



HIS MAJESTY THANKED BY EMIR OF KUWAIT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty’s condolences cable on the death of Shaikh Nasser Al Hamoud Al Jaber al Sabah.

In his cable, Shaikh Sabah expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty’s sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased’s soul in peace and protect His Majesty against all harms. — **ONA**

LOCKDOWN OF ALL GOVERNORATES

CHECKPOINTS TO BE ACTIVATED
FROM JULY 25 TO AUGUST 8

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in a meeting on Tuesday, decided a complete lockdown of all governorates of the Sultanate from Saturday (July 25) to Saturday (August 8).

The meeting, held at the Interior Ministry to follow up developments of the pandemic and measures of prevention of its propagation, was chaired by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. The Supreme Committee also banned movement of people, and announced the daily closure of all public places and commercial outlets during the lockdown period from 7 pm to 6 am.

Police patrols will be



intensified and command and control points will be activated in the daytime during the lockdown period, said a statement issued by the Supreme Committee, which also banned all types of assembling or gatherings, including Eid al Adha prayers and traditional pre-Eid souq/trading activities (habta), as well as any exchange of Eid visits among families or group gatherings to celebrate Eid.

The decisions were taken in view of the considerable rise in number of people being infected with COVID-19. These are necessary measures to protect individuals and society from the disease and to ease pressure on health sector and enhance its capacity to handle the situation.

The committee prayed for the Almighty’s divine protection of all people against all harms. — **ONA**

FIRST DAY OF EID AL ADHA ON JULY 31

MUSCAT: The Main Committee for Sighting the Moon of Dhul Hijjah, 1441AH, has declared that the moon has been sighted on Tuesday evening. Consequently, Wednesday, July 22, will be the first day of Dhul Hijjah, 1441 AH, and Friday, July 31, will be the first day of the blessed Eid al Adha.

In a statement, the committee said: “By grace of Allah the Almighty, the Main Committee for Sighting the Moon of Dhul Hijjah, 1441 AH convened on Tuesday evening under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

The meeting was attended by His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, Shaikh Ahmed bin Saud al Siyabi, Secretary-General at the Office of the Sultanate’s Grand Mufti, Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Shaikh Abdul Jalil bin Mohammed al Kamali, Supreme Court Judge, and Shaikh Mohammed bin Salem bin Dahman al Nahdi, a Judge at the Court of Appeals. — **ONA**

Checkpoints to be reinstated across Sultanate from Saturday

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: All major checkpoints across the country, besides those in Muscat covering Muttrah and Hamriya wilayats, will be reinstated as per the Supreme Committee decision.

The three major checkpoints, cordoning off the area from the rest of the city, are Darsait intersection, entry point near the Oman House, and Hamriya roundabout, controlling the movement of vehicles as well as people in and around the areas.

"All the inter-governorate checkpoints which were removed a few weeks ago



will be reinstated from July 25 owing to the increasing number of cases and to avoid the possibilities of people gathering during the Eid holidays," a senior ROP official told the Observer.

The total lockdown was

promulgated in Muscat Governorate on April 10 as the number of COVID-19 cases spiked and the Ministry of Health opened five testing centres for both citizens and residents in different areas.

"I feel checkpoints are

needed to have total control over the situation as this can control people's movement around the city," Jancy Joy commented.

People may be asked to show ID cards and company letters during checking at the checkpoints.

"I travel from Wadi Kabir to Qurum daily and I have to cross the major checkpoint of Darsait intersection where I was asked to show the letter from my office and my ID as well as tenancy contract confirming that I'm a resident of Wadi Kabir," Dilna Sujith, a private sector employee recalled her experience during the last lockdown.

OMAN OBSERVER

Together, we shall overcome

MOH Statement 145

Today's Total Cases

Omanis
1159

1487

Non-Omanis
328

Total Cases 69887

Recoveries
1458

Deaths
11

Tested
4701

Total 46608

Total 337

Total 279446

Admitted Cases
67

Newly admitted
582

Currently admitted
169

Current ICU admissions

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1,487 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 11 DEATHS

MUSCAT: As many as 1,487 new cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) were reported in the Sultanate on Tuesday in addition to 11 new COVID-19 related deaths.

Of the new cases, 1,159 were Omanis and 328 residents. This brings the total number of positive

COVID-19 cases to 69,887 in the Sultanate, in addition to 337 deaths, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry also pointed out that 1,458 new cases have recovered, bringing the total number to 46,608 cases. — **ONA**

Sale of Electric Lighting Items

Younis Nasser Mubarak Al Shuaibi Trading

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Those who are interested to purchase the same are hereby requested to contact mobile number 96477644 to view and inspect the said items located at a warehouse in Wadi Kabir on Sunday and Monday dated 26th and 27th July 2020.

Offers to purchase need to be submitted in writing latest on Wednesday 29th July 2020 before 5pm, for studying and evaluating the same and making appropriate decision as to offers sufficiency and acceptability.

The Management

With vaccine tests abound, WHO keen on safety

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: Almost seven months have passed since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. All these days some hope of finding a vaccine for the pandemic has become very imminent, especially with the emergence of successful trials in several countries around the world, including China, Britain and America.

Talking to media, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari (pictured), the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said that the Organisation is currently monitoring more than 1,700 clinical trials worldwide to test approximately 200 treatment options or combinations of these options.

There are 23 candidate vaccines subject to clinical evaluation. Another 140 candidate vaccines are under pre-clinical evaluation. "We confirm that many clinical trials of treatments are already underway, with steps and measures to ensure the safety and efficacy of vaccines and treatment."

Al Mandhari added, "What is certain is that vaccine production will not initially meet the needs of everyone, so a careful identification of the highest priority groups is taking place, such as health workers who are on the front lines in fighting the virus."

According to BBC, a coronavirus vaccine developed by the University of Oxford appears safe and triggers an immune response. A technique similar to the Oxford one, developed in China, also seems promising. In total there are 23 vaccines in clinical trials around the world and an-



other 140 in early-stage development.

In Russia, officials said that the first Russian vaccine for COVID-19 is now ready. Ruslan Tsalikov, First Deputy Minister of Defence, confirmed that all the volunteers who participated in the vaccine test are safe and have immunity to the virus. With this, it can be said that the first domestic vaccine against COVID-19 infection is ready.

At the beginning of this week, the China National Biotechnology Group (CNPC) said that the results of human tests for one of the possible vaccines to prevent the emerging coronavirus indicate that it may be safe and effective. It is the second possible vaccine from the company that produces encouraging results in clinical trials. This comes as authorities have allowed Chinese companies and research centers to test eight possible human vaccines in China and abroad, putting China in an advanced position in the race to develop a vaccine to prevent the pandemic.

However, the WHO Regional Director asserted that in light of the continued search for a treatment, the safety of any drug products and their efficacy in treating COVID-19 has not yet been proven.

"Hydroxychloroquine was recently returned to clinical trials after a temporary pause. More than 100 countries are participating in the experiment, including Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Kuwait from our region. Jordan is on the way to joining. In general, about 40 hospitals from the region were included in those trials," he added.

Govt determines fees for private PCR testing

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health issued a circular on Tuesday determining the fees for COVID-19 testing in private health institutions.

According to the circular, the fees for taking samples for COVID-19 should not exceed RO 5 per sample, and these fees do not include the value of the laboratory examination.

The statement stated that after the approval of the Minister of Health, the price of laboratory tests for COVID-19 samples was determined, whether for the purpose of travel or to obtain medical reports (free of disease or examination of suspected cases).

The fee for PCR realtime sample is RO30, the PCR point of care is RO45, and the immune test is RO14.

IATA called on governments intending

to introduce COVID-19 testing for travellers to deliver cost-effective test results quickly, accurately, and at scale.

PCR testing can be a useful layer of protection for travellers from countries considered as higher risk, potentially removing the need for more burdensome and intrusive measures such as quarantine, which is a major barrier to travel and the recovery of demand.

PCR gives us a good indication of who is infected. They can be isolated and get in contact with people they've been in touch with so they can be quarantined too, just in case.

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#Living_with_COVID19

Role of industrial incubators in reducing virus impact discussed

MUSCAT: The Research Council (TRC), represented by Innovation Park Muscat (IPM) through video conferencing, participated in a workshop on the 'Role of industrial incubators and business accelerators in reducing the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic'.

The workshop, organised by the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), was attended by 50 delegates representing 15 Arab countries.

The workshop aimed at highlighting the significance of incubators and business accelerators in the industrial field as means to reduce the economic and social repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to work to polarise young people, entrepreneurs and new graduates to establish small and medium industrial enterprises.

Iman al Shukaili, a Business Development Specialist at IPM, spoke in the submitted paper about the impact of the pandemic in general, the efforts of incubators and business



accelerators in particular, and the measures taken during such crisis.

