

PROPOSALS ON COVID-19
PANDEMIC INVITED

The Research Council (TRC) has opened applications for submitting pre-proposals for projects addressing the current COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the government's efforts, for the new COVID-19 Research Programme. Interested applicants can visit the COVID19- Research Programme on TRC's electronic portal to find out more about the programme. Interested applicants should fill in the application form, and only shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a detailed proposal. The themes of the COVID-19 pre-proposals can either of a clinical or nonclinical scope. **DETAILS ON P5**

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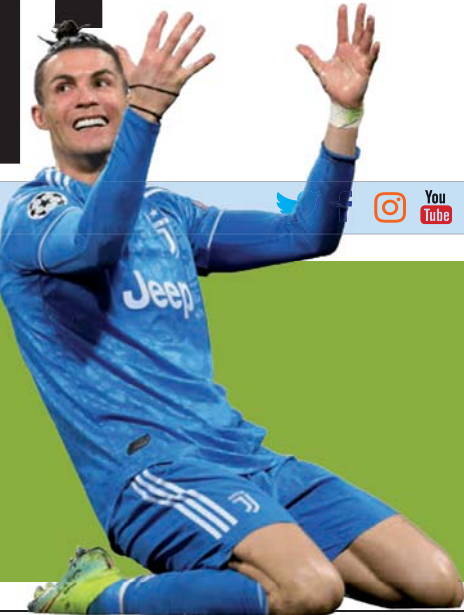
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ART - AN INNATE TALENT OR SKILL?



OMAN

E-platform for buying fish

MUSCAT: To facilitate the purchase of fish, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries launched an integrated electronic platform for the purpose on Sunday. According to a statement from the ministry, www.bekar.market has been unveiled in cooperation with the Oman Technology Fund to reduce crowding at market places. “The special platform, set up with the purpose of avoiding crowding of people, will enable them buy fish from the Central Fish Market at Al Fulaj through remote auction,” the statement said. The ministry last week closed down the fish markets in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, and South Al Sharqiyah as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

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PRIMARY HEALTH CENTRES ROLE IN COMBATING COVID-19

No flights until further notice

15 NEW CASES, 2,000 INBOUND TRAVELLERS UNDER INSTITUTIONAL QUARANTINE

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

As authorities including the defence apparatus, ramp up measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 outbreak, the Ministry of Health announced 15 new cases, bringing the total number of cases to 167.

Of these, five are linked with having close contact with confirmed cases of coronavirus and eight related to travel; two are under epidemiological investigation. The ministry said that 23 cases have recovered till date.

Muscat continued to top the list with 116 cases, followed by Al Dakhiliyah (14), North Al Batinah (13), South Al Batinah (8), Dhofar (6), South Al Sharqiyah (1), Al Dhahirah (1), Al Buraimi (1).

Around 2,000 people who returned from abroad have been provided with institutional isolation, especially to those without adequate conditions for isolation at home.

The Sultanate's Embassy in Washington said it has completed arrangements to bring back Omani citizens from the US and Canada.

Around 800 Omani citizens have confirmed their willingness to return to the Sultanate. The embassy has chartered flights that will leave on Monday for Muscat.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Higher Education said that it has arranged for the return of Omani students from Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia and European countries. The last batch of Omani students based in these countries will arrive on Monday evening.

Efforts are also under way to bring back Omani students from Australia, New Zealand and other countries, the ministry added.



In line with the recent decisions issued by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19, all scheduled domestic and international flights to and from the Sultanate's airports have been suspended until further notice, except for services to Musandam Governorate and cargo flights.

Travellers with valid tickets for flights during this period are expected to contact the respective airlines for change of dates, refunds or cancellations.

“This is a temporary suspension of our passenger services. We regret the difficulty and inconvenience this may cause, but it's vital for us as the national carrier of the Sultanate to assist in the country's efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19,” said Oman Air's Chief Executive Officer Abdulaziz al Raisi.

“We will prioritise the needs of our guests and employees as we continue to assess the evolving situation,” Al Raisi added.

Private sector told not to compromise on salaries

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday discussed measures taken by the authorities to minimise the spread of COVID-19 in the Sultanate.

Apart from reviewing the precautionary measures taken to protect citizens and residents in the Sultanate from the virus, the meeting discussed letters received from some citizens, which included complaints about deduction from their monthly salaries during the quarantine period.

The Majlis stressed that there should be no compromise on the salaries of employees in the private sector.

The General Federation of Oman Workers said that it is monitoring cases of violations of workers' rights in the private sector by some companies under the pretext of measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19 and some of these violations include termination of service, deduction of wages, and forced unpaid leave.

The companies shall import additional quantities in line with the demands of the local market and ensure that sufficient stocks to last at least six months.

The Muscat Municipality also intensified inspections to monitor mandatory closure of shops to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Officials from the municipality also continued their visits to ensure compliance of the guidelines issued to the eateries in Muscat.

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO), represented by the Sultan's Armed Forces engineering unit, has ramped up its preparedness level to play its part in the ongoing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. RAO has activated emergency plans and formed field teams to conduct disinfection and sterilisation of roads and public places across the Sultanate.

ADEQUATE STOCKS
The Directorate-General of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control of the Ministry of Health

(MoH) said it has taken urgent measures to ensure adequate stock of medicines and essential medical supplies in the Sultanate.



94 HOTELS TO PROVIDE ROOMS FOR RELIEF AND SHELTER

Four in 10 people worldwide confined in some form

PARIS: More than 3.38 billion people worldwide have been asked or ordered to follow confinement measures in the fight against COVID-19, according to an AFP database on Sunday. That represents around 43 per cent of the total world population, which is 7.79 billion people according to a United Nations count in 2020. The Chinese province Hubei and its capital city Wuhan, the first epicentre of the novel coronavirus, were the first to introduce confinement measures at the end of January.

German minister commits suicide after 'virus crisis worries'

FRANKFURT: Thomas Schaefer, the Finance Minister of Germany's Hesse state, has committed suicide apparently after becoming “deeply worried” over how to cope with the economic fallout from the coronavirus, state premier Volker Bouffier said on Sunday. Schaefer, 54, was found dead near a railway track on Saturday. The Wiesbaden prosecution's office said they believe he died by suicide. “We are in shock, we are in disbelief and above all we are immensely sad,” Bouffier said in a recorded statement.

Trump's initial denial was 'deadly': Nancy Pelosi

WASHINGTON: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi accused US President Donald Trump of having denied the true extent and severity of the coronavirus pandemic, charging that this decision cost lives. “His denial at the beginning was deadly,” Pelosi said on Sunday, as the US death toll passed 2,000. She sharply objected to a proposal floated by Trump to reopen the country's economy by April 12, warning that the virus is still spreading and a lack of testing means emerging hotspots may be escaping observation.

Social distancing is a life saving step to control coronavirus

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

As the Sultanate is confronting a growing number of COVID-19 cases, the government focus, along with several other measures, has shifted to social distancing.

Circulars being issued by different ministries are reflective of the need to “keep distance from other individuals in order to avoid catching the virus yourself and to avoid passing it on”.

Although slow, yet steadily both citizens and expatriates are coming to

terms with the orders to avoid crowding at market and other places.

All of us need to understand that the situation is really, really serious. We need to keep social distancing as it is required not just getting infected but not to infect others.

It is difficult to follow as our culture does not allow us to keep away from each other. Greeting in our culture is expressed through physical interaction.

But in this situation, it's life-saving — not necessarily for us alone, but for everyone in the community. So



social distancing is currently the most important step with which we can control the spread of the pandemic. We need social distancing across the country. The Supreme Committee which deals with COVID-19 emphasised that it is important for everyone to practice social distancing and minimise contact with people, including home gatherings, to help reducing the ability of the virus to spread in the population. According to Government Communications Centre (GCC), social distancing is a sort of behavioural change

by adopting some actions that reduce communication and contact with others. Though there has not been any evidence of community transmission in the Sultanate, all of us should make it an obligation to keep a two-metre distance from others. Social distancing is currently the most important factor that will help control the COVID-19 outbreak. Social distancing can also effectively extend to environmental precautions such as disinfecting often-touched surfaces that may pass on the virus.

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 30°C
MIN: 21°C

SALALAH
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 24°C

NIZWA
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 19°C

SUNRISE 06.01 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

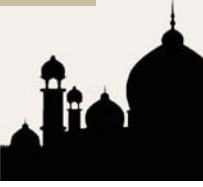
FAJR: 04:45

DHUHR: 12:16

ASR: 15:43

MAGHRIB: 18:27

ISHA: 19:38





RAO helps disinfect roads, public places



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO), represented by the Sultan’s Armed Forces engineering unit, has ramped up its preparedness level to play its part in the ongoing efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak. RAO has activated emergency plans and formed field teams to conduct disinfection and sterilisation of roads and public places across the Sultanate.

Crowding narrows down as ROP keeps strict vigil

People asked to stay home and avoid stepping out unless absolutely necessary

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

With the Royal Oman Police tightening patrolling of the city, public movement and crowding on the otherwise busy downtown streets in the capital have almost come to a halt.

