

HM CONDOLENCES TO EMIR OF KUWAIT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on the death of Shaikh Nasser Al Hamoud Al Jaber al Sabah. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the Emir, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace and grant his family patience. — **ONA**



SEASON OF GRAPES

Al Rawdha village in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi is unique with a diversity of agricultural crops, the fertility of soil and the abundance of water throughout the year. All these factors have given agriculture a special attention by farmers. Besides the cultivation of date palm trees, citrus fruits, fodder and many types of fruit trees, grape cultivation stands out as one of the most important crops in the village. **DETAILS ON P6**



Dhofar braces up for another weather disturbance

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate is bracing up for another weather disturbance due to the low-pressure system, which is catching up over the Arabian Sea. According to a source in the Salalah Met Office, the current disturbance which started on Friday would continue till Sunday with rain and thunderstorms in some areas. Most of the desert areas would receive moderate to high rainfall with the strong winds mostly in desert areas. **TURN TO P2**



POLL FINDS 95% OMANIS SATISFIED

GOVERNMENT'S DECISIONS ON
C O V I D - 1 9

MUSCAT: An opinion poll conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in May, found that 95 per cent of Omanis are, to one degree or another, satisfied with the decisions and measures taken by the government to contain the spread of the COVID-19. According to the poll's results, 94 per cent of those polled said they were 'satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with the official statements and the information and data. Also, 89 per cent of citizens polled said they followed the government's official statements on the pandemic. In an indication of the people's attention to get updated on the pandemic and high confidence on official data related to COVID-19, three quarters of the participants (76 per cent) followed with great care the official data on COVID-19. The television came on top of the information sources for citizens with 53.4 per cent, while 46.4 per cent of the participants said that they obtain information from WhatsApp applications (14.7 per cent follow official accounts, while 31 per cent follow unofficial accounts), Instagram came in third place with 27.3 per cent (17.2 per cent for official accounts against 10.2 per cent for unofficial accounts). **TURN TO P2**

OMAN

Poll finds 95 per cent Omanis satisfied

FROM PAGE 1
Regarding the economic impact of the pandemic on Omanis, 19 per cent said they have been financially affected. Wage reduction was found to be the most notable financial effect of COVID-19 with 40 per cent said they have had their salaries cut. For entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses, suspension of work or shutdown of enterprises were the most prominent effects of COVID-19. The highest economic impact from COVID-19 occurred in Muscat Governorate with 24 per cent, double the percentage registered for South Al Batinah (12 per cent). — **ONA**

Dhofar braces up for another weather disturbance

FROM PAGE 1
Oman Met in an alert said: “Low-pressure system over the Arabian Sea is causing an advection of clouds with chances of varying intensity of rainfall occasionally and thundershowers over governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar associated with fresh downdraft winds until Monday (July 20).”
The alert sounded heavy rain and thundershower with an expected rainfall from 40 to 80 mm on Sunday. “It may cause fresh downdraft winds, flash floods, and reduction in horizontal visibility in the projected areas,” the met alert said. It said that the cloud formations on the Western Hajar Mountains — Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah — will lead to sporadic rains with thunderstorms.

Pandemic an opportunity to reset hospitality

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: COVID-19 has undeniably struck the hospitality and tourism sectors the hardest. But experts say it is an opportunity to make these sectors more eco-friendly and sustainable. It will take a couple of years to be back to normal. And when it happens, they feel tourists might never travel the same way again.

DAGMAR SYMES, former General Manager, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort, believes that this pandemic can be used as a chance to re-design the entire hospitality industry.

“The damages inflicted to nature cannot be reversed. It is better late than never to press the reset button into a whole new light of redefined hospitality. Social distancing cannot prevail as it is contradictory to the core of our business,” she says.

She mentions that guest experience will be enhanced towards the trend by using recyclable materials, local produce, paper-free rooms supported by new technologies and degradable cleaning products.

YASSER AL MAAMARI, promoter of Al Maamari Tours, warns the aged may develop psychological trauma travelling outside or develop travel phobias. Therefore, they might prefer to undertake holidays or outings in their own country. He says tourists will not be able to enjoy hotel facilities like earlier and one needs to be aware of restrictions due to health protocols. Travellers, he says, must be prepared for mandatory medical certificates and health insurance, which will make holidays more expensive. Tour operators should make sure that proper hygiene is followed by guides

and drivers who must disinfect their vehicles before any trip.

MARTINE GOHIER, General Manager, M&N Tours by Arabian Shining Touch, calls upon the industry to focus more on recycling and ban plastics.

“Europe is becoming conscious of their environment in a big way. I think the Sultanate could create more jobs in that field which will attract more eco-responsible tourism.”

According to Dagmar, mass tourism will fade away and that travelling will become more expensive as capacities in aviation and hotels cannot be fully utilised in the short term.

Guests are likely to question hygiene standards from a different perspective. Private villas will become the new trend with the aspect of social and physical distancing, she adds.

Hotels will have to update their existing model of operations.