In addition, she reviewed the experience of TRC and IPM through the Makers Oman Center, and the virtual incubators programme in linking enterprise development institutions and R&D centres.

The paper also focused on a range of initiatives by small and

medium enterprises through platforms and websites, and their efforts to meet the needs of individuals and thus increasing their sales and ensuring their permanence, in addition to the facilities and incentives provided by various government entities to support the ambitious youth in entrepreneurship through a wide network of partners.

Iman concluded her paper by clarifying the Sultanate's role in learning about the best business practices based on leadership, innovation and knowledge in the world to select the most appropriate tools and mechanisms that would support Oman's vision 2040 in the transition towards the knowledge-based economy.

— ONA

Compare rates, complete vehicle insurance online

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: An online platform was launched on Tuesday that allows customers to get their vehicles insured after comparing rates with multiple service providers and complete the process within minutes.

Eng Said bin Nasser al Rashdi, founder of Insurance House, the owner, and developer of the platform, said, www.bima.om is now ready to take on a large number of customers, with operations that extend for the whole day till midnight. Standing in line to get insurance for your car will be something of



the past and forgotten within a couple of years.

Bima will expand to cover non-automotive insurance services as domestic workers' coverage was introduced last month. Travel, property and term life insurance lined up to be

included next.

Al Rashdi added, "During the past four months, during which we launched the initial operation of the platform, which coincided with the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, 'Bima' platform managed to issue

thousands of insurance policies for vehicles online easily and successfully around the clock on behalf of five insurance companies, Arabia Falcon, Al Madina Takaful, New India, Oman Qatar and Oman United Insurance. In addition, we have recently signed up with three new companies to provide their services through the site in the near future."

Al Rashdi thanked the Capital Market Authority for its support to the new idea, specifically ones that utilise the technology to ease the consumer's experience and guarantee a safe and smooth transaction.

OMAN

Elderly dependency ratio stands at 7 per cent

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The elderly dependency ratio in the Sultanate reached as low as seven per 100 persons of working age, while the child dependency ratio stood at 65 per 100 in 2019.

At the same time, the age dependency ratio for Omanis reached 72 persons per 100 of working age in the same year.

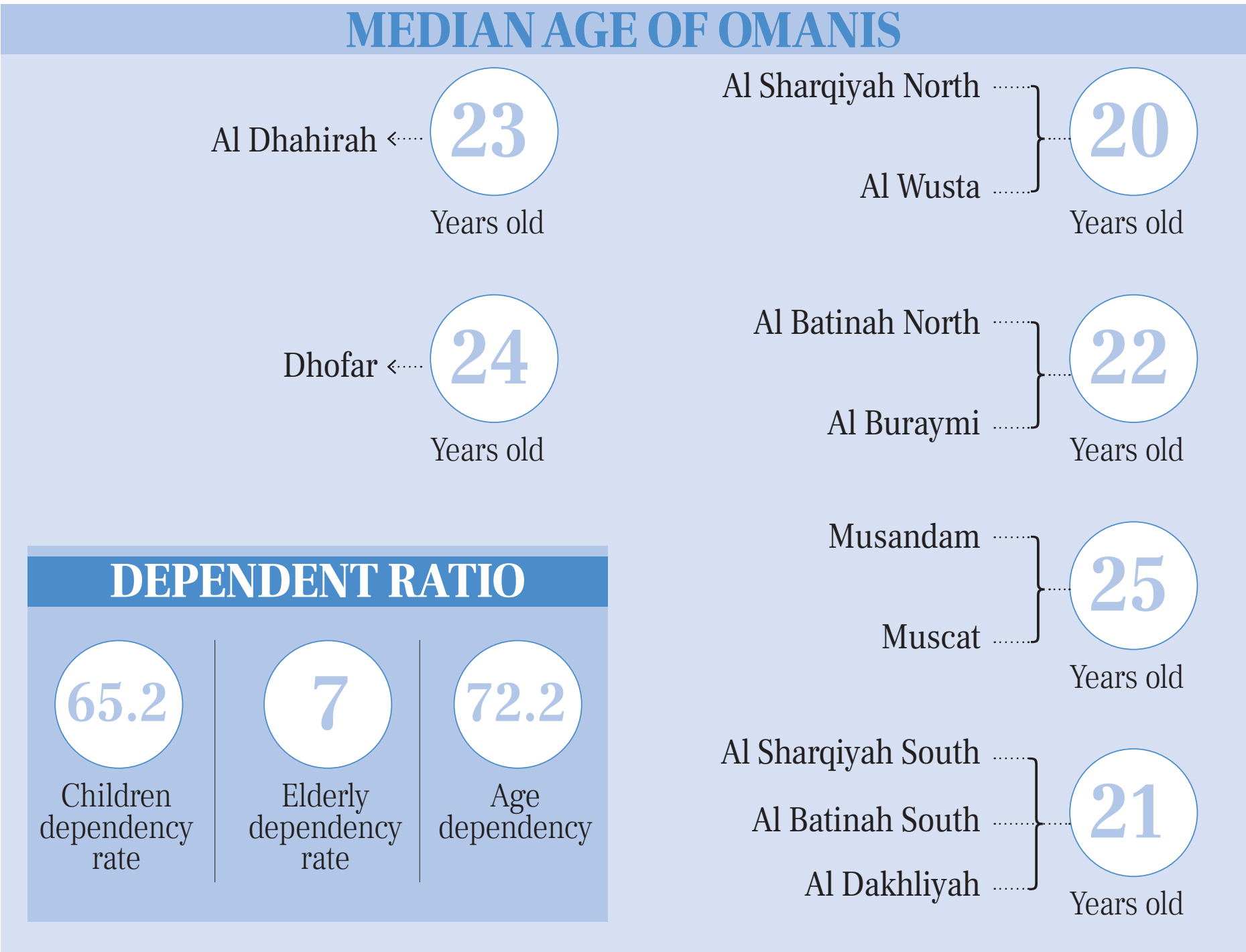
This is revealed in a report on the population statistical features for the period between 1993 and 2019 issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Globally, the dependency ratio is a measure of the number of dependents aged zero to 14 and over the age of 65, compared with the total population aged 15 to 64.

While the median age of Omanis is found to be 22 years, in the governorates of Muscat and Musandam it increased to 25, followed by Dhofar with 24 years.

"The lowest was registered in Al Wusta and Al Sharqiyah North with 20 years," the report points out.

Median age is the age that divides a population into two numerically equally sized groups - that is, half the people are younger than this age and half are older. It



is a single index that summarises the age distribution of a population.

"The sex ratio of the Omani population is 101 males per 100 females," the report shows.

According to the NCSI report, the distribution of population pyramid for Omanis by gender in 2019 was almost equal, as the percentage of males stood at 50.4 per cent against 49.6 per cent females.

"Omani youth and children, who are less than 29 years old, represent the largest segment of 64 per cent while children, younger than five years old form 15 per cent," the report, which sheds light on the numerical change of Omani and expatriate population during the period, reveals.

The average life expectancy in the Sultanate at the end of 2018 stood at 78.1 years, up from 77.9 years in 2017, whereas the total fertility rate stood at 2.9 births per woman aged between 15 and 45 years from 2014 to 2018.

The life expectancy of Omanis in 2018 reached 77 years, with 75 years for men and 79.1 years for women.

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR THE SIX MONTH ENDED 30th JUNE 2020	UNAUDITED & PROVISIONAL BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30th JUNE 2020	
Respected shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present herewith the result of National Real Estate Development and Investments Co. (SAOG) for the first Six-month period ended 30th June 2020.	2020 RO	2019 RO
Operational Result The Company recorded an un-audited net loss of RO. 9,670 up to the 2nd quarter ended June 2020 versus (2019: RO. 37,557 loss). There was no revenue and no volume up to 30th June 2020.	EMPLOYMENT OF FUNDS:	
	Non Current Asset	9,383,053
Finally, on behalf of the shareholders and the Board I wish to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq Bin Taimour for his wise leadership and guidance.	Current Assets	215,364
	Current Liabilities	485
For the Board of Directors Chairman	Net Current Assets	214,879
		9,597,932
NOTE: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request.	FUNDS EMPLOYED:	
	Share Capital	1,762,500
	Legal reserve	507,275
	Revaluation reserve	7,637,254
	Retained earnings	(1,688,532)
		8,218,497
	Non-current liabilities	1,379,435
		9,597,932
	UNAUDITED & PROVISIONAL PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE 2020	
	2020 RO	2019 RO
	Sales	-
	Cost of Sales	-
	Gross Profit	-
	Other Operating Income	2,586
	Expenses before Depreciation	(12,256)
	Profit before Depreciation	(9,670)
	Depreciation	-
	Net profit/(loss) after Depreciation	(9,670)

Shura refers draft laws to State Council

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura referred the drafts of the Value Added Tax (VAT) Law and the Income Tax Law to the State Council after voting on the remaining articles through the Economic and Financial Committee's report.