In line with the appeal by the authorities to citizens and residents to stay at home, unless it is absolutely necessary, the police are keeping a strict vigil at every corner of the city.

“It has become a common sight in the evening the policemen standing at different places asking, in some cases, reprimanding people to go home”, said Yaqoob al Balushi, who lives in Ruwi.

The ROP have called the public to comply with the instructions issued by health and security authorities to limit social contacts amid the spread of COVID-19 to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Necessary needs include going to get essential supplies such as food, medicine or going to work.

The ROP reiterated on the twitter that people should stay home except for absolute necessity.

“We are taking steps to stop people from gathering in public places. We urge both citizens and residents to



stay away from public gathering,” it tweeted.

A police official told *Observer* confidentially that “there will zero tolerance for reckless people who don’t follow safety instructions,”

Staying at home is a kind of indoor curfew designed to control public movement to avoid crowding and ensure social distancing.

“I just got escaped from being caned even though I was on my way to fetch my dinner. I was spared as they

saw the tiffin box in my hand,” said Siraj Sainuddin, an expatriate.

Earlier, the patrolling police officers used their vehicle’s public address speakers to ask people to stay home and avoid stepping out unless absolutely necessary.

The message in different languages urged people to avoid doing anything that endanger their life and public health.

Meanwhile, the ROP called upon citizens and residents to exercise

caution against fake online companies that promise medical supplies to fight the coronavirus.

The ROP said that a large number of people worldwide have been conned by “fake online pharma suppliers”.

“With the increase in demand for masks, sanitizers and other medical supplies, fake online companies trick potential customers into their net. Citizens and residents should be vigilant against such electronic fraud,” the ROP said in a statement.

Online platform for buying fish



MUSCAT: To facilitate the purchase of fish, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries launched an integrated electronic platform for the purpose on Sunday.

According to a statement from the ministry, www.bekar.market has been unveiled in cooperation with the Oman Technology Fund to reduce crowding at the market places.

“The special platform, set up with the purpose of avoiding crowding of people, will enable them buy fish from the Central Fish Market at Al Fulaij through remote auction,” the statement said.

This will help reduce the risks of spread of COVID-19, it added.

In decision last week, the ministry closed down the fish markets in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, and South Al Sharqiyah as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus.



PREVENTION, DETECTION AND RESPONSE

Primary Health Care institutions role in fighting coronavirus pandemic



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health's Primary Health Care (PHC) institutions are the first treatment line in the Sultanate and the key for all levels of healthcare (secondary and tertiary), along with linking society and health service providers. The ministry has committed to put the primary healthcare at top priority to reach the goal of health for all, stipulated in the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution.

The ministry's PHC institutions throughout various governorates of the Sultanate provide many preventive, treatment and rehabilitative services, as PHC gathers both the client and service providers, Dr Badria Mohsen al Rashidi, Director of the Health Care Services Support at the Ministry of Health, indicated.

With the emergence of the

Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the ministry has taken several precautionary measures that include working in border outlets and airports to assess arrivals in the Sultanate and identify groups that need home or institutional quarantine or transfer some critical cases to intensive care in hospitals, Dr Al Rashidi added.

Furthermore, informing PHC institutions about people who need a home or institutional quarantine, and following-up with them by phone to check their health condition or request their attendance if necessary.

The Primary Health Care institutions are categorising the cases with symptoms of fever and cold, or those with similar symptoms of COVID-19, performing the necessary examinations for suspected cases. Accordingly determining whether

positive results should be under home quarantined or hospitalised if necessary.

The health services in all PHC institutions have been limited to cover only emergency cases, colds and expanded immunisation of children. As for patients with chronic diseases, Dr Al Rashidi explained that phone numbers were set to request from pharmacy personnel an advance preparation of patient monthly medications without waiting for the doctor's visit.

On the significant of the social distancing, Dr Al Rashidi calls on all PHC institutions in the Sultanate to apply this principle to reduce the number of clients, urging all employees to commit with the infection control measures and spreading health awareness about COVID-19. — ONA





Over 4,445 hotel rooms for relief and shelter

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

The Ministry of Tourism has said that 94 hotel establishments in the country will be providing around 4,445 hotel rooms to be used as COVID-19 relief and shelters under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.

“The rest of the hotel establishments in all governorates are invited to contribute to this national duty and communicate on 99076665, 99762535,” the ministry said.

The team responsible for

COVID-19 relief and shelter held a meeting under the chairmanship of Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, and took the following decisions:

Preparing a number of hotels to serve as institutional quarantine centres for Omanis arriving from abroad. The quarantine centres at hotels will be divided into three categories: Some hotels will be dedicated to persons who are not showing symptoms of the disease.

Separate hotels will be reserved for



suspected cases while the third group of hotels for the medical treatment of infected persons.

The relief and sheltering team gave directives for the preparation of medical and social support groups to care for the Omani students coming from abroad during the quarantine period.

In addition, the sector requested the relevant departments to take all necessary measures to receive and test the Omanis returning and transfer them to the dedicated quarantine centres.

Access to higher education

OMREN launches Mirsal for higher education, research community



MUSCAT: Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of The Research Council (TRC) has launched a new service called ‘Mirsal’ that is developed to the requirements of the higher education and research community to exchange learning objects and large data sets.

Dr Abdulmunim al Kharousi, OMREN Director, stated that Mirsal is a web based application provided by OMREN that allows authenticated users to securely and easily send arbitrarily large files to other users. He also maintained that the service was developed internally by OMREN employees, and the launch of this service was to provide a new space for researchers and members of the network in light of the health conditions in the world and the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

MIRSAL IS A WEB BASED APPLICATION PROVIDED BY OMREN THAT ALLOWS AUTHENTICATED USERS TO SECURELY AND EASILY SEND ARBITRARILY LARGE FILES TO OTHER USERS

Dr Abdulmunim further added that this new service has several different features that suits the needs of all researchers, the most important of which are: Transfer expiry duration is 20 days, maximum number of files per transfer is 30, maximum number of recipients is 50 at a time, all file formats are acceptable except .exe & .bat, maximum size of file for non-HTML5 browsers is 2Gbps, and maximum size per transfer for HTML5 browsers is 50Gbps.

Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) is a central part of a sustainable infrastructure that contributes to the emergence of an effective national innovation ecosystem. It provides the research and education community in the Sultanate of Oman with a common network and collaboration infrastructure adapted to their needs. — ONA

Majlis Ash’shura discusses COVID-19 developments

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday discussed developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and looked into procedures undertaken on this issue by the departments concerned with a view to limiting the number of people who might get infected and measures to contain the virus’s proliferation.

The Majlis had received (prior to the meeting) various types of messages, including one from citizens working for some private sector companies who filed a complaint on salary-cuts being imposed on their monthly dues during the ‘health isolation’ (quarantine) period.

The Majlis studied the grievance and reaffirmed the importance of non-reduction of salaries of private sector workers.

The Majlis Ash’shura Office approved a number of recommendations deemed necessary to help the departments concerned upgrade the efficiency of procedures undertaken by the Government to address the impacts of coronavirus pandemic developments. — ONA

Shops closed for violations



SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

While warning against violations, the Muscat Municipality intensified inspections to implement mandatory closure of shops to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Officials from the municipality also continued their visits to ensure compliance of the guidelines issued to the eateries in the capital.

According to a statement from the municipality, a total of 4,354 commercial establishments were inspected in the Muscat Governorate last week.

“Eight shops were closed and seven violations were detected during the inspections at various locations”, the statement posted online on Sunday said.

Also included in the inspections were 909 food stores, 1,952 restaurants and cafes, 920 barber shops and salons, 30 gyms and health clubs, 403 laundry shops, 26 sheeshah cafes and 14 other shops.

According to a ministerial decision last week, violators of the decisions to close the shops and markets, will be slapped with a fine RO 300 in the first instance.

“Repeat offence will attract a fine of RO 1,000 and cancellation of the licence”, a statement issued by the ministry said.

Now consult doctors online

Online consultations will be provided by specialist doctors on Instagram in light of the current health conditions in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19.



Musandam to receive rain

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

Musandam and other governorates in northern Oman are expected to get rain on Sunday and Monday, according to the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

“The rain is mainly in Musandam,” the weather forecast said. As per the general weather forecast, clear to partly cloudy skies are expected over the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and North Al Batinah with chances of isolated rain.

Mainly clear skies are expected over rest of the Sultanate with chances of dust winds in the open areas of Al Wusta and Dhofar. Over most of the Sultanate’s governorates wind will be easterly to southeasterly, occasionally fresh wind along the coastal areas.



The sea continues to be moderate to rough along most of the Sultanate’s coastal areas with maximum wave height range from 2.0 to 3.0 metres.

The Met Office has also cautioned on poor visibility during the dusty wind situation.

Clear to partly cloudy skies over

most of the northern governorates with chances of isolated rain over Musandam Governorate. Chances of low level clouds or fog patches are expected along the Arabian Sea coasts.

