait of the artist as a young man, one of only three left in private hands. The Dutch master looks out with the slightly affected confidence of youth. Price tag: 12-16 million pounds (\$15-20 million).

One of Miro's dream paintings, *Peinture (Femme au chapeau rouge)*, from 1927, shows a woman floating against striking blue, deliberately obscure like a wistful love poem. It is on offer for 20-30 million pounds.

"It's fantastic to be back in the galleries here in Bond Street," Helena Newman, chairman of Sotheby's Europe, told Reuters.

The Picasso is a seductive image of his lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter, *Femme Endormie*. In charcoal on primed canvas, her curved

face, arms and lips are visible but her body is only hinted at. Price: 6-9 million pounds.

"A statuesque and mysterious creature: a kind of goddess even, embodying youth and innocence and pure force of life," art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon said of the portrait.

Fast forward 40 years to Richter's *Clouds (Window)*, which evoke the Romantic landscapes of Constable and the light-effects of Turner. On sale for 9-20 million pounds.

Presale estimates for the auction range from 128.8 million pounds to 185.8 million pounds.

There will be limited attendance and bidders will be in a separate room to the auctioneer. Admittance is by ticket. — Reuters