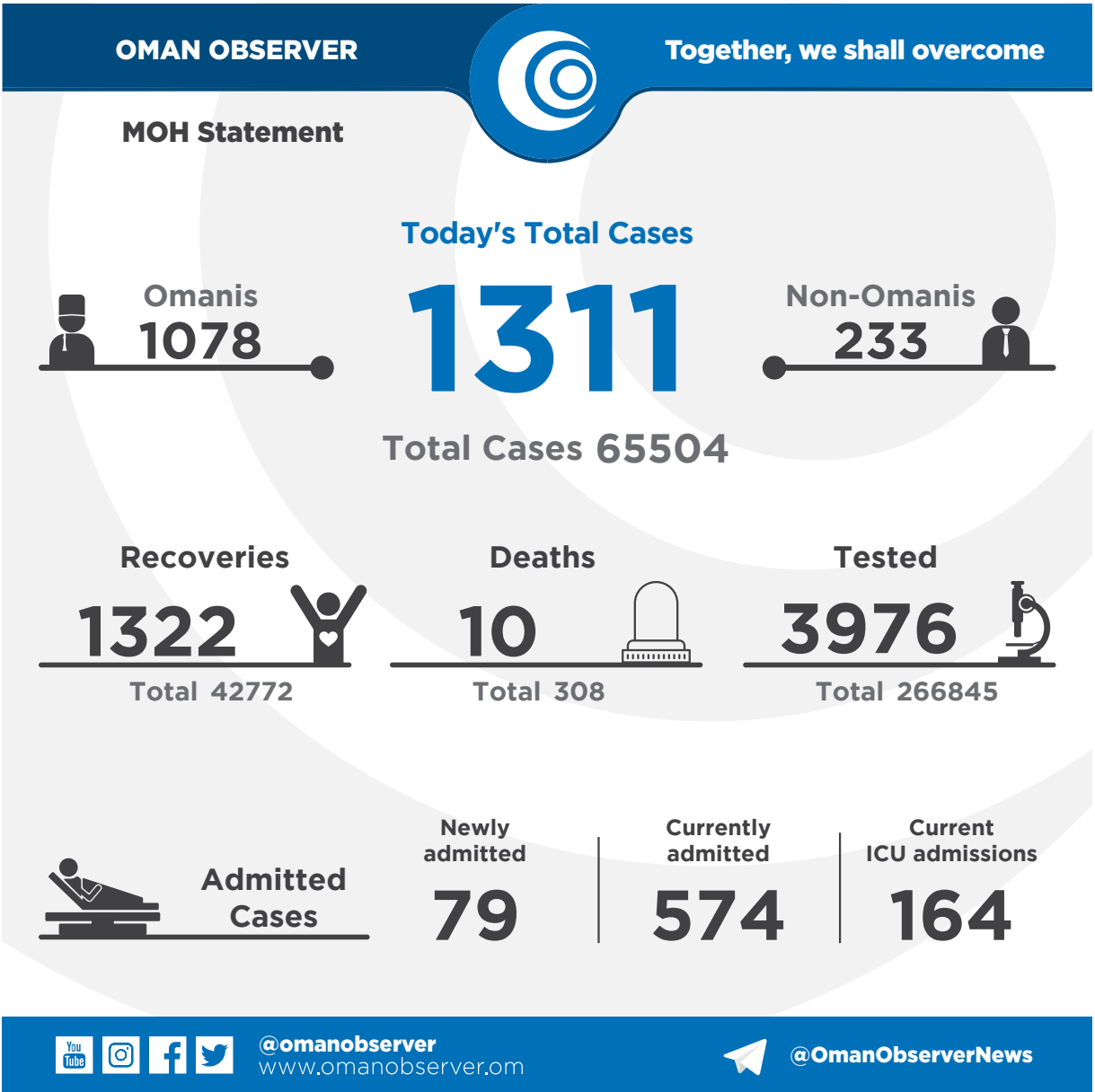
Crisis management plans must embody cost efficiency by identifying non-essential services and areas with decline in demand.

“The crisis has also revealed the companies’ loyalty and commitment towards their employees. Multiple talents have been made redundant in parallel to new positions arising, especially in hygiene related areas.

Offerings will have to be readjusted to the current travellers’ demand and expectations in terms of verbiage, content and style,” she adds.

Another aspect of the future hotel and travel environment will be the implementation of new technology in all areas.

Symes says the virtual world will be the norm and that personal devices will be the smart tool of tomorrow while consumer behaviour has already long shifted to online bookings, automated systems and digital systems need to be deployed by hotels.



Bidbid-Rusayl road to be 4 lanes

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport has started a project to expand Rusayl-Bidbid road to four lanes. This 27-km phase 1 starts from Rusayl-Nizwa interchange on Muscat Expressway and ends in Al Sharqiyah Expressway interchange located in Bidbid.

The project will also include the rehabilitation of the current pavement layers to meet the design requirement and accommodate the expected growing traffic in the coming 20 years. It also provides pedestrian bridges and tunnels, expanding Wadi Al Jefneen bridge, Wadi Fanja bridge near Al Amqat, building new interchange for Ghala road, and another in



Sayh Al Ahmer. Another expansion will also be on the current Fanja interchange, Bidbid interchange, and constructing the new bridge in Wadi Dhaboon. It will also include the construction of culverts for flood water drainage as well as protective facilities, and services pipes for future

services expansion.

The project follows the highest design and specifications standards. It is apparent through the newly added lanes leading to interchanges, roundabouts and exits.

The road will see the construction of modern energy-saving lighting poles. The

project will also include traffic safety facilities like concrete protective barriers, protective iron fences, warning sign boards, informative signboards and pavement floor painting. Road diversions will be set up to ensure smooth traffic flow during the construction of the project.

REGISTER TENANCY AGREEMENTS: MUNICIPALITY

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has warned landlords who lease their properties without registering the agreements to evade the five-per cent administrative fee.

“This kind of tax evasion is affecting the collection of revenues due to the municipality,” the statement posted in its twitter handle said.

The municipality stated that all lease agreements or contracts should be registered with it along with an administrative charge of 5 per cent of the total rental value.

Referring to the statement, an official at the municipality said that the number of tax evasion cases has seen a rise in the recent past.

“In some cases, they do not show the real rent amount in deal with the tenants,” he said, adding, “the municipality was currently dealing with many cases of undocumented lease

agreements.”

The Tenancy Law in the Sultanate mandates that the landlord must register the lease contract with the relevant municipality and pay the registration charges.

However, the parties may agree to shift this responsibility to the tenant, and the tenant in any case has the right to register the lease if the landlord fails to do so.

As the law provides important protections to tenants, particularly in the form of rent controls and protections against eviction, even when the duty to register the lease contract falls on the landlord, it usually behooves the tenant to ensure that this contract is duly registered with the municipal authorities.

But in many instances, individual landlords do not want tenancy agreements to be signed. Expatriates with low salaries opt for such accommodations where the rent is fixed at a bargain and is comparably cheap.

STATE COUNCIL SESSION TODAY

MUSCAT: The State Council's session on Sunday will be chaired by Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Council Chairman, in the presence of the honorable Council members and the Secretary-General of the Council.

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#Living_with_COVID19

PRODUCTIVITY AMONG RESEARCHERS SURGES

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: Coronavirus lockdown had upended normal life in April- May. For researchers, however, lockdown provided many advantages, says a Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) academic.

“Lockdown in fact forced all of us to explore all available online platforms and tools for meetings and effective discussions. This in fact armed us with a good weapon to work effectively maybe even after COVID-19 fades out,” says Dr Ali al Maktoumi, Director of Water Research Centre, and Associate Professor (Water Resources Management – Groundwater Hydrology) Department of Soils, Water and Agricultural Engineering, SQU.

“For Geoscience and Water Research, most of the research is related to field work. However, lockdown had slowed down the progress of work for the researchers. Gathering as a research team becomes challenging and we are left with only to work and communicate online,” he says.

“We found a lot of time to work on our articles. I did a lot of reading and wrote a



number of publications as well as found valuable time to communicate with my post-graduate students making excellent progress in this connection,” **Dr Ali al Maktoumi** told the Observer. Though

there was a slowdown in some activities but it immensely helped progress in other directions. “It opened up many opportunities but for water scientists, environmentalists and geoscience



in general, field experiments and visits are crucial and must be continued as one cannot understand nature from his or her office. Interaction and communication with nature is absolutely needed,” he explains.