Saleem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Economic and Financial Committee, said that after studying the drafts Value Added Tax Law and Income Tax Law, referred by the Council of Ministers as a

matter of urgency, the committee has agreed with what was stated by the two drafts. Following the council members unanimous vote on the committee's report, the drafts were referred to the State Council.

This happened at the eleventh ordinary meeting of the current annual sitting (2019-2020) of Majlis Ash'shura held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali. — ONA

OMAN

Cyber security key to individual safety

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: COVID-19 has created a situation in which people have to be fully dependent on online platforms, and at the same time they have to be extra cautious to keep safe from the unseen criminals called hackers or spammers.

Perform or perish is the need of the hour where any lax attitude may be detrimental. The situation requires a certain degree of awareness in every individual who is exposed to any cyber activity.

Dr R Venkateswaran (pictured), an expert in networking and information security, agrees with the current situation and calls for a greater sense of self-awareness to be safe while exposed to the vast world of the Internet.

In an interview with the Observer, he said, "We should understand that we are now living in a generation where privacy has become a thing of the past. By using the Internet services and applications, you already have decided to give up your privacy. The irony of the situation is, we do not have any choice, and these apps are part of our day-to-day business and personal communication," he



said. He puts stress on self-awareness and basic level expertise to be able to differentiate between good and bad applications (Apps) in terms of security and safety.

"Based on reliable and current data, national

cyber security concerns should be dealt with by the government to protect its people. But, as a mobile user, we should be aware that our privacy is not private anymore. We should be alert," he said.

This is scary to read the privacy policy of popular mobile Apps, as they seek all sorts of information as a matter of security. "All belong to the same league, it seems."

"No denying the fact that

most of the companies analyse the data to understand and meet their customers' needs and demands. They also use these data to improve their services and goods to be at par on the digital or business competition."

In this time of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the industries and academe are transitioning from brick-and-mortar to online platforms. Setting up and managing business and academe through online is not complicated.

"Just get the appropriate training, equipment and Apps. But, be aware and knowledgeable about the proliferation of online security threats, such as but not limited to: phishing, fake website, fake calls, spam e-mails, ransomware attack and Wi-Fi spoofing."

Being an IT expert, he suggests that data security

should be integrated while being online. "Always secure the mainstream device by installing anti-virus. Be aware of every App that you install, download Apps from trusted online stores. Do not register your credit and debit card details on any unknown websites. Do not click links to unknown websites. Avoid spam mail checking and response. Be aware and vigilant of fake calls and responses. Always try to use two factors authentication. Disable Siri option on a smart phone if not needed. Always check the camera and microphone permission while using the App. At home, switch off Wi-Fi networks that are not in use and make sure strong security settings are configured to prevent unauthorised Wi-Fi access," he said.

Dr Venkateswaran has a long list of advice. For the industry sector, he suggests the mobile security policies should be available and strictly followed by all employees. Strong firewalls should be installed. Secure the phones connected to a private server by using a VPN, and regularly update all computers' anti-virus and firewall configuration.

"By implementing this advice, you will be able to significantly reduce the cyber attacks. But always remember, security for today is not the same with the security for tomorrow. Always read and update your knowledge. Be safe," he advised.

Knowledge Oman to host webinar on positivity

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman will host Cornell Thomas (pictured), renowned international motivational speaker, coach and the founder of Positivity Summit, to encourage and motivate society to find the silver lining of the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Knowledge Oman virtual webinar will be held on July 26 and is open for registration for free to anyone to attend, learn and benefit from the session.

"We promise to present some insightful perspectives on the power of positivity that lies within each and every individual," said Balqees al Hassani, leading the initiative from Knowledge Oman.

Cornell Thomas wears many hats and also runs his own Executive Coaching Programme for CEOs that focuses on Emotional Intelligence, team building and culture.

Attendees of Knowledge Oman's virtual webinar will have the opportunity to interact with Cornell Thomas for discovering the power



of positivity to change their lives for the better.

Registration for the webinar is open at Knowledge

Oman's website at www.knowledgeoman.com/register. As a renowned global speaker, multiple title author, social entrepreneur, corporate trainer and mindset coach, Cornell Thomas's vision is to touch and impact the lives of people across the world through his words.

The pandemic did not deter him from continuing with the Positivity Summit, scheduled to take place this year, as he went on to open the summit to the global community in an effort to unite and heal humanity.

EU agrees huge virus aid plan as Trump backs face masks

BRUSSELS: European leaders on Tuesday agreed a massive aid package for their pandemic-ravaged economies, as US President Donald Trump finally came out in favour of face masks as a tool against the coronavirus.

The virus has infected more than 14.7 million people and killed over 610,000 of them since emerging in China late last year, with fresh alarm being sounded over its accelerating spread in Africa.

After a fractious, 90-hour summit, European leaders finally agreed on a rescue package of 750 billion euros (\$858 billion) to try and pull their bloc out of a deep recession. The pandemic has devastated the global economy.

"This is a historic change for Europe," said French President Emmanuel Macron, while German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed relief that the EU had, in her eyes, shown itself equal to



"the greatest crisis" in its history.

The package will send tens of billions of euros to countries hit hardest by the virus, most notably heavily indebted Spain and Italy who had lobbied hard for a major gesture from their EU partners.

The talks saw strong resistance from some nations against sending money to countries they considered too lax with public spending.

There was criticism from others that the compromises made were too great. Teenage climate campaigner Greta Thunberg tweeted her disappointment.

"As expected the #EUCO resulted in some nice words, some vague distant incomplete climate targets nearly impossible to track and a complete denial of the climate emergency," she wrote. Britain, who left the EU in

January and will not benefit from the aid plan, revealed on Tuesday that state borrowing had rocketed to a record £127.9 billion (\$162.5 billion, 142 billion euros) in the three months to June.

Britain has suffered Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 45,000 deaths recorded to date.

And with even richer nations struggling, experts have warned that the impact would be harshest in poorer regions of the world like Africa.

The World Health Organization sounded the alarm about the situation there, particularly in South Africa, where the death toll crossed 5,000 over the weekend.

With no effective treatment yet, there are few options available to combat the spread of the virus, though they do include face masks -- which Trump and his political allies refused to encourage for months.

— AFP
See also P14

IN BRIEF

Israeli says annexation is not currently on the agenda

TEL AVIV: Israel's foreign minister said on Tuesday that annexation of parts of the West Bank "is not currently on the agenda," as the country grapples with a second wave of coronavirus infections. Gabi Ashkenazi's comments come after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected on July 1 to advance annexation plans that he had loudly touted, but failed to do so and has since gone quiet on the issue. "We said before July 1 that this date was not sacred. What is sacred is the state of Israel and its security," Ashkenazi said in an interview with Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot. "We stand by our position and our position is not a secret," he continued.

India, US closing in on trade deal: Minister

NEW DELHI: India and the United States are closing in on a trade deal, Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday, after two years of negotiations. India is seeking concessions for generic drugs it exports to the United States in return for opening its dairy markets and slashing tariffs on farm goods as the two sides seek to clinch a new trade accord, three sources said. They have been negotiating a limited trade pact aimed also at restoring zero tariffs on a range of Indian exports to the United States under its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), from which the Trump administration withdrew last year, citing lack of reciprocal access to Indian markets.

US defence secretary says he plans to visit China

WASHINGTON: US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Tuesday he plans to visit China this year for talks on "crisis communications," as Washington takes a tougher stance against Beijing in the disputed South China Sea. Esper said he has spoken to his Chinese counterpart several times and hopes to make the trip by year's end. He told a security seminar that one of the goals of the trip would be to "establish the systems necessary for crisis communications and reinforce our intentions to openly compete in the international system in which we all belong."

— Agencies

WORLD



Nearly one in four New Delhi residents had COVID-19: survey

NEW DELHI: Almost one in four people in New Delhi have been infected with the coronavirus, a study testing antibodies of a random sample of people in the Indian capital published on Tuesday showed.

According to the result of the survey, 23.48 per cent of the 21,387 people whose blood samples were tested had COVID-19 antibodies, a government statement said.

The study, which was conducted by the National Center for Disease Control, showed that the infection rate in New Delhi was much higher than the number of confirmed cases indicated.

For a city with an approximate population of 20 million, the total number of cases at a 23.4 per cent rate should stand around 4.7 million. But Delhi currently has a total of 123,747 cases, less than 1 per cent of its population.

The government said the difference indicated that a “large number of infected persons remain asymptomatic” and commended “proactive efforts” like lockdown measures to prevent the spread of infection.