On Tuesday partly cloudy skies are expected over most of the northern governorates with chances of isolated

rain over Musandam Governorate and Al Hajar Mountains during the afternoon. Mainly clear skies are reported over rest of the Sultanate with chances of low level clouds or fog patches over parts of governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.

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Oman pledges funding support for anti-COVID-19 research, solutions

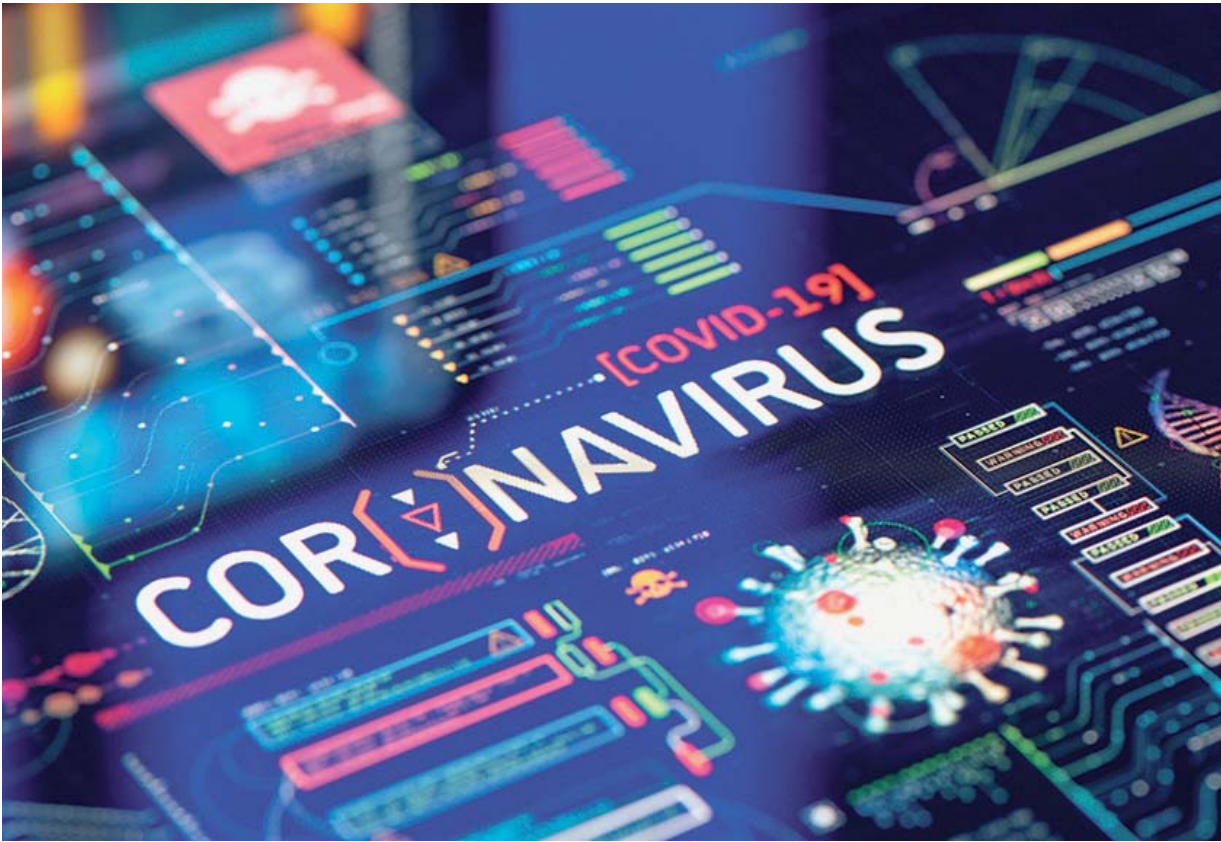
LOCALISATION: The Research Council and Oman Technology Fund announce funding for indigenous initiatives and projects that offer ‘quick win’ solutions against the pandemic

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

As the international community scrambles to innovate, uncover and fashion effective responses to the pandemic unleashed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), designed to address various health, social and economic impacts of the scourge, the Sultanate of Oman is taking the plunge as well into this global effort.

In recent days, two leading institutions on the frontlines of research and private equity financing in the Sultanate have pledged funding support for indigenous research and technological initiatives that hold promise in the fight against the pandemic.

The Research Council (TRC), the Sultanate’s pre-eminent research agency, has invited pre-proposals for its COVID-19 Research Programme. Proposals may focus on clinical themes, such as therapeutics, diagnostics, role of telemedicine, psychosocial aspects and preventive strategies or non-clinical, such as the use of Artificial Intelligence, Monitoring Technologies, Emergent Tracking, Support Systems, Economic and Business Impacts, E-Learning, Crisis Management, Environmental Issues, and so on.



Stressing its preference for quick-wins, the Council said: “As COVID-19 is evolving extremely fast with huge social and economic impact worldwide, proposals focused on relevant realistic and short-term objectives as well as optimised costs

will be given priority”. Interested researchers have until April 4, 2020 to submit their ideas.

On Sunday, Oman Technology Fund (OTF), the Omani government-backed specialized fund for investing in start-ups and innovative ideas in

the technology sector, announced RO 1 million in funding for tech initiatives that will help the local community stave off the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Preference will be given to young Omani entrepreneurs and innovators with tech ideas that can be

rolled out speedily and effectively, it noted.

OTF, launched in 2016, has so far invested in over 100 start-ups and initiatives in Oman and the wider Middle East region. At the weekend, OTF lent its backing to a new online portal to help Omani fishermen operating from the now shuttered Al Fulaj Wholesale Fish Market in Barka to offer their fresh harvest to traders.

Created by four talented Omanis, the portal, called ‘behar.market’, serves as an integrated electronic platform that allows traders to bid for fish offered for sale online — an initiative that has been widely welcomed following the closure of the wholesale market, in line with pandemic countermeasures implemented by the government.

Meanwhile, the Innovation Factory Centre (IFC), a pioneering Omani initiative behind the establishment of a unique digital fabrication and prototyping lab located in Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), is preparing to unveil a first-of-its-kind, automatic sterilising unit that can help individuals disinfect themselves from the coronavirus. Entirely designed by local Omani tech experts with local materials, the unit is like a walk-in cupboard fitted with a virus-killing UV-scanner.

Drugmakers Mylan, Pfizer delay merger



Logo of Mylan Laboratories is pictured in Merignac near Bordeaux, France. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Drugmaker Mylan NV’s merger with Pfizer Inc’s off-patent branded drug unit, Upjohn, will now close in the second half of this year, the companies said, blaming the coronavirus pandemic for the delay.

Due to restrictions on large gatherings, the general meeting of shareholders to approve certain matters for the deal to go through has been postponed to June 30, Mylan said.

There were no other changes to previously announced terms or plans pertaining to the deal, previously expected to close in mid-2020, the companies said.

The merger, which will bring blockbuster treatments Viagra and Lipitor from Pfizer under one umbrella with Mylan’s EpiPen, is part of years-long effort by Pfizer to split into three parts — innovative medicines, lower margin off-patent drugs facing generic competition and consumer healthcare. — Reuters

Oman Health Endowment Fund’s remit transcends COVID-19 fight

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

The launch of Oman’s first endowment fund dedicated to public healthcare services could not have come at a more opportune time, say market pundits. In the week since it was rolled out, the fund has garnered several millions of Omani rials in contributions from government, public and private sector organisations and growing numbers of individuals as well.

But the mandate of the so-called Endowment Fund for Enhancing Healthcare Services is not limited

to financing the government’s burgeoning campaign to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), with the Ministry of Health playing a frontline role.

Long in the making, the Endowment Fund grew out of the Health Ministry’s desire to ease its longstanding dependence on the government for its annual funding requirements. It has its origins in reforms initiated by the ministry in the wake of the fiscal crisis triggered by the slump in global oil prices in 2014 — the fallout of which continues to constrain Oman’s financial situation.



According to a senior official who helped craft the framework behind the first-of-its-kind Fund, the initiative is modelled on ‘Siraj’ — an endowment fund set up at the behest of the Education Council to help fund the development of higher education in the Sultanate.

Dr Halima al Hinai, Senior Consultant at the Ministry’s Directorate of Health Investment and Financing Alternatives, said the new endowment fund offers a “non-traditional approach” to help sustain the financing of the public healthcare sector in the Sultanate.

“The ministry came up with the idea of setting up an endowment fund that (capitalises) on some of its assets, uses donations and explores investments in partnership with Islamic banks,” the official recently told a conference on Islamic finance held in the city.

According to the official, the Healthcare Endowment Fund is being positioned as a primary source of finance for the running of Oman’s public healthcare sector in the future. “The Fund is proposed to eventually take over the financial burden of the ministry, support the

construction of hospitals, establish healthcare institutions at different levels, purchase hospital equipment, medicines and support medical education and R&D in healthcare,” said Dr Al Hinai. “It will also explore investments in healthcare related projects, such as pharmaceutical industries, private hospitals, and so on”.

Licensed banks, public listed companies, investment funds and private businesses are among scores of organisations that have announced generous contributions to the Fund in recent days.