Dr Ali said the research students were able to utilise all e-platforms during the stay home.

Over the last three months, Dr Ali attended a number of online international symposiums without spending money.

“The good thing for researchers is that the international scientific community started to organise big conferences using online platforms and made it possible for hundreds of participants and most importantly at nearly zero cost to attend such scientific gatherings.”

For teaching, e-learning was helpful. Although physical interactions in classrooms, laboratories and field experimental sites are extremely important and necessary for excellent teaching, e-learning is the only remaining option for continuing education in a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Ali concludes.

DIFFERENTLY ABLED KIDS SHINE AT EXAMS

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: As many as 15 differently abled students secured high scores at the CBSE public exams at the Indian schools. One student scored 98.2 per cent.

Despite being challenged by Down’s Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism these children made their parents, teachers and schools proud by confidence and determination.

“The outstanding result is largely due to the deep commitment of students, their

supportive parents and the devoted team of teachers. The ISM family dedicates this notable triumph to the coronavirus warriors and the community as they stand united at large,” said Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan, Principal of Indian School Muscat.

He also attributes the success to the dedication of the school counsellor and teachers who played a very crucial role in the success.

“It is no doubt, with the wholehearted cooperation from the part of parents and school and counsellor and therapist that

such a success was possible,” says Dr Benny Varghese, academic counsellor.

“With proper guidance and proper accommodation to the disability, everything is possible,” adds Dr Benny.

Indian School Muscat recorded the school average aggregate of 83 per cent at Class 10 CBSE exams. As many as 37 students scored centum, 32 per cent students scored above 90 per cent, 65.5 per cent scored above 80 per cent, 32.6 per cent A1 and 55.6 per cent of A1 and A2 in all subjects.

FOCUS ON RAISING TELECOM, HUMAN CAPITAL SCORES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Enjoying the 50th global position in e-government in the UN index, the Sultanate's focus areas now are telecom and human capital, which stand at 63 and 72 positions respectively.

The Ministry of Technology and Communication (MoTC) is studying how to improve these two sectors.

Shariffa al Maskery, Director of International Relations and Communications at MoTC, said, "We are currently studying all possible aspects, the biggest challenge being updating timely and accurate data with UNESCO's Institute of Statistics and telecom data with International Telecom Union (ITU)."

"These two organisations need time to validate 193 member states. So if we



delay uploading our information on their dashboard, we would miss the chance.

Once the UN begins to gather the information and if our information is not up to date, they would use the old one.

So we will be working very closely with the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) and ITU as well as the Human Capital Index and Institute of Statistics of UNESCO. They are all very cooperative but we just need to ensure that information is uploaded," explained Shariffa.

COVID-19 has seen a move towards digital services more than ever and has seen a speed up to use Artificial Intelligence

technology.

"The Ministry of Health is using Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to monitor people in quarantine. The Royal Oman Police is using drones to urge people to stay indoors. Government employees have been working from home is something we would have never dreamt of. Thanks to technology, we did not stop working even when we are at home due to the pandemic. Universities, colleges, and schools have adapted to the situation by bringing education online," she noted.

Many factors enabled the Sultanate to secure the 50th position in e-government. The two major factors – the e - t r a n s f o r m a t i o n programme, and the MoTC's work with the potential ministries to improve their portals and e-services – were mainly due to cooperation among the government entities.

Survey to know school-age Omanis from today

MUSCAT: The Electronic Census of Population, Housings and Establishments 2020, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, will begin a survey on Sunday to identify the number of Omanis at school age.

The survey will be conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) Call Centre till September 30.

The initiative is aimed to obtain and verify education data and enrolment status. In cooperation

with the Ministry of Education, a special field has been added in the Education Portal for listing data on education level for Omanis at school age and others studying abroad.

The process comes as a confirmation of the importance of setting up an integrated education database that encompasses all Omanis in line with the Ministry of Education's vision based on developing education and learning in a manner that ensures building a

generation capable of continued learning.

Earlier, the ministry called upon the parents of Omani and expatriate students to update and verify the students' information on the Education Portal. It is worth noting that the Electronic Census of Population, Housings and Establishments 2020 is currently at the pilot phase which is the fourth phase of the project and is aimed at collecting and revising preliminary indicators. — **ONA**

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Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries Announces the following International Tender:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
29/2020-3 (Re-tender) International	The Design, Construction and Deployment of a Marine Farm Artificial Reef Complex in South Al - Sharqiyah Governorate (Sur) of the Sultanate of Oman.	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 2/8/2020	Thursday 20/8/2020

- International specialized and Interested Companies may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24166670 or etenderhd@ita.gov.om.
- Note: Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries



CULTIVATION OF GRAPES THRIVES IN AL MUDHAIBI

AL MUDHAIBI: Al Rawdha village in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah is unique in the diversity of agricultural crops, the fertility of soil and the abundance of water throughout the year. Thanks to these features, agriculture has been given special attention by farmers. Besides the cultivation of date palm trees, citrus fruits, fodder and multiple types of fruit trees, grape cultivation stands out as one of the most important agricultural crops in the village. Currently grape is abundant in the markets of the wilayat and neighbouring wilayats, achieving a great financial return for farmers, despite competition from imported grapes. Eng Qais bin Amer al Maawali, Head of the Agricultural Development

Currently grape is abundant in the markets of Al Mudhaibi and neighbouring wilayats, offering a great financial return for farmers, despite competition from imported grapes

Section in the Agricultural Development Department in Samad Al Shan, said, “The cultivated area of grape in Al Rawdha village is estimated at 13,000 square metres, and it produces about 14 tonnes, at a value of up to RO20,000 annually.” In an interview with the Oman News Agency (ONA), he added, “There is a great interest in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in grape cultivation. The ministry provides materials and moral support to farmers, including seminars, improved seedlings, introducing farmers to

modern agricultural methods, and promoting agricultural products”. Sarhan bin Shatit al Habsi, grape farmer in Al Rawdha village, said, “The interest in growing grapes is continuously increasing. It receives significant attention from farmers and officials at various agricultural development sections in the wilayat. This is noticed in recent years in the large agricultural areas where grapes are grown”. The availability of fertile agricultural soils and fresh water whether from aflaj (ancient irrigation system) or wells in Al Rawdha vil-

lage has contributed greatly to the success of the grape cultivation. Attention is given to grape cultivation in the village from the beginning of the season until the date of harvest, including continuous irrigation, fertilisation, pruning, creating an appropriate environment, protection against agricultural pests and using modern agricultural methods. Al Habsi indicated that there are many types of grapes including black, white, and Lebanese, which achieve outstanding success in cultivation and quality. Harvesting of grapes in the village starts from June and ends at the end of August. The price per kilogram of grape during this period reaches approximately RO1 to RO1.5, and the prices go up at the end of the season. — **ONA**

Civil rights icon and US congressman Lewis dead

WASHINGTON: John Lewis, the civil rights warrior who died on Friday aged 80, excelled at what he liked to call “good trouble” — standing up against racial injustice to forge a better United States.