As only 23.48 per cent of people were affected in Delhi six months into the epidemic, a significant pro-

portion of the population remained vulnerable and containment and preventive measures needed to continue with the same vigour, the government added.

Delhi, along with Mumbai, is one of the epicentres of the outbreak in India, although infections in both cities have declined in recent days.

Delhi recorded 954 new cases on Monday, down from its previous single-day spike of 3,947 infections on June 23. Overall, 3,663 people have died from COVID-19 in the city.

With a total of 1.1 million coronavirus cases, India is the third-worst hit country of the global pandemic, after the United States and Brazil.

NEPAL FLIGHTS: Nepal said on Tuesday it will resume international commercial flights in mid-August, in a boost for its coronavirus-hit tourism sector.

The Himalayan nation shut its airports in late March to combat the spread of the virus, which has so far infected 17,844 people and claimed 40 lives in the country.

The shutdown hit just before the peak of the tourism season, when hundreds of mountaineers and trekkers visit Nepal, costing the industry — a key part of the economy — millions of dollars.

— Agencies

DELHI, ALONG WITH MUMBAI, IS ONE OF THE EPICENTRES OF THE OUTBREAK IN INDIA, ALTHOUGH INFECTIONS IN BOTH CITIES HAVE DECLINED IN RECENT DAYS.

IN BRIEF

Proof of no coronavirus for all China arrivals

BEIJING: Anyone going to China will have to prove they don't have coronavirus before boarding their flight, Beijing announced on Tuesday, as the country seeks to prevent new infections after easing travel restrictions. China has been relaxing a ban on most foreign travellers that was imposed in March to prevent an influx of infections after authorities largely brought the domestic epidemic under control. All arrivals were screened for the virus on landing, and also had to spend 14 days in quarantine at their own expense at designated hotels. But under new regulations announced on Tuesday by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) citizens must now also upload a picture of their negative test certificate to a health app, while foreigners must apply to a Chinese embassy or consulate with proof of their status.

Oxford vaccine developer cautious on 2020 roll-out

LONDON: The University of Oxford's possible COVID-19 vaccine could be rolled out by the end of the year but there is no certainty, the lead developer of the vaccine said on Tuesday. The experimental vaccine, which has been licensed to AstraZeneca, produced an immune response in early-stage clinical trials, data showed on Monday, preserving hopes it could be in use by the end of 2020. “The end of the year target for getting vaccine roll-out, it's a possibility but there's absolutely no certainty about that because we need three things to happen,” Sarah Gilbert told BBC Radio.

Virus kills 13% of Spanish hotels and restaurants

MADRID: Devastated by the loss of customers during the virus crisis, around 40,000 bars, hotels and restaurants in Spain have permanently closed, the hotel and catering industry said on Tuesday. The figure amounts to 13 per cent of such establishments in Spain, a country in which tourism plays a major role in the economy, and where the population tends to eat out very often, Spain's hospitality federation said. By the end of the year, that figure is expected to rise to 65,000 — or 20 per cent of the total.

— Agencies



KANYE WEST’S PRESIDENTIAL RUN: REAL OR FOR SHOW?

THOMAS URBAIN

US rapper Kanye West’s chaotic launch of his unlikely campaign to oust Donald Trump in November’s presidential election has sparked anger, concern for his mental health and questions about whether he is seriously running.

Wearing a bullet-proof jacket marked “security,” West broke down in tears during a rambling speech in Charleston, South Carolina on Sunday that was supposed to kickstart his White House bid.

Instead, controversial comments about renowned American abolitionist Harriet Tubman enraged attendees, provoked scorn online and left political analysts scratching their heads about the mercurial musician’s true intentions.

For Jeffrey McCune, who teaches a course on West at Washington University in St Louis, the topsyturvy nature of the event was typical of the hip-hop star.

“All things Kanye are impulsive. I have never been a fan of ‘throw-

your-towel-in’ political entries. However, this is Kanye’s brand completely,” he said.

With “2020” shaved onto his head, West veered between several subjects during the hour-long rant.

But it was his comment that “Harriet Tubman never actually freed the slaves, she just had the slaves go work for other white people,” that grabbed most headlines.

West “has lost his mind,” tweeted historian Kate Clifford Larson, author of “Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero.”

“HARRIET TUBMAN FREED enslaved people. You, Mr West are a jerk and not worthy of uttering Tubman’s name. You have not freed anyone,” Larson wrote.

Tubman is known for helping free dozens of black people from slavery by using a network of activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. She fought for the Union in the Civil War, as well.

West’s speech, clips of which went viral on social media, provoked bewilderment, as well as concern for the musician, who has talked about his struggles with bipolar disorder. — AFP

Too much worry risks COVID-19



Samuel Kutty

samkuttyobserver@gmail.com

“Some are hard and fast rules... but some are rules for your guidance only”, wrote British journalist A G Gardiner in his short story “All About a Dog”. I was reminded of this moral when I sneezed during my shopping in a supermarket.

I know sneezing in public is risky during these pandemic times. “Sir, please follow the rule and go home if you are not well,” advised an exasperated fellow shopper, who even lodged a word of protest with the shop supervisor against my sudden involuntary expulsion of air.

Although my sneezing resulted from the allergic reaction to the perfume my accuser was wearing, he still had all the right to suspect that I am a carrier of the coronavirus. Moreover symptoms of coronavirus and flu are almost similar. Ever since the breakout of the pandemic, people have become more anxious that they fail to realise the fact that sneezing is caused by allergy!

The virus is new, and there remain many questions about the illness and the way it spreads. But we let us understand scientific facts and not panic. We don’t exactly know up to what extent we’ll be impacted or how bad things might turn out.

There are many things we can do — even in the face of this exceptional crisis.

We should realise the fact that too much anxiety will not do any good. Instead, practise the highest possible hygiene by putting in place necessary precautions like keeping physical and social distancing, avoiding crowded places, wearing masks and washing hands frequently.

But still the good news is, for most people, coronavirus infection is generally mild and symptoms of fever and cough don’t last long. The bad news is the virus is novel and highly contagious, and right now there is no vaccine.

Let us not forget that the more we are worried the more vulnerable we are!

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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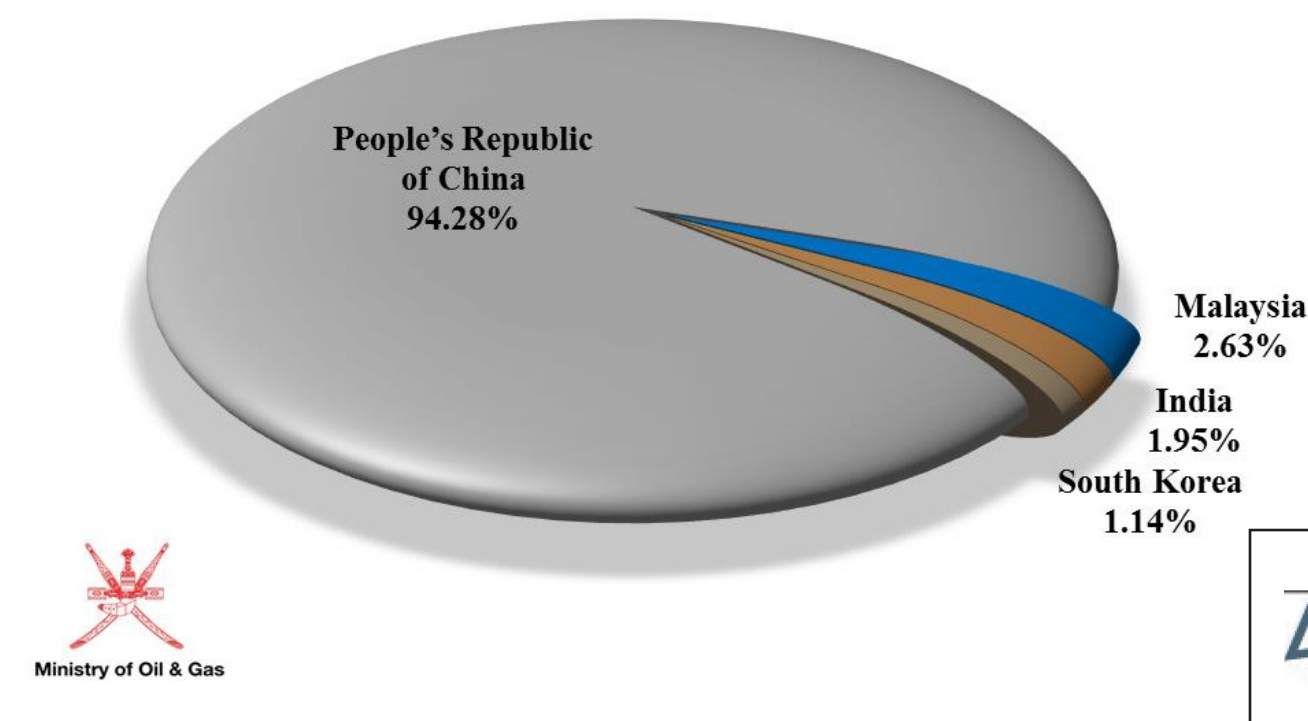
For more information: https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/COVID_19_Preventive_Measures.aspx

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CHINA LIFTS 94 PER CENT OF OMANI CRUDE EXPORTS IN JUNE

Oman Crude Oil Destination June 2020.



JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT: China remained the top market for Omani crude exports in June 2020, receiving 94.28 per cent of total exports averaging 899,412 barrels per day (b p d) , according to the Ministry of Oil and Gas. It represented a 6.77 per cent increase over May figures. Modest quantities were also lifted by Malaysia (2.63 per cent), India (1.95 per cent) and South Korea (1.14 per cent).

According to the Ministry's monthly report, average daily production of crude oil during June 2020 reached 683,625 barrels, which was up 2.40 per cent m-o-m compared with the daily production average of May 2020.

Exports of Oman blend crude oil of 899,412 bpd barrels represented a 22 per cent increase over the previous month.

The average price of Oman's Crude Oil futures contract on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange increased 23.5 per cent compared with previous month. The monthly official selling price for Oman Crude oil for July 2020 delivery – traded during May 2020 – was \$41.58 per barrel, an increase of \$7.90 compared with the May 2020 official selling price. The daily trading marker price ranged between \$39.04 per barrel and \$44.07 per barrel.

“Crude oil prices experienced an optimistic view during trades in June 2020 due to several factors, which had direct and posi-

tive impact on prices,” said the Ministry in a statement.

“The main factors that supported positive trading sentiments were signs of improved demand for fuel as countries began to reduce public isolation measures imposed to prevent the spread of the emerging coronavirus, in addition to reducing crude

supplies from two major producers and continuing to reduce public isolation measures related to the coronavirus despite a record increase in infection cases around the world.

Also, the number of American drilling rigs decreased, which reflected a decrease in US oil production.”

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING TENDERS:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Board Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
17/MZEC/2020	SUPPLY OF ENERGY SMART METERS (SINGLE PHASE DIRECT - 3-PHASE DIRECT, 3-PHASE CT AND CT/VT)	28/07/2020	01/09/2020	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	250
18/MZEC/2020	REFURBISHMENT OF (15) POWER TRANSFORMERS & (500) DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMERS.	28/07/2020	01/09/2020	SPECIALIST (Transformer Manufacturer)	LOCAL	150
20/MZEC/2020	SCA SCADA INTERFACE WORK FOR NEW BAYS IN PRIMARY SUBSTATIONS IN MZEC REGIONS	28/07/2020	01/09/2020	SPECIALIST IN SCADA	LOCAL	175

- Interested companies registered with DCRP and Tender Board and having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through scm.tenders@mzec.co.om.
- Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- The offers and related documents should be submitted in a sealed with red wax envelope addressed to the chairman of the (Internal Tender Committee).
- On the top of the envelopes bidder should write the tender number and the subject only and no other marks or any reference thereto should be written outside the envelopes.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.
- The completed tenders should be deposited in the tender box at main head office building in Al Saih Al Hmer - Bid Bid before 10:00 am on the assigned closing date for submission of the tender.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- The related parties only are invited to attend the tender opening meeting based on the assigned date.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications 17/08/2020.
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

Tenders & Contracts Section : (+968) 25371366 / 25371067 / 25371070

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OMAN DRYDOCK PREPARES FORAY INTO SHIPBUILDING

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Oman Drydock Company (ODC), which owns and operates one of the region's largest ship repair and maintenance yards at Duqm, is preparing to add an important capability to its expanding portfolio of services: shipbuilding.

The move marks an important step for the wholly government-owned company in achieving its longer-term objective of adding shipbuilding to its varied offerings. It also comes on the 10th anniversary of its launch in 2011 as a dry-docking maintenance and ship repair yard.

"Oman DryDock Company announces its readiness to fulfill new-build requests for small and medium vessels including fishing vessels and tugboats (up to 100 metres) for all private and governmental marine sectors," said ODC – part of Asyad Group – in a tweet.



GROWTH AMBITIONS:

Duqm yard announces plan for construction of small and medium-size fishing vessels and tugboats up to 100-metres in length.

ODC Chief Executive Officer Said bin Hamoud al Maawali had told the Observer in an interview published last year that the yard plans to make the transition towards shipbuilding in gradual steps with the goal of becoming a full-fledged shipyard by 2023.

"Shipbuilding has always been part of our long-

term plan. We will start on a modest scale with the construction of relatively simple ships, but after 2023, our plan is to target shipbuilding projects that are quite significant," Al Maawali had stated.

In recent years, ODC has diversified its offerings to include, among other services, industrial and modular fabrication

and conversions into Floating Production Storage & Offloading (FPSO) vessels and Floating Storage & Offloading (FSO) units. It has also added the fabrication and installation of scrubbers to its capabilities.

Earlier in March this year, parent organisation Asyad Group announced the integration of wholly stated owned Oman Shipping Co with Oman Drydock Co as part of a vision to provide global markets with end-to-end logistics solutions.

3.3pc growth in banking sector credit

MUSCAT: The total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks (collectively known as other depository corporations or ODCs) grew by 3.3 per cent to RO 26.5 billion at the end of May 2020, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) said in its monthly report for May 2020.

Credit to the private sector rose by 2.6 per cent to RO 23 billion. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 47.1 per cent and 44.2 per cent, respectively, while the financial corporations received 5.4 per cent



and other sectors the remaining 3.3 per cent.

Total deposits held with ODCs reached RO 24.1 billion at the end of May 2020, increasing by 5.7 per cent from May 2019. Total private sector deposits increased by 9.3 per cent to

RO 16.1 billion. When looking at sector-wise analysis of private sector deposits, the share of households was largest at 50.8 per cent, followed by nonfinancial corporations at 30.4 per cent, financial corporations at 16.2 per cent and the other

sectors at 2.6 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks indicates an annual growth of 2.4 per cent in total outstanding credit as on end-May 2020. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector increased by 1.2 per cent to RO 19.3 billion. Conventional banks' overall investments in securities amounted to RO 3.5 billion.

Investment in Government Bonds increased by 24.5 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion. Banks also invested RO 184.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 874 million at the end of May 2020.

BUSINESS

ELECTRICITY DEMAND
GROWTH SET TO
DECLINE IN OMAN



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Oman's power authorities have pared their expectations of electricity demand growth over the next seven years spanning the 2020 – 2026 timeframe, citing in part the economic downturn sparked by low oil prices and the pandemic.

In the Main Interconnected System (MIS), which covers the northern half of the Sultanate and accounts for 90 per cent of total electricity consumption, peak demand is projected to grow at an annual rate of four per cent to reach 8,490 megawatts (MW) in 2026.

This compares with a power demand averaging 5 per cent announced last year for the 2019-2025 timeframe.

The latest projection is based on the 'expected case' – a scenario that represents the average of 'low case' and 'high case' estimations provided annually by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) as part of its planning of procurements of new electricity generation and water desalination capacity required to

DOWNTREND:

Economic downturn and coronavirus pandemic to dampen growth in demand for electricity.

meet demand growth.

In the low-case scenario, OPWP projects annual growth of two per cent over the 2020 – 2026 timeframe, resulting in peak demand of 7,080 MW in 2026. In comparison, demand growth under the low-case scenario was projected at three per cent last year.

Underscoring the same downtrend in demand, the high-case scenario projects annual growth of 7 per cent in power demand to reach peak demand of 10,220 MW in 2026. Last year, the comparative rate under the high-case scenario was 8 per cent.

A similar dip in demand growth is also evident in the Dhofar Power System (DPS), which serves Salalah and the adjoining areas. In the expected-case, peak demand is expected to grow at 5 per cent annually to reach 793 MW in 2025. Compare that with a 6 per cent growth rate announced a year ago.

The low-case scenario for Dhofar projects an

annual growth of 4 per cent over the 2020 – 2026 timeframe versus 5 per cent announced last year for the 2019 – 2025 period. In the high-case scenario, peak demand driven by rapid industrialisation is projected to grow 8 per cent to reach 938 MW by 2026, versus 9 per cent announced a year ago.

Commenting on the expected slump in electricity demand going forward, the Authority for Electricity Regulation (AER) said: "It is anticipated that 2020 will witness the first overall negative growth in supply since the restructuring of the electricity sector in 2005, a sharp fall from the decade after restructuring which saw consistent double-digit annual growth rates in supply.

Supply growth in 2020 is expected to decrease by 1.1 per cent from 2019 outturn, mainly driven by the impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting downturn in the general economy."