Governments, central banks must help economies cope: BIS chief

LONDON: Governments and central banks need to step up efforts urgently to support their economies in the face of the coronavirus crisis, the head of the Bank for International Settlements said on Sunday.

General Manager Agustín Carstens, who heads the BIS — an umbrella group for the world’s central banks — wrote an opinion piece on Sunday saying “urgent” solutions beyond those used during the 2008 financial crisis were needed.

Rules brought in after the 2008 crash were designed to prevent banks overextending themselves, but the worry now is that they are not stepping in and lending when the capital markets have slammed shut for many firms.

“To give viable businesses a lifeline to tide them over the economic sudden stop wrought by COVID-19, a solution is needed to complete the last mile from potential



Bank of Mexico Governor Agustín Carstens gestures during the delivery of quarterly report from the Bank of Mexico in Mexico City. — Reuters

lenders to those firms at the edge of the precipice,” Carstens said.

Major central banks have rushed to pour trillions of dollars worth of emergency funding into the global banking system but that money needed to reach those who need it, Carstens said.

A first step towards bridging what he called “the last mile” would be for banks to use their capital buffers while “a global freeze on bank dividends and share buybacks,” was also needed.

A second step he recommended would be government-guaranteed

loans by banks to small and medium firms, equal to the amount of taxes each paid last year, although it should only go to those that were profitable last year to limit scope for corruption.

These “tax deferral loans” could be securitized and refinanced by the central bank, with any losses to be borne by governments.

Finally he said, these principles must “go global”, building on central bank dollar swap lines to channel liquidity toward preventing global supply chains from unravelling.

Government-guaranteed loans by banks to finance receivables, such as invoices for exports, could also be securitized and financed by a central bank facility.

“For central bank liquidity to reach the far corners of the financial system, it must directly target individuals and businesses that need it most. Otherwise, central bank actions may be just pushing on a string,” Carstens said. — Reuters



Ministry of Health

Auction (1/2020)

The Ministry of Health hereby informs specialized companies that the number, subject, date of collection document and date of submission of the Auction No. (01/2020) has been amended as follows.

Auction 01/2020/ for Lease of shop for selling gift and flower in Ibra Hospital. Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes.

Specialized Companies, establishments may collect auction documents and specifications from Finance Department In Ibra Hospital between 8.00am and 12.00pm during official working hours on or before 09/April/ 2020 and bring Full Valid registration documents issued by Ministry of Commerce and Industry,

A Bank Guarantee or a Certified Cheque valid for 90 days issued by a local bank for (1%) of the Auction Value addressed to Ministry of Health shall be enclosed with the bid as an auction bond that may be reimbursed to unsuccessful bidder. A bid unaccompanied by the auction bond will be rejected.

Offers enclosed in the sealed envelope duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee in Ibra Hospital providing the title of the auction viz:

“Auction No. 01/2020/R0 – for Lease of shop for selling gift and flower in Ibra Hospital”. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder’s name or identity.

Offers shall be deposited at the Office of Ibra Hospital Director by 12.00 afternoon on Monday, 27/April/ 2020. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry is not bound to assign any reason for rejected bids.



US consumer sentiment near 3-1/2 year low

WASHINGTON: US consumer sentiment dropped to near a 3-1/2-year low in March as the coronavirus epidemic upended life for Americans, and consumer spending was sluggish in February, strengthening economists' expectations of a deep recession.

The reports on Friday followed data on Thursday that showed the number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits rocketed to a record 3.28 million last week, eclipsing the previous record of 695,000 set in 1982.

The highly contagious virus, which causes a respiratory illness called COVID-19, is wreaking havoc on the economy, prompting the Federal Reserve to take extraordinary measures and the US Congress to approve a record \$2 trillion stimulus on Friday. Economists say the economy is already in recession.

"People are struggling to understand the magnitude and duration of the economic shock from COVID-19," said Chris Low, chief economist at FHN Financial in New York. "Job losses are the most vivid demonstration of the new reality. As the reality sinks in, confidence is likely to fall into the mid-50s by May."

The University of Michigan's Consumer Sentiment Index fell to a

reading of 89.1 this month, the lowest level since October 2016, from a final reading of 101.0 in February. It was the largest monthly drop in the index since October 2008, during the height of the financial crisis.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast sentiment would drop to a final reading of 90.0 this month.

The survey's gauge of consumer expectations tumbled to a reading of 79.7 from 92.1 in February. The University of Michigan expected consumer sentiment would decline further because of rising unemployment and the resulting drop in household incomes.

Governors in more than half of the nation's 50 states have ordered residents to stay mostly indoors, affecting over 100 million people. Widespread job cuts and the plunging economy have seen President Donald Trump, who is running for reelection in November, pushing for businesses to reopen by mid-April.

With infections and the death toll rising, many health experts, economists and politicians have warned against such a move. The United States now has the most coronavirus cases in the world, with more than 97,000.

In a separate report on Friday, the



Shoppers carry bags of purchased merchandise at the King of Prussia Mall, United States' largest retail shopping space, in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, US. – Reuters

Commerce Department said consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, increased 0.2% last month as

households spent more on electricity and gas, offsetting decreases in motor vehicles and parts as well as recreational goods. Last month's increase matched

the gain in January and was in line with economists' expectations.

Restaurants and bars have been shuttered, and airline travel severely

curtailed, which economists say will greatly offset any boost to consumer spending from grocery purchases following a wave of panic buying as Americans prepared to hunker down.

When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending edged up 0.1% for a third straight month in February.

US stocks sagged, ending a massive three-day rally, as investors' focus shifted from the stimulus relief to the damaging toll the coronavirus is inflicting on the economy. The dollar fell against a basket of currencies. Prices of US Treasuries were trading higher. With "social distancing" measures to contain the virus shutting down businesses, throwing millions out of work and severely curtailing spending, economists are predicting a moderate decline in consumer spending in the first quarter, which would give way to a sharper contraction in the second quarter.

"Social distancing measures taken in response to the fast-spreading coronavirus along with extreme financial market volatility will take a severe toll on the main engine of economic growth," said Lydia Boussour, a senior US economist at Oxford Economics in New York.

— Reuters

Saudi Arabia says no talks on new oil deal

MOSCOW/DUBAI/LONDON: Saudi Arabia said on Friday it was not in talks with Russia to balance oil markets despite rising pressure from Washington to stop a price rout amid the coronavirus pandemic and an attempt by Moscow to fix a rift with the de facto OPEC leader.

A three-year supply pact between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers, including Russia, fell apart this month after Moscow refused to support Riyadh's plan for deeper production cuts, prompting Saudi Arabia to pledge to raise output to a record high.

The resulting supply boost has coincided with plummeting demand as governments around the world implement national lockdowns to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The twin-pronged assault on prices has



An OPEC sign is seen outside the headquarters of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, in Austria. – Reuters

sent Brent crude LCOc1 to a 17-year low below \$25 a barrel and hammered the income of oil producers.

"There have been no contacts between Saudi Arabia and Russia energy ministers over any increase in the number of OPEC+ countries, nor any discussion of a joint agreement to balance oil markets," an official from

Saudi Arabia's energy ministry said, referring to the wider grouping of oil producers.

The comment came after a senior Russian official said on Friday that a larger number of oil producers could cooperate with OPEC and Russia, in an indirect reference to the United States, the world's biggest producer which has never cut production.

"Joint actions by countries are needed to restore the (global) economy ... They (joint actions) are also possible in the OPEC+ deal's framework," said Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund.

Dmitriev and Energy Minister Alexander Novak were Russia's top negotiators for the previous OPEC pact, which officially expires on March 31. Dmitriev declined to say which nations could be included in a new deal. — Reuters

Lufthansa applies for short-time work for employees

BERLIN: Lufthansa has applied for short-time work for around 31,000 crew and ground staff at its core brand until the end of August, a spokesman said on Friday, as Germany's flagship carrier has slashed flights due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Short-time work is a form of state aid that allows employers to switch employees to shorter working hours during an economic downturn to keep them on the payroll. It has been widely used by industry, including Germany's car sector.

The spokesman said Lufthansa had not yet applied for state aid but was in talks with various banks and authorities about what kind of help would be possible if the airline needed it.

He said around 700 of Lufthansa's roughly 760 planes were currently grounded.

In an interview with weekly magazine Der Spiegel, Lufthansa Chief Executive Carsten Spohr said he expected the global economy to



Airplanes of German carrier Lufthansa are parked on the tarmac as air traffic is affected by the spread of the Covid-19, in Frankfurt, Germany. – Reuters

shrink as a result of the crisis, adding globalisation might be reversed to a certain extent.

"That's why we are currently running different scenarios for a smaller Lufthansa group. In doing so we're trying to possibly keep all

our employees on board," he told the magazine.

"But this will only work with innovative ideas such as comprehensive part time work for all employees."

— Reuters

Investors fear markets not out of woods despite big rally

NEW YORK: After a brutal meltdown, some investors have been wading back into US stocks. But others are wary of another leg down as the coronavirus spreads and its economic impact is difficult to predict.