The African-American icon marched with Martin Luther King Jr, was nearly beaten to death by police, and later as a sitting congressman was arrested multiple times for protesting genocide or leading immigration reform sit-ins.

Lewis was a sharecropper's son whose fights for justice helped define an era, and whose moral authority as an indomitable elder statesman left a permanent imprint in Congress. He was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in late 2019.

“Today, America mourns the loss of one of the great-



est heroes of American history,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said of the 17-term congressman from Georgia.

She described Lewis as “a titan of the civil rights movement whose goodness, faith and bravery transformed our nation.”

Lewis clashed with

President Donald Trump on multiple occasions — boycotting his inauguration and citing Russian interference in the 2016 election to question his legitimacy.

RISKED ‘LIFE AND BLOOD’

Lewis was just 21 when he became a founding member

of the Freedom Riders, who fought segregation of the US transportation system in the early 1960s, eventually becoming one of the nation's most powerful voices for justice and equality.

He was the youngest leader of the 1963 March on Washington, in which King delivered his famous “I have a dream” speech.

Two years later, Lewis nearly died while leading hundreds of marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on a peace march to Montgomery when state troopers, seeking to intimidate those demonstrating for voting rights for black Americans, attacked protesters.

Lewis suffered a fractured skull that day, which would become known as “Bloody Sunday.” — **AFP**

Fire damages French cathedral, arson suspected



NANTES, France: Fire erupted in the gothic cathedral of Nantes in the western France on Saturday before being brought under control, sparking an arson investigation and leaving Catholic officials lamenting the loss of priceless historical artefacts.

The cathedral's 17th century organ was destroyed and its platform was in danger of collapsing, said regional fire chief Laurent Ferlay, but added the damage was not comparable to last

year's devastating blaze at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Passers-by saw flames behind the windows of the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul and alerted the emergency services just before 08:00 am (0600 GMT).

Around 100 firefighters rushed to the scene and managed to control the blaze at the gothic structure, built between 15th and 19th centuries, said Ferlay. — **AFP**

Twitter says hackers ‘manipulated’ employees

WASHINGTON: Twitter says hackers “manipulated” some of its employees to access accounts in a high-profile attack on the social media company, including those of Democratic presidential challenger Joe Biden and tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

“We know that they accessed tools only available to our internal support teams to target 130 Twitter accounts,” said a statement posted on Saturday on the company's blog.

For 45 of those accounts, the hackers were able to reset passwords, login and send tweets, it added, while the personal data of up to eight unverified users was downloaded.

Posts trying to dupe people into sending hackers Bitcoin were tweeted by the official accounts of Apple, Uber, Kanye West, Bill Gates, Barack Obama and many others on Wednesday. — **AFP**

WORLD

US divided over masks and schools as virus cases rise

WASHINGTON/BRUSSELS/LONDON: Americans debated mask mandates and the reopening of schools during the coronavirus pandemic on Friday as state and local officials imposed conflicting orders and cases rose by more than 70,000 across the nation for the second day in a row.

British ministers are making plans to distribute millions of free coronavirus antibody tests after a version backed by the UK government passed its first major trials, the Daily Telegraph newspaper reported on Friday.

The fingerprick tests, which can tell within 20 minutes if a person has ever been exposed to the coronavirus, were found to be 98.6 per cent accurate in secret human trials held in June, the newspaper reported.

At the European Union summit in Brussels, the Dutch welcomed new proposals on a massive EU stimulus fund on Saturday in a second day of negotiations among the bloc's leaders though a final deal on how to revive growth stifled by the coronavirus pandemic remained far off. The talks on Friday were deadlocked over who should control how the money is spent, as Prime Minister Mark Rutte held out against his EU counterparts after 13 hours of negotiations.

The United States recorded a total of at least 70,674 new COVID-19 infections on Friday after climbing by a record 77,499 a day earlier, the largest



President Donald Trump wears a mask while visiting Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre in Bethesda, Maryland. The president on Friday said he did not believe in implementing a national mask mandate as people should have a “certain freedom.” — Reuters

increase posted by any country since the pandemic started, according to a Reuters tally.

US deaths on Friday rose by at least 912, the fourth day in a row that fatalities have exceeded 900 a day.

In the state of Georgia, Governor Brian Kemp sued Atlanta's mayor to prevent her from mandating masks.

Americans have become divided along political lines over mask orders, with conservatives more likely than liberals to call the rules a violation of their Constitutional rights.

California Governor Gavin Newsom, who until now has allowed school districts in the nation's most populous state to set their own policies, said on Friday schools could reopen only in counties that for 14 days have stayed off a worsening trends watch list.

As of Friday, 30 of the state's 58 counties were on the list and schools there must remain closed. Among them are Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Diego counties, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of the state's population. — Reuters

Aishwarya Rai, daughter hospitalised

MUMBAI: Indian actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and her daughter were hospitalised for COVID-19 treatment, the Times of India reported on Saturday, days after her husband and father-in-law were admitted.

Rai's father-in-law Amitabh Bachchan and son Abhishek Bachchan, also major Bollywood celebrities, were admitted to Mumbai's Nanavati Hospital early this week, becoming the highest-profile patients of the pandemic sweeping India.

At the same time, Aishwarya Rai, a former Miss World, and her eight-year-old daughter, Aaradhya Bachchan, tested positive for the coronavirus, but they have since been in home quarantine.

Chinese city enters 'wartime mode'

SHANGHAI: Urumqi, the capital of China's far western region of Xinjiang, has gone into “wartime mode” and launched an emergency response plan after the city reported 16 new coronavirus cases on Friday.

State broadcaster CCTV cited unnamed officials as telling a press conference on Saturday that the city had suspended gatherings and ordered communities to restrict visits to other households.

It urged people not to make unnecessary trips outside the city and ordered infection tests for anyone who needed to leave Urumqi, aiming to prevent the spread of the virus. It has also carried out city-wide free infection tests, officials told the press conference as part of what the officials termed a “wartime” response.