Chevron's \$5 billion deal for Noble ends deal drought

BENGALURU: Chevron Corp's surprise \$5 billion deal for oil producer Noble Energy should spell the end of this year's deal drought, setting a price benchmark that will trigger more buys, mergers and acquisition bankers, lawyers and analysts said.

The COVID-19 pandemic destroyed fuel demand and left dozens of energy companies without the prospect of drilling their way out of debt. They may now be more willing to entertain deals with the Chevron offer as a standard.

"Sometimes you need the one significant deal to reset the comps and manage price expectations," said Andrew Dittmar, an M&A analyst at researcher Enverus.

"The debt maturity wall that has been out there for some time is getting closer and closer."

Chevron agreed to pay \$5 a barrel for Noble's reserves, a price that could reset expectations for sellers weighing deals, analysts said.

Other oil companies that have hinted at interest in cheap reserves and have the wherewithal to buy include ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil Corp and Total SA.

"This is going to wake a lot of people up," said one Houston-based attorney specializing in energy mergers and acquisitions. "They are going to look at it and say 'uh oh, even someone like Noble threw in the towel.'"

He said his firm was working on 10-15 smaller sale processes, although he cautioned many may not get done due to capital constraints. He declined to be identified as deal talks are confidential.

US producers spent only \$3.4 billion on company and land deals in the first six months of the year, turning away from buying assets as oil prices fell. — Reuters



Chevron oil exploration drilling site is seen near Midland, Texas. — Reuters

Pandemic or labour crises?

Both the private sector and investors are considered to be the main partners who help in building a nation. These two sectors play a vital role in providing job vacancies.

As we know, the private sector still depends on the government support through the liquidity that the government provides in the local market. The liquidity aims to make a high volume of activity in the market including projects. As a result of insolvency, a large number of employees were faced with dismissal from their positions. Fortunately, the majority of the companies have endured the pain due to the pandemic.

On the other hand, during negotiations between companies and their Omani employees, most of the employees agreed to reduce their wages or to go on vacation as per the Supreme Committee's ruling. Personally, I liked what one employer described his employees when they



Bader al Kiyumi
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agreed to reduce their wages: "They are loyal to their company".

On the other hand, there are employers who did not take their responsibilities to protect their employees and fired their staff and did not try to think outside of the box.

Recently, during my visit to the Labour Department I happened to meet by chance a person named Abdullah who was fired from his job. This 29 year-old narrated his story to the Labour Inspector. He had worked in the family business company for more than seven years. However, they received a call from the company during the lockdown requesting him to come for a meeting.

When he went to his office he was shocked to be informed by his manage-

ment that the owners had decided to close the company. "I completed my engagement for marriage last February and I already have been informed by my wife that our official marriage would be next October. Unfortunately, I have taken the decision to postpone the marriage until I find a job," he mentions sadly.

I had a quick discussion with the labour inspector who confirmed that the Ministry of Manpower has switched off the system and does not allow employers to terminate their Omani employees' contracts. The ministry has taken this initiative aiming to control the employers and not to let companies go towards dismissing their staff during the pandemic period.

Personally, I agree with the call to convert family businesses into joint stock

companies because we did not hear about joint stock firms that fired their employees during the pandemic period.

The problem with some of the family business is that it is not only during COVID-19 but has its roots from several years back.

The change will help to ensure the sustainability of these companies. The companies will be under corporate governance and have to follow certain rules including legal reserve.

However, according to many experts the main reasons behind the unwillingness of family businesses owners to convert their companies into joint stock companies is the fear of some that this will lead to a severe control by government agencies such as the stock exchange, MSM and others. In addition, the accountability and fines that may result, as have happened to some companies earlier.

However, I wish Abdullah gets hold of a suitable job to go ahead with his marriage and family life.

OIL PRICES UP AT LEVELS LAST SEEN IN MARCH

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Tuesday, helped by positive news about vaccine trials and a European Union stimulus deal reaching levels last seen when an oil price war erupted in early March between Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Benchmark Brent crude was up \$1.17 cents at \$44.45 by 09:04 GMT, on track for its biggest daily rise since

mid-June at around 2.7 per cent. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) gained 19 cents to \$41.00, its highest daily rise in a month at around 2.6 per cent.

The prices were buoyed by an agreement among European Union leaders on a 750 billion euro (\$859 billion) fund to prop up their coronavirus-throttled economies, lifting prospects

for fuel demand.

In other markets, world shares and the euro also hit their strongest levels since March on Tuesday.

The deal allows the European Commission to raise billions of euros on capital markets on behalf of all 27 states, an unprecedented act of solidarity in almost seven decades of European integration.

Oil prices were also supported by promising virus vaccine data released on Monday, raising confidence that a vaccine may be created even if a global rollout will take time.

In China, some cinemas reopened on Monday after a six-month closure, another sign of recovery in the world's second-largest economy. — Reuters



An employee wearing a face mask fills up a car at a gas station in Manila, Philippines. — Reuters

BUSINESS



The President of European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the President of the European Council Charles Michel hold a news conference on the European Union response to the COVID-19 crisis at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — **Reuters**

EU agrees landmark €750 billion virus ‘Marshall Plan’

THE PACKAGE WILL SEND TENS OF BILLIONS OF EUROS TO COUNTRIES HARDEST HIT BY THE VIRUS, MOST NOTABLY HEAVILY INDEBTED SPAIN AND ITALY.

BRUSSELS: EU leaders emerged from a marathon four-day and four-night summit on Tuesday to celebrate what they boasted was a historic rescue plan for economies left shattered by the coronavirus epidemic.

The €750 billion (\$858 billion) deal was sealed after intense negotiations that saw a threats of a French walkout and a Hungarian veto — and fierce opposition from the Netherlands and Austria to what they said was too generous a package.

“These were of course, difficult negotiations in very difficult times for all Europeans,” said EU Council Chief Charles Michel, whose job was to

guide the tortuous talks over more than 90 hours.

The package was made possible by the crucial backing of Germany and France and includes the biggest ever joint borrowing by the 27 members of the bloc, something that had been resisted by Berlin and the so-called “frugal” northern states for generations.

The deal is a special victory for French President Emmanuel Macron who came to office in 2017 committed to strengthen the European Union, but had struggled to deliver.

“This is a historic change for Europe,” Macron told reporters in a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel,

who said Europe had shown itself equal to “The greatest crisis in the history of the EU.”

But there was criticism from some that the compromises made to get the deal were too great, with teenage climate campaigner Greta Thunberg tweeting her disappointment.

“As expected the #EUCO resulted in some nice words, some vague distant incomplete climate targets nearly impossible to track and a complete denial of the climate emergency,” she tweeted.

The package will send tens of billions of euros to countries hardest hit by the virus, most notably heavily indebted Spain

and Italy.

Their call for solidarity was met with the fierce opposition of the “Frugals”, a group of northern nations led by Netherlands, who believed strongly that the stimulus package was unnecessary.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez hailed “a Marshall Plan for Europe”, that would boost Spain’s economy by 140 billion euros over the next six years.

But Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte denied the advent of joint borrowing for the rescue heralded the start of what he had warned of before the talks — a “transfer union” with a permanent north-south transfer of wealth. — **AFP**

SPORTS

COLLINS DISMISSED FROM WORLD TEAMTENNIS

OVER COVID-19 PROTOCOL BREACH



“We have dismissed Danielle Collins ... for the remainder of the 2020 World TeamTennis season after breaking our COVID-19 protocols and leaving The Greenbrier Resort and the state of West Virginia.”

Carlos Silva, WTT Chief Executive

NEW YORK: American Danielle Collins has been dismissed from the World TeamTennis event in West Virginia for breaking COVID-19 protocols, organisers said on Tuesday.

One of only a few live sports events allowing fans in North America to attend amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, the entire three-week regular season of the WTT is being held at the Greenbrier resort in West Virginia.

“We have dismissed Danielle Collins ... for the remainder of the 2020 World TeamTennis season after breaking our COVID-19 protocols and leaving The Greenbrier Resort and the state of West Virginia,” WTT Chief Executive Carlos Silva said in a statement.

“The protocols have been put in place and communicated numerous times to protect the health and safety of our players, coaches and staff which are of utmost importance to WTT.”

The organisers did not provide details about the travel undertaken by the 26-year-old Collins, who made the semi-finals of the 2019 Australian Open.

Collins last month criticized Novak Djokovic after the men’s world number one said it would be “impossible” to play this year’s US Open under COVID-19 protocols proposed by organisers.

Multiple Grand Slam winners Venus Williams of the United States and Belgian Kim Clijsters, who is making a comeback to professional tennis, are among the top draws in the innovative mixed-gender league.

Safety measures taken by WTT to curb the potential spread of the virus include COVID-19 testing for participants and regular temperature checks, with organisers letting a maximum of 500 fans inside the 2,500-person stadium.