High-profile investors from BlackRock Inc to billionaire William Ackman have turned more bullish on equities in recent days, as unprecedented stimulus from the Federal Reserve, a \$2.2 trillion stimulus bill signed on Friday, and a call by President Donald Trump to get the US back to work in weeks rather than months sparked the biggest weekly rally in the Dow Jones Industrial Average since 1938.

But other investors, economists, and strategists are fearful of advising a jump back in, with no certainty about when the coronavirus will be got under control.

"People are trying to time the bottom and that's indicative of an early bear market, when people have hope," said Richard Bernstein, chief executive officer of Richard Bernstein Advisors. "The beginning of a bull market starts with complete despair, when you've killed hope."

Bernstein said he was a "data hawk"



The Wall St Bull is seen standing on a nearly empty Broadway in the financial district, in New York City, New York, US. – Reuters

and was looking for a combination of "improving fundamentals" — eyeing the basic health of the asset, rather than trading patterns — and "total disbelief," adding that in 2009 investors did not believe the bull market was real.

After a slump into bear market territory, the Dow Jones Industrial Average surged over 20% from its recent low last week, which by one definition

suggested a new bull market. That definition, however, should be treated with significant caution.

BofA said on Friday that its Bull & Bear Indicator — a key market measure used to track positioning — had hit "maximum bearish," which could imply a rebound. However, that could have been borne out by the rally seen in the past week.

Goldman, Morgan receive nods for majority stakes in China ventures



A sign is displayed on the Morgan Stanley building in New York US. – Reuters

BEIJING/HONG KONG: Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley said they had received the final regulatory approvals to take majority stakes in their China securities joint ventures, as Beijing continues to open its financial sector to foreigners.

The approvals come as policymakers and authorities step up efforts to shield the world's second-largest economy, battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Goldman and Morgan Stanley received the nods from the China Securities Regulatory Commission to raise their stakes in Goldman Sachs Gao Hua Securities and Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities from 33% to 51% and 49% to 51%, respectively, the two Wall Street banks said in separate statements.

Majority ownership of the joint ventures potentially allows the US banks to expand operations in China, and better integrate them with their global businesses.

Goldman in 2004 set up its China securities JV with Beijing Gao Hua Securities, which was cofounded by veteran Chinese banker Fang Fenglei.

Unlike most of the other China JVs, Goldman already has day-to-day operational control of its JV, which offers investment banking services such as equities and bond underwriting and deal advice. — Reuters

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NEW family flats in Darsait near the beach, 5 bedrooms, hall with AC, 4 bathrooms, balcony with sea view, RO 450 per month. Contact: ☎99315986.

BHK flat Al Wattayah, Muscat, 3 bedrooms + 3 bathrooms + kitchen. Located behind Honda Showroom- OMASCO. Contact: ☎91724525.

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APARTMENT has 2 bedrooms, sitting room, 2 toilets at Athaiba. ☎99773958.

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BEACH front appartment for rent in Al Ghubrah. Three bedrooms, three toilets, sitting and dining room, kitcher and a big balcony. Call owner ☎99202779.

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WELL maintained 1&2 BHK and office space/store available at Rex Road. Contact ☎92227165

APARTMENT for rent in Maabala 8 in Muscat. It's the highest one of the other two. 3 rooms with 3 toilets one family room, small store and air-condition. ☎71136222.

SHOP in Seeb market. ☎95250300/ 99110600/ 24182000.

NEW apartment in Ruwi near church consists of 2 rooms with its facilities. Contact: ☎94664635, 95850345.

SHOWROOM and flats FLATS for rent near Diwan Zafраниya area end of Muttrah Corniche close to (Muscat Shiva Temple), family, bachelor. Contact ☎99083071, 99323015.

FLATS for rent in Salalah European design, farm view, good situation in the centre near the sea, new flats. ☎92181524 WhatsApp.

INDUSTRIAL land 5,500 sqm in Jufnin ☎95490842, 97928817.

NEW Flats For Rent at Darsait near to Ministry of Sports Affairs, Mumtaz area The flats include: 1 Living Room, 2 Bedroom, Kitchen, 3 Toilets, Every room with split A/C, High quality finishing. Rent per flat is RO 320/- Interested persons, please contact. ☎00968-92225523.

1BHK & 2 BHK flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. ☎93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

FURNISHED flats for rent in Muscat Grand Mall ☎99445771, 93204595 93203481.

TWO new apartment for rent in Al Qurum near Mina al Fahal. ☎94664635, 95850345.

THE owner of family flats located Al Ghubra Healthcare Centre is offering them for rent against RO 260 ☎95548774, ☎99346417.

FLAT for rent in Al Khoudh near SQU. Monthly rent for RO 195 ☎99522963.

NEW penthouse, N Ghubra — 2 bedroom + 3 toilets + 1 maid room with toilet and 1 big hall ☎99370300.

FAMILY flat, air-conditioner, middle Al Khuwair ☎93663380.

OPEN space prime offices for rent at Qurum, adjacent to Muscat Private School on the main road, ground floor, 550 sq meters, every meter is RO 6.500 with general services. ☎95308724.

NEW building in Maabala Industrial Area available for rent. Corner location for showroom, hypermarket or bank. Ground floor, 1st and 2nd floors are open. ☎99323030

FLAT for rent at Al Khuwair 33, 4 bedrooms, majlis, 2 halls, kitchen and store. ☎99383446.

EXECUTIVE offices, including ACs/water & electricity in central Ruwi ☎99238012/ 24704994.

A VILLA in the old Al Filaj, Al Tayibeen District, 5 bedrooms, 6 toilets, a living room, a majlis, two kitchens & a store, building area 333 sqm, land area 637 sqm, the villa is 1 km far from Al Maabelah RO 300.000. Call ☎92111892.

ONE bedroom flat at Darsait near Medical RO 170/-. Two BHK Al Khuwair RO 300/-. Athaiba behind Zubair RO 300/-. (24790449, Fax: 24790559.

NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-. ☎92838118.

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FLATS in Al Mabella. ☎99323957, 95490842.

RESIDENTIAL building in Al Hamriya. Income RO 1,200. Required RO 115,000. ☎92273379.

RESTAURANT in an excellent location in Salalah with equipment and workers. ☎93397812.

FOR sale: Extravagant and furnished residences for female students in Al Khuwair, Al Mawaleh and Al Khoudh along with all assets. ☎99001332.

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PROVIDES all kinds of legal works, LLC registration, agreements, contracts. Takes all kinds of cases of companies. ☎97351649.

INDUSTRIAL land for sale. Area of 20,500 square metres in the Rusayl area, Price RO 70/- per square metre. ☎99369192.

FLATS in Al Wadi Al Kabir near to the Al Kuwaiti Mosque. ☎99425958.

SEMI furnished 2 & 3 BHK flats at Bausher — near Atlas Hospital. ☎99348493/ 93200424/ 24502254.

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact ☎99657906

AL Awsad Modern LLC, electronic and furniture used. ☎99834373.

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. ☎90202090.

RESIDENTIAL-commercial land in Nizwa, Hail Farq beside LuLu and Grand Mall is offered for sale. The plot is open from three directions and a corner. It is 750 sqm and RO 70,000 is requested. To check the plot's map and inquiries, communicate with ☎97722292.

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. ☎92836774.

JEWELLERY workshop attached with showroom for sale at Walja, Way Number 4301, Al Fursan Street, shop Number 25. ☎24835276, 93035380.

1) A LAND IN HALBAN behind GUTech is offered for sale. The land enjoys a permit for twin-villa.

2) A LAND is for sale in Mabaila 8 owner: ☎95959166.

HOUSE for sale in Wadi Udai for RO 27,000 (neg). ☎99462401/ 99243291.

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) ☎99242445, 9327939.

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For Sale/Rent

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact ☎94272979, 96252664.

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Situation Vacant

JOB vacancies for staff nurse Al Yamama Medical Center and Al Amal Al-Bassam Polyclinic. ☎98504226/94094262.

.....

MODERN Explorer Company LLC request job of **Accountant**. Indian nationality. He holds an Omani driver's licence. Send CV by e-mail: info@ees-oman.com ☎91240404

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HIGH Pressure Trading LLC, Hydroflow, looking for **Accounts Clerk** and **PRO** with one or two years experience in Suhar. Kindly send your CV with expected salary at: alzulfi@eim.ae

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MODERN Explorer Company LLC request jobs of **Conditioning Technicians**. ☎91240404. E mail: info@ees-oman.com

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URGENTLY required **Electrician with electrical licence (DCRP)**. Omani or expatriate (3 years experience). Contact ☎99337587, 99043127, 99348493.

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LOOKING for **Saleswoman** to work in printing press. Contact: ☎92673716.