Rouhani says 35m face infection

TEHRAN: President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that 25 million Iranians have been infected with the coronavirus and that another 35 million were at risk of acquiring it as Iran reimposed restrictions in the capital and elsewhere.

The figures Rouhani cited in a televised speech were far higher than Saturday's official toll of 271,606.

His office said they were based on “an estimated scenario” from a report by the health ministry's deputy minister of research.

“Our estimate is that until now 25 million Iranians have been infected with this virus and about 14,000 have lost their dear lives,” Rouhani said in the speech. — Reuters



A participant holds a replica depicting globe on fire during a “Fridays for Future” march in Mumbai, India.. — Reuters

Efficient cooling key to keeping climate change in check

THIN LEI WIN

After enduring the hottest decade on record, India aims to keep its homes and workplaces cool without raising energy consumption with one simple change: raising the temperature settings on air conditioners.

The government has mandated a default temperature of 24 degrees Celsius instead of the standard 20-21C for units made or sold from the start of this year and wants commercial buildings to keep air conditioning at that level.

The measure could cut national energy consumption by 24 per cent for households and 20 per cent for businesses, according to Gabrielle Dreyfus, co-author of a report published last Friday that called for a switch to more energy-efficient cooling systems.

The United Nations report said that while cooling devices like air conditioners and refrigerators are crucial to human health and the global economy,

emissions from the fossil fuels used to power them could worsen climate change.

“Doubling the energy efficiency of the cooling equipment... can save something like 1,600 medium-sized power plants from being built by 2030,” Durwood Zaelke, co-chair of the report’s steering committee, said.

“That’s a tremendous amount of conventional and climate pollution you can avoid,” said Zaelke, who heads the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development, a US think tank.

This should be a focus in post-pandemic recovery plans, said the report, which follows recent heatwaves in the United States and Siberia.

As climate change brings ever-hotter days, worldwide demand for cooling appliances is growing — by up to 10 devices every second on top of an estimated 3.6 billion that are currently in use, the report said.

It also said phasing out climate-warming refrigerant gases known as hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) could help the world avoid up to 0.4C of global warming by 2100.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

E-learning can never replace classroom



RAY PETERSEN

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Although e-learning has done a great job in enabling educational institutions to complete the 2020 Spring Semester, enabling students to complete assessment of their learning, and progression through the education system, there is no way in which the online format should be seen as a replacement for the classroom educational experience.

This, in fact, has its foundations in basic education where as much as pupils are taught to recognise and understand new things, most importantly they should learn to learn. In much the same way as the old proverb that observes, “Giving a man a fish will feed him for a day, while teaching him to fish will allow him to feed himself, every day.” Pupils do not only need to learn, but to learn how to learn!

Quality learning revolves around pupils learning all the ways they can learn whether they recognise them, or not. Good teachers seek to involve their pupils in understanding that there are many ways of learning, and how we are all different in the way we engage with learning. For example, all pupils arrive on day one of school with different amounts of ‘educational capital,’ depending on how much their parents have supported their pre-school learning experience, so although they are all the same age, they already have different knowledge.

The learning styles of verbal, visual, musical/auditory, physical/kinesthetic, logical/mathematic, social, solitary, or a combination of these are the ways we learn best. There are impulsive and reflective learners, temperament, personality, sociological factors, and the nature versus nurture debate, all of which require consideration, differentiation, analysis, and development by the classroom teacher to ensure the pupil experiences a quality education experience. As students, social and communicative learning experiences encourage and require students to speak with and listen to others, breaking down barriers, talking about oneself, learning that making mistakes and needing help and answers from others is not a reflection of a lack of knowledge, but simply learning! Teachers, parents and students should all harken to Ben Franklin’s simple: “Tell me, I forget, teach me, I remember, but involve me, and I will learn.”

The profile of a successful e-learning higher-education student is one that is motivated, has a reason for studying that is greater than simply marks and qualifications. The best of them are organised, prepared, questioning, understand that the e-lesson is only the beginning of the learning experience... and finally, that the real work is in what you do next!

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

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Oman’s first oilfield off east coast gets nod for development

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A promising offshore oilfield – the first to be discovered off Oman’s eastern seaboard – has been greenlighted for commercial development, a key stakeholder in the concession announced over the weekend.

Singapore-based Rex International Holding Limited said Oman’s Ministry of Oil and Gas recently approved the Field Development Plan (FDP) for the Yumna Field in Block 50, an offshore concession encompassing the waters around Masirah Island off the Sultanate’s east coast.

A Declaration of Commerciality has also been announced for the field, effectively marking the start of commercial production for the first time from the Block.

The announcement caps a multi-year effort by Rex International subsidiary Masirah Oil Limited, which has a 100 per cent interest in Block 50, in exploring and appraisal

NEW DISCOVERY:

The Yumna 1 well has so far produced more than 1 million barrels of oil and is currently producing over 8,000 barrels of oil per day.

the potential of the Yumna Field, among other prospects in the concession.

“The ‘Declaration of Commerciality’ will enable Rex’s subsidiary Masirah Oil Ltd to fully develop the Yumna Field while continuing to explore the rest of Block 50 Oman. Masirah Oil is grateful for the strong support provided by the Ministry of Oil and Gas in achieving this significant milestone,” Rex International said in a press statement.

The Yumna oilfield, previously known as GA South Field, is home to the GA South #1 discovery, which was made in early 2014. At the time, Masirah Oil announced a first-ever hydrocarbon find in the 17,000 sq km concession off the Sultanate’s east coast. During a second exploration well drilled in the concession, hydrocarbons were flowed to the surface and the well

achieved a restricted flow rate of 3,500 barrels per day of light oil of high quality without water production from a sandstone reservoir of excellent quality.

Last December, Masirah Oil began drilling the Yumna 1 well to appraise the Yumna oilfield. Early production testing commenced in January this year with oil produced during the field appraisal stored temporarily on an Aframax tanker.

“The Yumna 1 well has so far produced more than one million barrels of oil and is currently producing over 8,000 barrels of oil per day through a 1 inch choke with 440 psig flowing tubing-head pressure.

The first three cargoes of Masirah crude were lifted and sold in April, May and June 2020. Liftings were successfully completed from the first

offshore ship-to-ship transfers in Oman,” Rex International further noted.

A Mobile Offshore Production Unit (MOPU) installed at since in May this year, together with the Aframax storage tanker, now constitute the permanent offshore production facilities, it stated.

“We are very pleased with the progress in Oman. This is a major milestone achieved. I commend the local team for the great execution. Progressing to production will fundamentally change our corporate profile,” said Dan Broström, Executive Chairman of Rex.