— Reuters

SPORTS

‘TIME AWAY FROM MOM THE HARDEST PART OF QUARANTINE’

“The only thing that I missed during the quarantine period was my mother. It was the first time I went that long in my life without seeing my mom.”

LEBRON JAMES, LA LAKERS FORWARD



NEW YORK: Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James said the hardest part about quarantining during the COVID-19 pandemic was the time he was forced to spend away from his mother.

The NBA was suspended in March in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak and three-times NBA champion James quarantined in Los Angeles, California, while his mother, Gloria, remained in Akron, Ohio.

“The only thing that I missed during the quarantine period was my mother,” James said. “It was the first time I went that long in my life without seeing my mom.”

“I hadn’t seen my mom since All-Star weekend then I saw her two weeks, three



weeks before we had to report to our respective cities. That was extreme for me.”

“Coming from a single parent household, being an only child... for me to be away from her that long (was difficult). My mom, she kept me sane, because she said in due time we’ll join back again.”

The NBA will resume on July 30 at Disney World without spectators. Twenty-two of its 30 teams will play eight seeding games to determine a full 16-team playoff field that will follow the traditional post-season format with four best-of-seven series.

James’ Lakers, who lead the Western Conference with a 49-14 record, face the Los Angeles Clippers on their return to action.

— Reuters

Ballon d'Or

2020

scrapped due to coronavirus disruption

The prestigious award, voted for by journalists, is an annual prize given to the best male footballer in the world since 1956. The women's Ballon d'Or was first awarded in 2018

PARIS: The Ballon d'Or will not be awarded this year for the first time in its 64-year history after the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the football calendar, organisers *France Football* magazine said on Monday.

The prestigious award, voted for by journalists, is an annual prize given to the best male footballer in the world since 1956. The women's Ballon d'Or was first awarded in 2018.

The 2019-20 season has been ravaged by the pandemic, with all the major European leagues suspending matches from March to June.

International tournaments, such as the European Championship and Copa America, were also pushed back to 2021 due to the virus.

Pascal Ferre, editor-in-chief of *France Football*, said in a statement: "From a sports perspective, two months (January and February), out of the eleven generally required to form an opinion and decide who should lift the trophies, represent far too little to gauge and judge."

"... Without forgetting that the other games were played – or will be played – in extraordinary conditions (behind closed doors, with five replacements)."

The final stages of the Champions League, from the quarter-finals, have also been rescheduled as a mini-tournament featuring single leg matches behind closed doors in Portugal next month.

Barcelona's Argentina forward Lionel Messi has won the men's award a record six times — one more than long-time rival Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ronaldo can still help Juventus win the Serie A and Champions League double this season but the Portuguese forward will be among several leading players who will miss the opportunity to contend for the individual honour.

Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski reached 50 club goals this term and has an opportunity to win the treble, while Messi became the first player in Spain's La Liga to record 20 goals and 20 assists in a single campaign.

To fill the void left by the annual ceremony, *France Football* magazine's jury of 180 will elect an all-time 'Dream Team' at the end of the year. — **Reuters**



SPORTS

2020



GROUP A

- FLAMENGO
- INDEP. DEL VALLE
- JUNIOR
- BARCELONA

GROUP B

- PALMEIRAS
- BOLÍVAR
- TIGRE
- GUARANÍ

GROUP C

- PEÑAROL
- COLO COLO
- A. PARANAENSE
- WILSTERMANN

GROUP D

- RIVER PLATE
- SÃO PAULO
- LDU QUITO
- BINACIONAL

GROUP E

- GRÊMIO
- UNIV. CATÓLICA
- AMÉRICA DE CALI
- INTERNACIONAL

GROUP F

- NACIONAL
- RACING CLUB
- ALIANZA LIMA
- ESTUDIANTES (M)

GROUP G

- OLIMPIA
- SANTOS
- DELFIN SC
- DEF. Y JUSTICIA

GROUP H

- BOCA JUNIORS
- LIBERTAD
- CARACAS
- DIM



COPA LIBERTADORES TO RESTART ON SEPTEMBER 15

BUENOS AIRES: The Copa Libertadores, South America's equivalent of the Champions League, is to restart on September 15 after a six-month hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) said on Monday. Four group ties will take place on September 15, followed by five a day later and another seven on September 17. The last Libertadores games were played on March 12 before the tournament was suspended. There are 32 teams still remaining in the tournament, divided up into eight groups of four. So far each team has played two group matches. The final is scheduled for January at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium. — Reuters



THERE ARE 32 TEAMS STILL REMAINING IN THE TOURNAMENT, DIVIDED UP INTO EIGHT GROUPS OF FOUR. SO FAR EACH TEAM HAS PLAYED TWO GROUP MATCHES



FEATURES

NATURAL SPRINGS GIVE BIRTH TO LIFE IN DHOFAR

Dhofar is famous for the presence of more than 360 springs distributed in different mountainous areas including edges of mountains adjacent to the coastal plain. These springs varies not only in terms of water quality but also of the amount of minerals found in them which is why preserving them is important in maintain the vibrant life in Dhofar.. **page 20**

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**Future of famous
Mexican dance hall
threatened by pandemic**



P21

**From egg hunter to
protector, Malaysian
battles to save turtles**



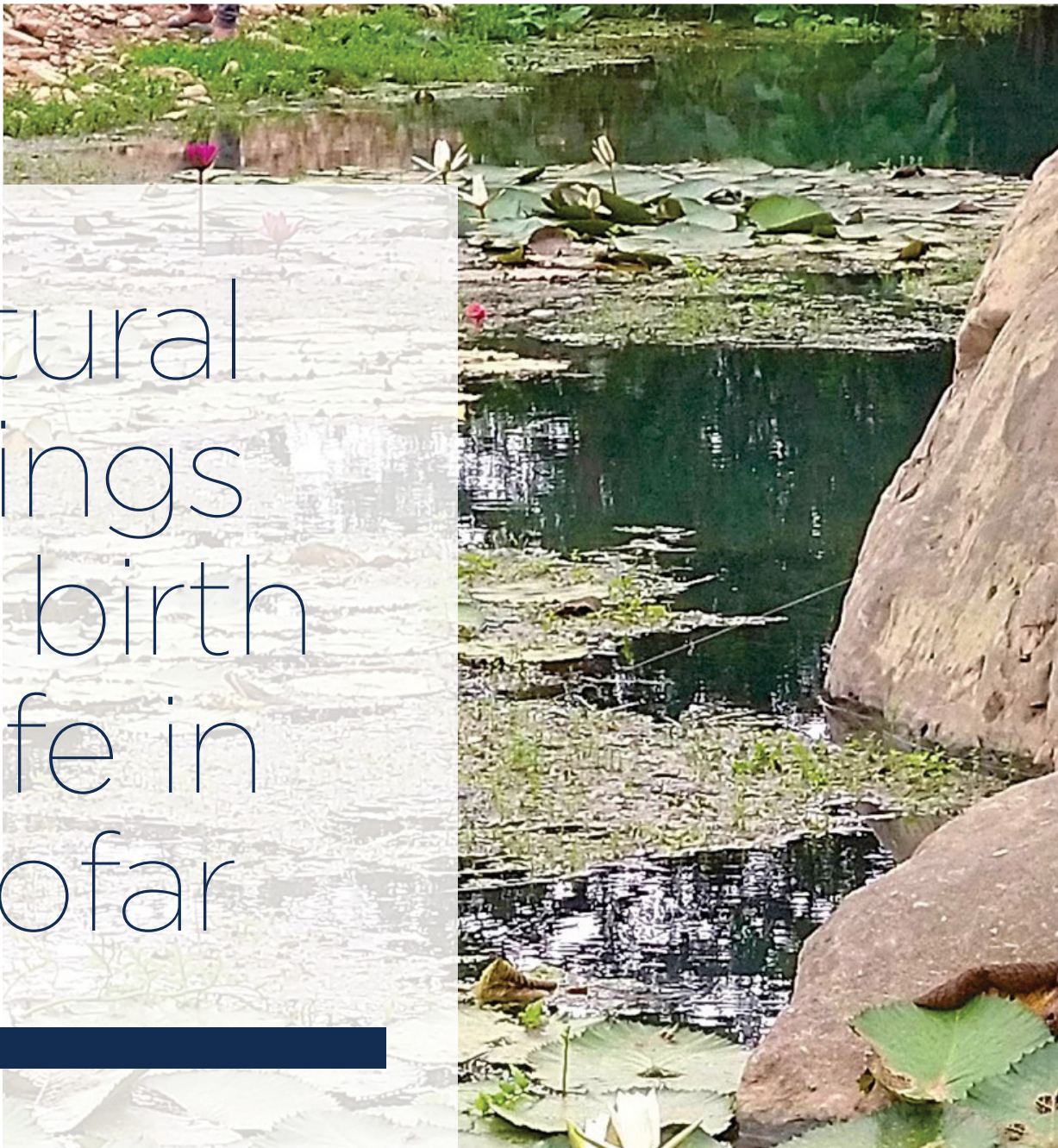
P22

FEATURES



Natural
springs
give birth
to life in
Dhofar

STAFF REPORTER



Natural springs vary according to water quality. It can be warm, hot or cold. It can be fresh and ideal for drinking or saline which is not recommended for human consumption. It can also be alkaline and when mixed with valley water can be suitable for agriculture. There is also the spring water that contains varying proportions of mineral salts, making them ideal for curative and relaxation purposes.