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WE are looking for **Sales Executive**, candidates have minimum bachelor degree qualification and relevant experience can send CVs to Email: accounts@alsaroojss.com

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Announcement

ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENT OF DISTRIBUTORES

THE Arab Convertible Industries Company LLC, which specialises in the manufacture of household and industrial detergents of all kinds and based in the Sultanate of Oman (Barka), announces its desire to conclude product distribution contacts in each of the governorates of the Sultanate (Muscat, Al Batinah North and South, Al Sharqiyah North and South, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah, Salalah) and outside the Sultanate as well. For those wishing to enter the competition, please call the following numbers during working hours: (00968 - 99380182 or 00968 - 99322446). And send a brief summary of the company's business activities to the email: altabarak14@gmail.com

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URGENTLY required **Beautician**. Visa will be provided. Contact ☎94939252.

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REQUIRED **Counter Sales Staff** for building and carpentry material shop with two to three years experience at Wadi Kabir, contact ☎97914594.

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INDIAN male, MEP civil engineer graduate from Muscat and Master in sustainable architecore with 2 years experience, seek immediate placement, Oman D/L and employment visa available up to 2022 . Contact ☎92529664.

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INDIAN male, MEP engineer highly experienced in Oman, seeks immediate suitable placement. Contact ☎92056639.

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9 YEARS Oman experienced light duty driver looking for a job. MD Shafi ☎78058700

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Situation Wanted

LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM ☎92541510

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INDIAN female with Oman experience — Admin/Accounts, seeks job ☎91719246.

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CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job ☎97299165.

.....

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact ☎93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

.....

SUDANESE, 3 years experience in KSA, firefighting and fire alarm field, Nebosh (IGC) holder, driving licence: ☎79318246

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CIVIL diploma, 2+ years experience, Oman-DL, NOC available, seeking job. ☎99488438, e-mail: abdulrahman9035239249@gmail.com

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SINGLE, 27-year-old Tunisian national, Oman experience+driving license, looking for a job in admin, customer service, marketing, stock receiving/ management and any other related field. ☎96286678

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INDIAN, 33, male, already have 2.5 years of experience in Oman. In the field of Oil and Gas, maintenance, service of instrument air compressor and rotary equipment and have 6 years of automobile sales in India. Looking for suitable position. Currently on visit visa for 30 days. Contact ☎78207968, 92762001. E-mail: somuk1486@gmail.com

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INDIAN male 30 with NEBOSH Igc 7 years GCC experience on visit looking for suitable position. Call ☎+96878262237.

.....

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact ☎96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

.....

INDIAN male 25, MBA with 2.6 years of experience, having valid Omani driving licence, available for immediate joining for suitable post. Contact ☎0096895960211. E-mail: dedwin130@gmail.com

.....

ACCOUNTANT male Seeking good position. Experience more than 10 years with 4 years experience of Oman. Now on visit visa. ☎96090127

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SEEKING suitable placement. Qualified travel, aviation, hospitality personnel experienced in customer care and sales seeking placement. Immediate availability. Contact: ☎90485199, 79588741

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FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, Projects, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact: ☎99884291/99741875 Email: vipul70@gmail.com

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INDIAN male, Civil Engineer, 35 years in Oman with consultants and ministries, seek suitable position. Employment visa upto Sept 2021. Can work on present visa. Contact ☎99315714.

.....

MECHANICAL engineer specialized in quality inspection with cswip 3.1 & ASNT LEVEL II certifications looking for an opening in oil & gas industry. Currently in Muscat, kindly contact in ☎96206400 or (arunedathil@gmail.com)

.....

A YOUNG, Indian national, experienced in men's apparel sales, is looking for a suitable placement Contact: ☎78052285

.....

INDIAN male MBA graduate with over 12 year experience in sales, business development, marketing, accounts management and presales. Presently on visit visa in Muscat seeks suitable openings. Willing to join immediately. GSM ☎97733081 Email: sadiqbashawjs@gmail.com

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Situation Wanted

PAKISTANI male driver, 8 years experience in Oman, knows Arabic, seeks job. ☎96551602.

.....

MECHANICAL Engineer, 38-year-old Tunisian with 12-year Experience in administration, marketing, sales and customer service, looking for a job in these or other fields. ☎95643359.

.....

INDIAN male civil engineer graduate from Muscat and Master in sustainable architecture from Europe with 2 years experience seeks suitable position. Oman D/L and NOC available. ☎99315714.

.....

SRI LANKAN Male (24), HNDE-QS/Civil Engineer With AutoCad-MEP qualified, +2 years experienced, looking for a suitable placement. GSM: ☎92187572, Email: sifathhasan1995@gmail.com

.....

DRIVER have 8 years experience need a job. Contact ☎94954431/91788569.

.....

INDIAN male, 23, B Com, with 2 years experience in Accounts and Finance on a family visit, available for immediate joining. Suitable post of accountant, looking for a job. E-mail: aaronfernandes033@gmail.com. Contact ☎79869563.

.....

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. ☎96894991705.

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INDIAN male 26, BBM & MBA with UAE 2 years experience presently on visit visa in Oman seeks suitable opening willing to join immediately contact ☎78119897 Email: mohammedraiyan25@gmail.com

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PART-TIME accounting up to finalisation with free software. Contact ☎91720465.

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INDIAN, male, Age 26, B.Tech Mechanical Engineer, with 1+year Experience of India as site Engineer, HVAC, Autocad, fire fighting Equipment Maintenance and Technical works, seeking suitable job. Contact ☎91921038, E-mail: muqtarkhan80@gmail.com

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INDIAN male, BE+ MBA, 15 years experience in electrical products in projects and retail segment at senior position with valid D/L and NOC, seeks placement. Contact ☎95954779

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ARCHITECT, 9 years experience in maintenance projects, finishing, interior design and project management. ☎94481780.

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SEEKING a job. Bangladeshi, 5 years experience in driving. ☎95291202