Singapore-based oilfield technology firm Rex International Holding Limited holds an effective interest of 86.37 per cent in Masirah Oil through its indirect wholly-owned subsidiary, Rex Oman Ltd. Petroci, the National Oil Company of the Ivory Coast and Schroder & Co Banque SA also own minority stakes in Masirah Oil.



Oman Investment Authority outlines priority tourism projects

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the holding company of state investments in, among other sectors, tourism and hospitality projects, says it is pursuing the implementation of a number of ventures in line with its strategic goal to stimulate the nation's economic diversification, as well as maximise the return on state investments.

Hasil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, Senior Director of Real Estate Investment Projects at the Oman Investment Authority, said: "The priorities of Oman Investment Authority in tourism investments focus on strengthening the tourism infrastructure in the Sultanate thereby stimulating new investment opportunities, strengthening partnerships with the private sector, supporting opportunities for small businesses, and creating employment opportunities for young Omanis – objectives that are in line with Royal Decree 61/2020 establishing Oman Investment Authority."

In implementing various tourism projects, the Authority will take into account their economic returns, uniqueness, geographical location, and their impacts or benefits to local communities.



KEY GOALS:
Design and features of Muscat Port Waterfront Development to be reviewed to ensure it is consistent with surrounding heritage of Muttrah.

Projects making headway in their implementation include the 5-star Alila Salalah in Dhofar Governorate, which is in the process of being handed over to the operator Alila ahead of its opening in Q4 2020.

In Al Dakhiliya Governorate, construction work has been completed on a four-star hotel in Jabal al Akhdar, which will promote adventure tourism. A specialised European company will operate an adventure park within the facility. The project is now in the handover phase with a formal opening planned in Q4 2020.

At Yiti in the Governorate of Muscat, work is currently underway to establish the first phase of the integrated sustainable city featuring a four-star and five-star property, in other to other tourism and leisure components.

Oman fulfils commitments under WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement

MUSCAT: Oman has fully lived up to its commitments under the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), according to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The world body said in a news report that Oman adopted the best international standards and practices for developing its logistics sector in an effort to boost the country's investment appeal.

The Sultanate's commitment toward TFA and all other related international agreements – which are enshrined in Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy (SOLS2040) and Oman 2040 Vision -- aims to fulfil the country's ambition



to become a global logistics hub and to improve the country's international rankings.

Among the 164 WTO members across the world that have approved TFA commitments, the Sultanate is one of the first countries in the region to comply 100 per cent with the agreement.

Due to its provisions facilitating trade liberalisation, the Sultanate's complete fulfilment of requirements of this international agreement is reflected on the readiness of the country's systems, legislations and its business environment for

keeping pace with the global economic variables.

The TFA incorporates 40 main and subsidiary commitments related to the best trade practices for a smooth transaction of the goods and commercial movement in border crossings between countries, which contributes to facilitating the import and export operations.

The agreement also commits to achieving several benefits in the global business environment such as providing information, consultancy services before involving in commercial agreements, prejudices and appeal services in customs cases.

— ONA

BUSINESS



OXY OMAN'S EXPLORATION DRIVE YIELDS 16 DISCOVERIES IN 2019

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Occidental of Oman Inc (Oxy), ranked only second to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as the largest producer of crude in the Sultanate, racked up 16 new hydrocarbon discoveries across its large portfolio of upstream assets in 2019.

Production of oil, condensate and natural gas averaged 245K barrels of oil equivalent per day (BOEPD) in 2019, down from around 240K BOEPD a year earlier. The company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of US-based international energy firm Occidental, achieved peak output of 254K BOEPD in 2016.

"Occidental Oman achieved the planned production target. We have maintained activity levels and production despite market conditions and low oil price environment," the company said in an outline of its 2019 performance featured in the newly published 2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Oil and Gas.

A key highlight of the year was its successes in uncovering new hydrocarbon finds. "The 2019 (exploration) programme resulted in 16 discover-

ies with 66 per cent success rate for the year. We also acquired more than 2,024 sq km of new 3D wide-azimuth seismic data in Block 72," the company further noted.

Among the oldest players in Oman's upstream sector, Occidental has seen its footprint expand in the recent. "Today, Occidental is the largest independent oil producer operating in the country, with major operations in the north, primarily at Safah Field, and in central Oman at Mukhaizna Field.

Production of oil, condensate and natural gas averaged 245K barrels of oil equivalent per day (BOEPD) in 2019 in line with planned production targets.

Occidental was recently awarded three new exploration blocks, more than doubling its land position in Oman to 6 million gross acres," it said.

Four new blocks – 30, 51, 65 and 72 – were added to its portfolio over the last three years, effectively doubling the number of assets to a total of eight in the Sultanate.

Key contributors to the company's hydrocarbon output include Block 9 in the north, which accounts for a sizable share of its gas production. Block 53, home to the prolific heavy oil Mukhaizna field, is the source of the chunk of Oxy's black oil production. Block 62 and Block 27 made modest contributions as well.

MSM ends down led by drop in all sub-indices

MUSCAT: The MSM30 closed the week lower by 1.25 per cent on the back of drop in all sub-indices led by financials. Shariah index was however up by 0.09 per cent. The turnover and volumes were higher than last week by 77 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively. Foreigners continued to remain net sellers last week as well.

The number of insurance policies issued through various electronic windows and channels during the COVID-19 pandemic has exceeded 130,000, according to a report prepared by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on the performance of the insurance companies in rendering service during the pandemic. This proves that the sector was able to render non-stop service to the public to meet their need for insurance coverage in light of the precautionary measures announced by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic including suspension of conventional methods and closure of customers' counters.

The majority of the companies listed on MSM announced their second quarter results. Overall, earnings of 97 companies whose year ends in December stood at RO 137.5mn in 2Q20 compared to RO 96.2mn in 1Q20 and RO 183.9mn in 2Q19. Financial sector earnings were at RO 96.3mn, higher 24 per cent QoQ but lower 14 per cent on YoY basis. Industrial sector reported loss of RO 7.95mn in 2Q20 compared to profit of RO 9.3mn in 2Q19. While the services sector reported net income of RO 49mn, higher by 144 per cent QoQ but lower 21.5 per cent on YoY basis.

The Sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation declined by 0.73 per cent during June 2020 compared to the same month of 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The food and non-alcoholic beverages group witnessed a price rise by 3.39 per cent; health by 0.98 per cent; education by 2.21 per cent, and restaurants and hotels by 0.88 per cent. However, the prices of transport fell by 6.95 per cent; furnishings, household equipment, and routine household maintenance declined by 0.31 per cent; housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels dropped by 0.52 per cent; communication by 0.09 per cent; and miscellaneous goods and services by 1.62 per cent in June 2020 compared to the same month of 2019.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Bank Muscat holds RO 1m Al Mazyona prize draws

MUSCAT: Fortune smiled on 46 lucky winners last week at the special mid-year draw of Oman's largest savings scheme. The draw, which was held at the Head Office of Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, saw the winners walk away with a total of over RO 1 million in prizes.

Congratulating the winners, Abdullah Tamman al Mashani,DGM—Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said that the bank's flagship savings programme would



continue to promote a healthy savings habit amongst all people in the country. He expressed his happiness with the tremendous success achieved by

the Al Mazyona scheme in promoting the concept of savings in Omani society over the last many years and encouraged all customers to continue saving more

so as to get more chances of winning during the rest of the Al Mazyona prize draws scheduled for this year.

On his part, Abdulnasir al Raisi, DGM — Premier Banking, expressed his happiness with the successful organisation of the mid-year draw which gave away over RO 1 million to customers as a reward for saving more and more. He pointed out that Premier Banking customers are eligible for a large portion of the mega prizes which are given away as part of Oman's largest prize draw savings scheme.

NBO names new CEO

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the National Bank of Oman (NBO), has announced the appointment of Abdulla bin Zahran al Hinai (**pictured**) as Chief Executive Officer.

An industry veteran, Al Hinai is set to drive the bank's solid financial and operational performance forward while yielding sustained long-term shareholder value. He is also expected to add further momentum to the bank's digital transformation, continue to drive the focus on customer experience and lead the bank into the next phase of its strategic direction.

Amal Suhail Bahwan, Chairperson of NBO said, "Abdulla brings a solid track record of building and managing successful organisations across financial markets, where he has always delivered with vigour. We are confident that his stellar



background will strengthen NBO's position as a market leader and continue to pave the way for more growth opportunities for our organisation, our people and our clients".

She added, "We thank Al Sayyid Wasfi bin Jamshid al Said for his stewardship of and commitment to the Bank".

With over two decades of experience in the banking and financial sector, Al Hinai previously served as Chief Wholesale Banking and Strategic Growth Officer at Bank Muscat. Over the years, he held a number of other senior positions including General Manager-Wholesale Banking, Deputy General Manager-Investment Banking and Chief Executive Officer Muscat Capital (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), a Bank Muscat Subsidiary.

HSBC named Best Investment Bank in Oman



MUSCAT: HSBC Bank Oman SAOG has been named as the Best Investment Bank in Oman at the 2020 Euromoney Middle East Awards for Excellence.

The HSBC Group collected a total of six Middle East awards, once again featuring prominently in Euromoney's list of honours which are considered the most prestigious in the financial services industry.

"Being recognised as the Best Investment Bank in Oman is a clear recognition of the strength of our comprehensive capabilities that support both Omani clients seeking access to global opportunities and in presenting business opportunities in Oman which attract international investors to the Sultanate", said Andrew Long, CEO of HSBC Bank Oman.

The recognition for HSBC Bank Oman was complemented by a crop of other HSBC wins across the region, including the marquee awards of Best Investment Bank in the Middle East, Best Bank for Transaction Services in the Middle East and Best Bank for Sustainable Finance in the Middle East.

HSBC also collected an Excellence in Leadership award in recognition for the support it has provided to customers, employees and communities in the region throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

HSBC was also named as the Best Investment Bank in Kuwait.

BankDhofar's CEO is new OBA Chairman

MUSCAT: BankDhofar's Chief Executive Officer Abdul Hakeem Omar al Ojaili (**pictured**) has been appointed as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Banks Association (OBA) for the period 2020-2022. The announcement came following an online meeting held by Oman Banks Association's Board of Directors last month.

With 30 years of progressive experience in various aspects of banking operations and a strong track record of successful and inspirational leadership, Al Ojaili has been leading BankDhofar through a comprehensive



restructure and transformation journey towards achieving an ambitious strategic vision to become the Best Bank in the Gulf.

OBA is a non-profit professional association created to represent Omani banking sector, promote banking activities, coordinate with the regulatory authorities on matters of policy and strategy, and also support the collective effort towards banking excellence in Oman.

The association was formed based on the Ministry of Social Development's approval number 113/2014, dated May 21, 2014.

BUSINESS



Saudi hosts G20 talks on debt crisis, virus recovery

RIYADH: G20 finance ministers and central bankers are set to hold talks aimed at spurring global economic recovery from a coronavirus-triggered recession amid growing calls to widen debt relief for crisis-hit poor countries.

The virtual talks, hosted by Saudi Arabia, come as the surging pandemic continues to batter the global economy and campaigners warn of a looming debt crisis across poverty-wracked developing nations.

The ministers and bankers will “discuss (the) global economic outlook and coordinate collective action for a robust and sustained global economic recovery”, G20 organisers in Riyadh said in a statement.

The talks, chaired by Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al Jadaan and Central Bank Governor Ahmed al Kholifey, come a day after the European Union held its first face-to-face summit in five months to discuss a post-virus economic rescue plan.

Kristalina Georgieva, the International Monetary Fund's Managing Director, has warned that despite some signs of recovery, the

So far, 41 out of the world's 73 poorest nations have applied for the G20's debt service suspension initiative, saving them up to \$9 billion this year.

global economy faces sustained headwinds, including the possibility of a second wave of COVID-19.

“We are not out of the woods yet”, Georgieva said in a message to G20 finance ministers, warning the pandemic was likely to increase poverty and inequality.

Downgrading its growth forecasts, the Washington-based crisis lender last month said it expected global GDP to fall by 4.9 per cent this year due to a deeper contraction during lockdowns than previously anticipated.

The \$11 trillion in stimulus offered by G20 nations has helped to prevent a worse outcome, but “these safety nets must be maintained as needed and, in some cases, expanded”, Georgieva said.

In April, G20 nations announced a one-year debt standstill for the world's poorest nations.

Campaigners have criticised the measure as grossly inadequate to stave off the knock-on effects of the pandemic.

France said on Friday it would ask the G20 to extend the debt service suspension.

“The economic crisis will persist in 2021 throughout the world”, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a statement.

“France calls on the G20 countries to extend the moratorium on debt servicing to give the poorest countries the means to overcome” the crisis.