Springs of different kinds are widespread in various parts of the Sultanate. Most of these springs stem from mountainous areas and vary in their abundance, temperature and quality.

The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources is taking the necessary measures to restore the condition of the different areas of Dhofar affected by the last tropical climate depression, especially the water springs.

The department has been busy in cleaning and removing debris and restoring the springs to their original forms.

The maintenance activities were divided into three phases. The first phase included restoration and cleaning of Jarzeez, Sahnout, Athum, Tobruk, Garnout, Manhal, Eastern Houta, Western Hutta, Aghsita, Fargnot, Idir, Marit, Saillet, and Adert. The rest of the springs will be completed according to the schedule prepared for that.

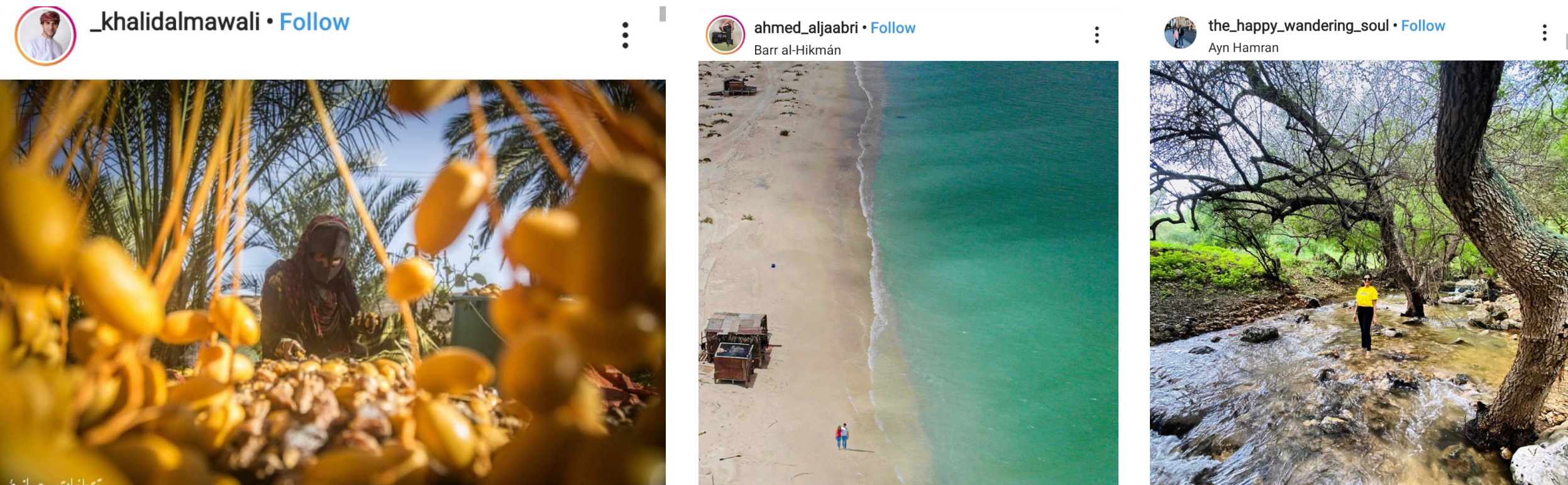
The Ministry gives great importance to the water resources sector through the implementation of projects aimed at managing, developing and evaluating water resources. It includes projects to maintain the Aflaj and the springs and wells, building dams, developing a network to monitor water conditions and continuing exploratory drilling to find new water resources.

It takes measures to protect water sources from pollution and drought, developing the national sense and promoting public awareness of the importance of water, as well as enhancing the role of the private sector in establishing and managing water projects.

It is worth noting that Dhofar is famous for the presence of more than 360 springs distributed in different mountainous areas including edges of mountains adjacent to the coastal plain, while a small number of springs are present in An Najd area. Most of these springs have water all year round.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



FEATURES



From egg hunter to protector, Malaysian battles to save turtles

AZIZ MUSTAFFA used to collect turtles' eggs from a Malaysian beach and sell them. But nowadays, he makes a living as a ranger protecting the creatures' nesting sites.

His transformation is one success in an uphill struggle to defend the endangered reptiles who swim ashore to the tropical country from the South China Sea to lay their eggs in the sand.

Several species, including Green turtles, Hawksbills and Leatherbacks, nest on Malaysia's coasts, where the spectacle of babies hatching and scurrying into the sea has long been a major tourist draw.

But their numbers have dwindled dramatically due to worsening maritime pollution, coastal development, and people snatching their eggs, which are a popular local delicacy.

Conservationists have however been making progress. As well as persuading some people like Aziz to change their ways, Terengganu state, a major nesting site, has announced

it will ban the trade in eggs.

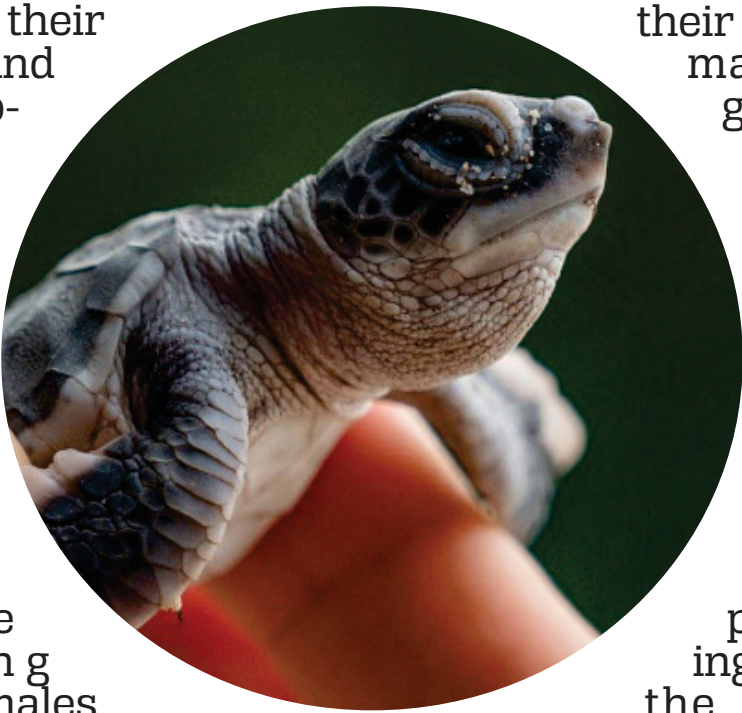
"The turtles and eggs are our national treasure," Aziz, 44, said, after watching a group of the reptiles emerge from the sea and lay eggs on a beach on Redang Island, in Terengganu.

"I feel I am their god parent and I want to protect them for future generations. It gives me joy to see the huge turtles returning here to nest."

The 20-strong group of females came ashore at night, crawling up Chagar Hutang beach, with Aziz watching alongside several other conservationists.

VORACIOUS APPETITE

They dug holes and laid thousands of eggs, before swimming back into the sea. On the same 350-metre



(1,100-foot) beach, one of the busiest nesting sites in Malaysia, baby turtles were hatching and scurrying into the waters.

Humans are far from the only threat they face — monitor lizards eat their eggs, while many are gobbled up by sharks and predatory fish as soon as they make it into the waters.

Aziz, from a poor fishing family on the island, remembers how he used to hide in the bushes by the beach and race out to grab the eggs shortly after they were laid, with brawls often breaking out between rival collectors.

The eggs were then sold to local traders or eaten, and were a key source of protein in limited diets, although

that started to change as incomes increased and different food options became available.

At the same time, Aziz realised there were more benefits for the local community in protecting turtle nests than raiding them, as growing numbers of tourists flocked to the island to see the creatures.

"I realised that if these migratory species are protected, the villagers on Redang would be able to sustain their livelihoods," he said.

So he started working for University Malaysia Terengganu's turtle research unit to protect the creatures, earning about \$400 a month.

He now works with two other rangers and a group of volunteers to safeguard the eggs from poachers and predators like monitor lizards.

"Villagers on Redang Island now enjoy a stable income from tourism as a growing number of people want to watch the Green turtles lay eggs," he said.—AFP