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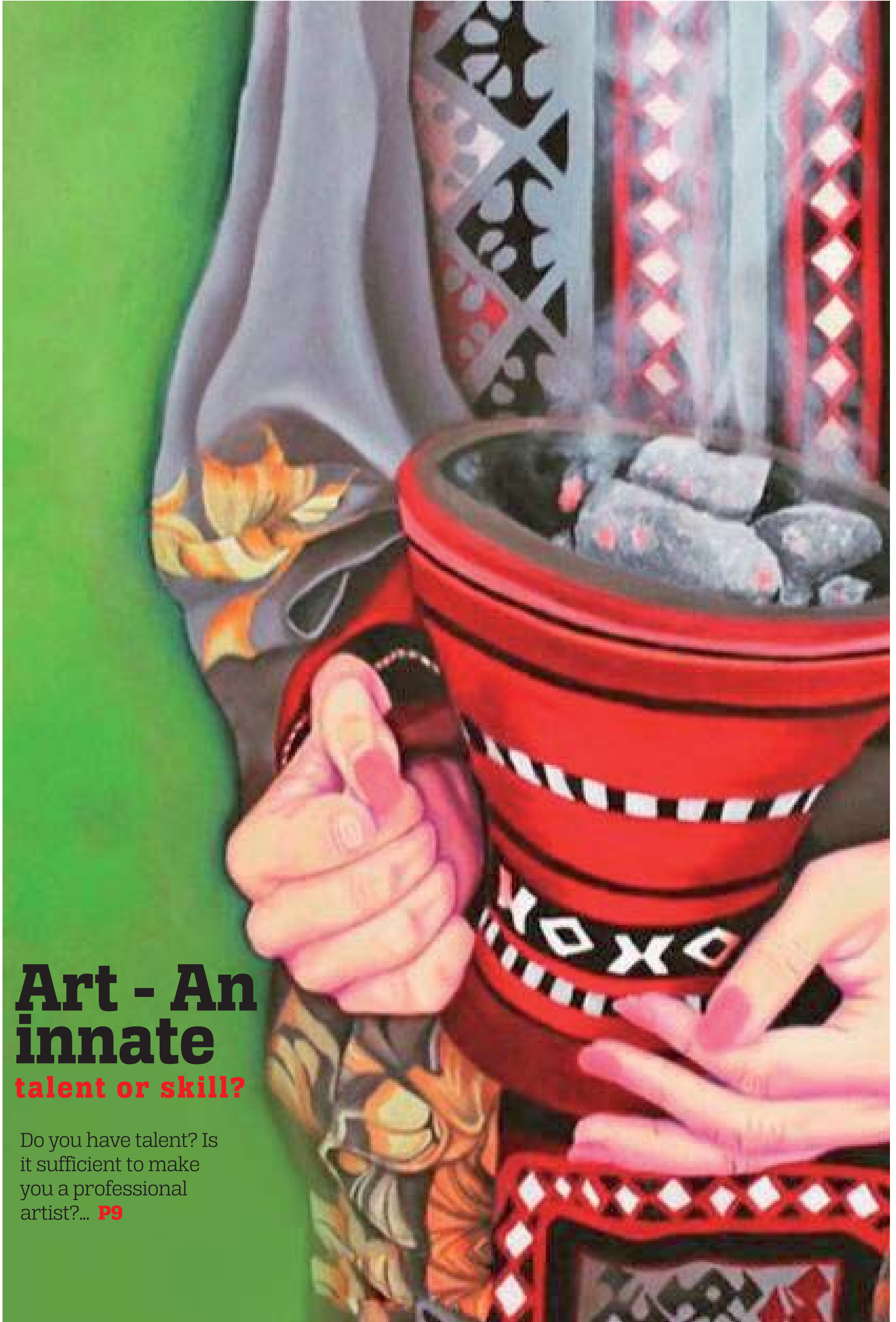
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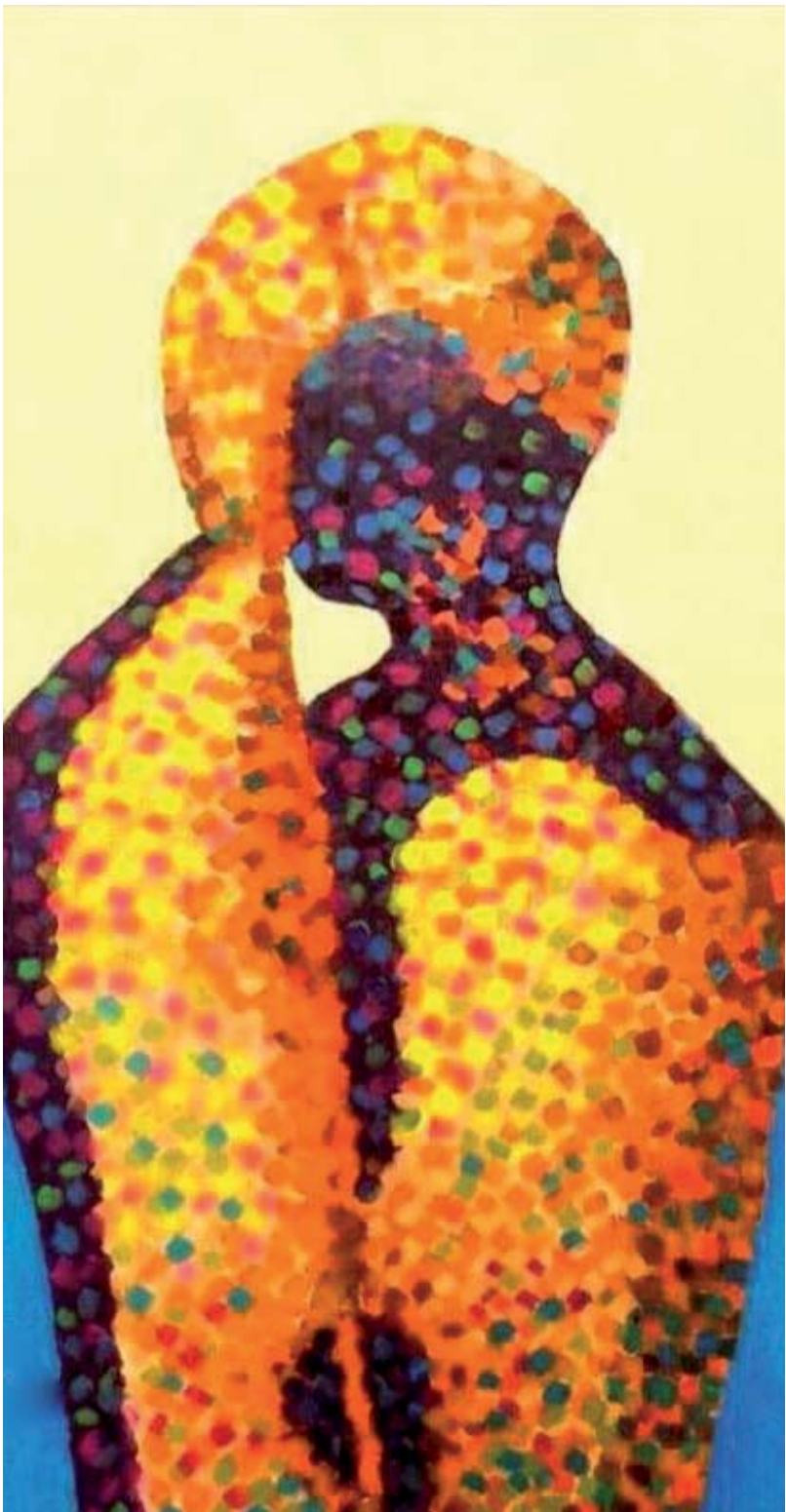
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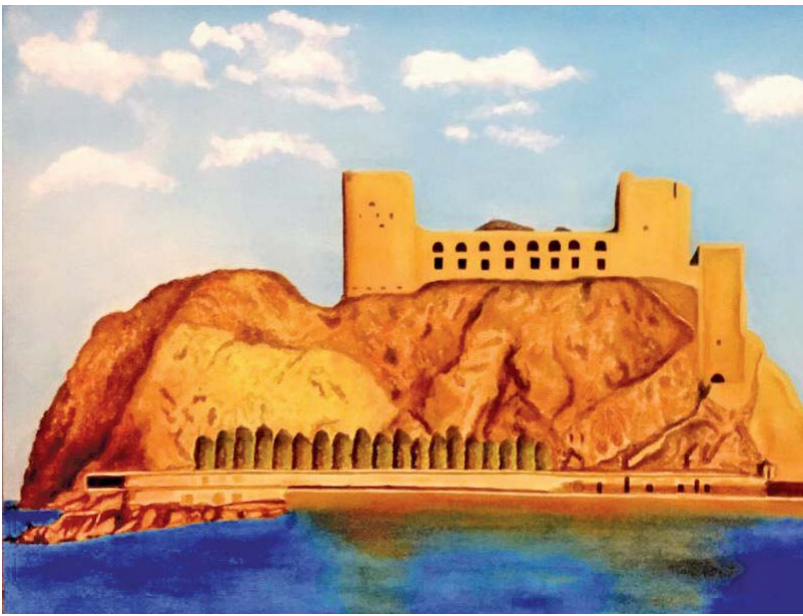
Art - An innate talent or skill?

Do you have talent? Is it sufficient to make you a professional artist?... **P9**





Art - An innate talent or skill?



MAI ALABRI

Do you have talent? Is it sufficient to make you a professional artist? Some people are blessed with abilities that others don't have. All of the talent in the world won't get you anywhere if you aren't willing to work hard, push yourself and try new approaches. When we see a fine piece of art or music, we often conclude that the artist must be really gifted. We come to this conclusion because we're judging the end result – the art work itself. We tend to forget about the process and the journey of getting there. The artist may have been practising for many years to get to that point. In which case hard work plays a huge role, regardless of whether he/she is naturally gifted or not.

The *Observer* met some Omani artists to take their opinion on this matter. Majority of them agreed that it is the combination of both, depending on the determination of each to reach the goal.

Nora al Balushi, a young Omani artist who is extremely passionate about drawing, said: "It's both. Most people fall in a category of left brain and right brain and combination of the two. Someone who is right brained has a much better chance of becoming an artist. Right brained people have better imaginations and are more creative. But, without using your creativity to learn all there is to know about what you are passionate about, then your talent will be wasted".

"Listen, learn, practice, innovate and you will be on your way to being an artist with a chance of being known and respected in the

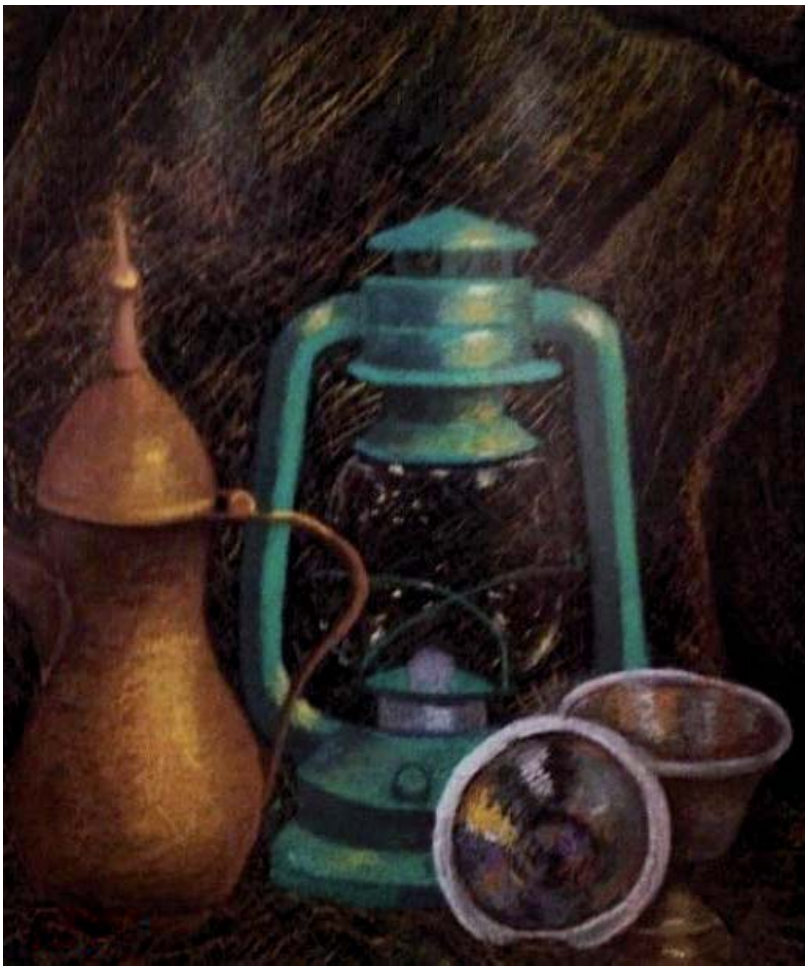
world of art, she elaborated. Most artists don't even come close to that level, but the ones that work at it will be happier, more satisfied".

Hazza al Maamari, a school teacher of arts, said: "Art has elements of skill, just like learning to write an essay has techniques or playing football has techniques. If you never learn those basic skills and steps, then of course you will have limited skill! But, if your education incorporates those techniques and skills, you will become more skillful".

If schools and education incorporates drawing skills as part of their curriculum from a young age, students will show more advanced skills in drawing and different arts. And as we all know the sooner you put hours into something and if you are taught a skill and made to practice it, you will get more skillful", he explained.

"I absolutely agree that artistic ability is a combination of both talent and practice," he added. As you say, with practice just about anyone could become fairly proficient with one medium or another. But a truly great can never be the product of mediocre talent, it requires intense practice. The truly great were no different from anyone else, they simply practiced more".

All of us are on different art levels. There will always be someone who knows less or more than you. This is what makes our art community such a rich source of knowledge and inspiration. We give each other hope and support to improve our craft. I have artist friends whose work I admire and always drool when I visit their studios. It humbles me, and upon leaving, it makes me realise that I have so much more to learn.





Break in season welcome for India's players, says coach

MUMBAI: The pause in cricket due to the coronavirus pandemic will allow India's jaded players to recharge their batteries, according to head coach Ravi Shastri.

The flu-like virus has halted sporting events across the globe as countries have gone into lockdown to contain the spread, with more than 550,000 people infected globally and nearly 25,000 dead, according to a Reuters tally. "It cannot be a bad thing. Because towards the end of the New Zealand tour, you could see some cracks coming up when it came to mental fatigue, physical fitness and injuries," Shastri said.

"The amount of cricket we have played over the last 10 months was beginning to take its toll. Guys like me, and some other guys from the support staff left India on May 23 for the World Cup in England. Since then we have been at home for 10 or 11 days."

India called off a home one-day international series against South Africa after the first match, while the cricket board (BCCI) has also postponed the start of this year's Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 tournament until April 15.

The country is currently in a 21-day lockdown until April 14 and the fate of the popular IPL is unclear.

Many national team players, including India's captain Virat Kohli, have taken to social media to spread awareness about the virus and the importance of staying at home.

"There are certain players who played all three formats of the game," Shastri added.

"You can imagine the toll it has taken on them, especially being on the field, adjusting from T20s to test match cricket and all the travel that goes with that because we travelled quite a lot. — Reuters



Superstar Smith's leadership ban ends

SYDNEY: A two-year leadership ban slapped on Steve Smith after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa ended on Sunday, leaving the master batsman free to skipper Australia again.

The 30-year-old captained the team until he was suspended for 12 months over a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper under his watch during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

Part of his punishment included a further year-long exile from any

leadership role, which has now expired.

Coconspirator and former vice-captain David Warner was banned from any leadership role for life, although both have successfully resumed their international careers.

There have been calls for Smith to take back the Test captaincy from Tim Paine, but it remains unclear whether he wants to, with the 35-year-old seemingly intent on playing on.

Coach Justin Langer last year praised Paine's leadership as

"brilliant" and said Smith may not want the "burden" of captaincy on top of batting pressures.

Aaron Finch is skipper of the Twenty20 and one-day teams.

Smith told Channel Nine television on Sunday he was focused only on trying to stay physically and mentally fit during the coronavirus shutdown of Australian cricket.

He was supposed to be preparing for a big-money payday at the Indian Premier League, but the tournament has already been delayed until April

15 in response to the pandemic.

With India in a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain a spread of the virus, Smith admitted the IPL appeared unlikely to go ahead.

"I think the country's basically shut its borders until the 15th of April," he said.

"It's obviously not looking likely at the moment, I think there might be some meetings over the next couple of days to discuss what the go is with it all.

"But just trying to stay physically

fit and mentally fresh," he added. "If it goes ahead at some point, then great. If not, then there's plenty going on in the world at the moment. Just play it day by day."

All cricket in Australia has been cancelled, with the team's three-match T20 series against New Zealand this month a casualty after just one game.

Australia has a Test tour to Bangladesh scheduled for June and a subsequent one-day campaign in England, but both appear to be at risk.

— AFP



WE'LL BE STRONGER THAN EVER IN 2021: OSAKA

TOKYO: Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka, the poster girl of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, took to social media on Saturday to show her support for the decision to postpone the Games until next year Osaka, who won the US Open in 2018 and the Australian Open in 2019, was the central character in the video to launch Tokyo 2020's official motto for the Games, launched last month.

The coronavirus has since spread across the world, however, leading to last week's decision by the Japanese government and International Olympic Committee to postpone the Games.

"Everyone knows how much the Olympics means to me and how proud I will be to participate in my home country," Osaka, the world number 10, wrote on

Twitter.

"Of course, I am disappointed that it won't happen this year but we'll all be ready to stronger ever in 2021! I support Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's brave decision and the IOC 100%.

"Sport will eventually unite us again and be there for us always, but that time not now," the 22-year-old added.

"This is the time for people from all countries, backgrounds and races to rally together to save as many lives as we can. To me, that is the Olympic spirit.

"To the people of Japan: stay strong, hang in there, and let's show the world our beautiful country when time is right in 2021."

Osaka, the first Asian to be ranked world number one,

concluded with a message for her 500,000 plus Twitter followers.

"Stay safe everyone, take care of each other, be kind and we will make it through. Love, Naomi."

Osaka, who was born in Japan to a Haitian father and Japanese mother before being raised in the United States, was chosen to lead Tokyo 2020's "United by Emotion" motto as the face of a changing country.

Japan, which has traditionally seen itself as a racially homogeneous country, is becoming more ethnically diverse and Osaka has been at the forefront of a new wave of sporting heroes set to represent the host nation at the Olympics.

Coronavirus infections in Japan have climbed to more than 1,400, with 47 deaths. — Reuters

sport

MILAN: Juventus players and coach Maurizio Sarri have reached an agreement over a wage reduction that will save the Italian champions 90 million euros (\$100.26 million), the Serie A club announced on Saturday.

Sarri and the first-team players have agreed what amounts to a four-month pay reduction to help Italy's most successful club during the coronavirus crisis.

The effective one-third cut to the players' annual salaries will mean a huge drop in wages for a squad headed by marquee Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, the best-paid footballer in Italy who is reported to earn 31 million euros a year.

The agreement comes at a time when many clubs around Europe have had to cut wage bills because of the dramatic impact of matches having had to be postponed or played behind closed doors due to the spread of the virus.

"The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros for the 2019/2020 financial year", Juventus said in a statement.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly payments of March, April, May and June 2020", it added, saying personal agreements with Sarri and the players will be finalised in the coming weeks.

The Turin-based club, in one of the regions hit hardest by the crisis, have suffered in recent weeks with three of their players having tested positive for the virus — forward Paulo Dybala, defender Daniele Rugani and midfielder Blaise Matuidi.

Soccer around the world has been brought to a standstill by the pandemic with Italy having suffered more than 10,000 deaths from the virus, the highest number in any country.

Italy's top-flight Serie A league has been suspended since March 9 with Juventus, seeking a ninth successive title, leading the league by one point from Lazio with 12 games each remaining.

HEALTH EMERGENCY

"Juventus Football Club S.p.A. announces that, due to the current global health emergency (which) is preventing the performance of the sporting activity, it has reached an understanding with the players and the coach of the First Team regarding their compensation for the residual portion of the current sport season," the club statement said.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly wages of March, April, May and June 2020.

"In the coming weeks, personal agreements with the players and the coach will be finalised, as required by the current regulations.

"Should the current season's matches be rescheduled, the Club will negotiate in good faith with the players and the coach conditional increases of compensation according to the actual resumption and finalisation of official competitions.

"Juventus would like to thank the players and the coach for their commitment at a difficult time for everyone".

Long-standing defender Giorgio Chiellini led the players' negotiations amid reports in the Italian media that Ronaldo had agreed to sacrifice 3.8 million euros of his yearly wage to ease the financial burden on the club while Italy is in lockdown.

The agreement comes the day after leading Spanish club Atletico Madrid took the decision to cut the wages of their staff, including the players, to ease the financial burden on the club.

Atletico joined La Liga rivals Barcelona, who imposed a compulsory wage reduction on their players during the period of lockdown after Spain became the second-most affected country by the coronavirus in Europe behind Italy.

German Bundesliga clubs Borussia Moenchengladbach and Borussia Dortmund have also said their players would forego some of their salary. — Reuters



JUVENTUS PLAYERS, COACH SARRI AGREE PAY CUT DUE TO CORONAVIRUS