So far, 41 out of the world's 73 poorest nations have applied for the G20's debt service suspension initiative, saving them up to \$9 billion this year, according to charities Oxfam, Christian Aid and Global Justice Now. — **AFP**

SPORTS

FINAU, PALMER SHARE LEAD

TIGER MAKES CUT WITH SEVEN-FOOT PAR PUTT AT MEMORIAL

LOS ANGELES: Tony Finau and Ryan Palmer overcame slow starts to share the lead at the halfway point of the Memorial Tournament in Ohio on Friday while Tiger Woods narrowly made the cut thanks to a seven-foot par putt on his final hole of the day.

Starting on the back nine, overnight leader Finau struggled out of the gate with bogeys on two of his first three holes.

But momentum shifted his direction when he saved par with a greenside bunker shot out of an awkward stance on the par-three fourth that rolled within inches of the hole.

He went on to birdie three of his final five holes and sits atop the leaderboard with Palmer at nine-under-par 135 heading into the weekend.

"I was very pleased to finish that way," said the 30-year-old Finau, who is looking to capture an elusive second win after claiming victory at the Puerto Rico Open in 2016.

"At the end of the day, still at the top of the leaderboard. Pretty satisfied."

His countryman Palmer suffered his first bogey of the tournament on his second hole but went



Tony Finau putts on the 13th green during the second round. — USA Today Sports

error-free the rest of the way to card a 68 under sunny skies at the Muirfield Village Golf Club.

Woods, competing on the tour this week for the first time in five months, made two late birdies to salvage a four-over-par 76 that left him three over on the week. The cut line settled at three over, giving the 44-year-old a chance to win a record-breaking 83rd tour title this

weekend. "Well, not very good," Woods said, when asked to assess his round.

"I three-putted two holes early and, whatever kind of momentum I was going to create, I stifled that early and fought it the rest of the day."

Woods added that his range of motion was limited on Friday by his surgically repaired back.

US PGA TOUR MEMORIAL TOURNAMENT SCORES SECOND ROUND (USA UNLESS NOTED, PAR-72):

- 135 - Ryan Palmer 67-68, Tony Finau 66-69
- 136 - Jon Rahm (ESP) 69-67
- 138 - Gary Woodland 68-70, Chez Reavie 71-67, Luke List 70-68
- 139 - Jason Day (AUS) 73-66
- 140 - Mackenzie Hughes (CAN) 74-66, Henrik Norlander (SWE) 74-66, Steve Stricker 73-67, Jim Furyk 72-68, Danny Willett (ENG) 74-66, Jordan Spieth 70-70, Viktor Hovland (NOR) 74-66, Patrick Cantlay 70-70
- 141 - Lucas Glover 69-72, Christiaan Bezuidenhout (RSA) 72-69, Dylan Frittelli (RSA) 73-68, Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG) 75-66, Justin Thomas 74-67

World number four Dustin Johnson struggled mightily on Friday, posting his second consecutive round of 80 for an unsightly 16-over par for the tournament after winning the Travelers Championship in his last start last month. Bryson DeChambeau's second-round 76 included a quintuple-bogey 10 on the par-five 15th as he joined Johnson, Rickie Fowler and Justin Rose in missing the cut. — Reuters

BCCI ORDERED TO PAY DECCAN CHARGERS \$640M



NEW DELHI: A court has ordered India's cricket board to pay more than \$640 million to former Indian Premier League champions Deccan Chargers for illegal termination of the franchise.

The Chargers, which were owned by the Deccan Chronicle newspaper group, were kicked out of the IPL in 2012 by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for financial breaches. The action was taken a day before the team's deadline to settle matters however. And the Bombay High Court ruled

on Friday that the termination was illegal and premature, a legal representative of Deccan Chronicle said.

"They have been directed to pay 48 billion rupees (\$640 million) plus taxes which might amount to about 80 billion," the legal representative said. "We haven't received the judgement copy yet, only after reading, we will decide our next plan of action," Hemang Amin, the interim chief executive of the BCCI, was quoted as saying by the Economic Times newspaper. — AFP

SPORTS



STOKES
READY
FOR LONG
HAUL

RAIN FRUSTRATES ENGLAND AS HOSTS LOOK TO SQUARE SERIES

MANCHESTER: Ben Stokes admitted England had their work cut out to draw level with the West Indies as rain threatened to wash out the whole of the third day's play in the second Test at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Persistent rain, which ensured the pitch and square were fully covered, meant there was no play before lunch, with England looking to level a three-match campaign at 1-1.

Star all-rounder Stokes top-scored with 176 on Friday and shared a partnership of 260 for the fourth wicket with opener Dom Sibley, who made a painstaking 120, as England piled up 469-9 declared after being sent into bat.

"It's not ideal, turning up today with the weather around," Stokes told Sky Sports on Saturday. "It's looking like we'll have to take 19 wickets in two days.



"But the wicket has offered something throughout the whole Test so far, so we just need to make sure we can expose that. And we know that once we get on a roll, anything is possible with the bowling attack we have."

Before Friday's close, Sam Curran had John Campbell lbw, with West Indies set to resume on 32-1.

England are looking to bounce back after a four-

wicket loss in the first Test at Southampton last week in a campaign that marks international cricket's return from the coronavirus lockdown.

Stokes is a member of a revamped bowling unit, with England resting seamers James Anderson and Mark Wood.

They dramatically found themselves without Jofra Archer for this match when the express quick

was omitted for a breach of the bio-secure regulations governing the series.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board announced Saturday that, following a disciplinary hearing, Archer would be available for the third Test starting on Friday.

LEARNING CURVE

Stokes found himself captaining England at Southampton after regular skipper Joe Root missed the first Test to attend the birth of his second child. "It's never nice losing a Test match," said Stokes, with the West Indies bidding for their first series win in England for 32 years.

"But I enjoyed the whole process of being captain for the five days."

Defeat continued a worrying trend for England, who have now lost the opening Test in eight of their last 10 series. — AFP

Pics: Reuters

HAMILTON CLAIMS RECORD 90TH POLE

BOTTAS JUST BEHIND AS MERCEDES LOCK OUT FRONT ROW AT HUNGARIAN GP

BUDAPEST: Lewis Hamilton broke the circuit lap record and drew level with Michael Schumacher for another feat on Saturday as he claimed a record-increasing 90th pole position for Sunday’s Hungarian Grand Prix.

The six-time world champion clocked a stunning time of one minute and 13.447 seconds on his second run in final qualifying to finish just ahead of team-mate Valtteri Bottas as Mercedes reeled off their 65th

front-row lockout.

It was Hamilton’s second successive pole of the COVID-19 delayed season and a Schumacher-equalling seventh pole at the Hungaroring, where he seeks his eighth victory to draw level with another Schumacher achievement for wins on the same track.

Schumacher won eight times at the French Grand Prix.

“I have to pinch myself,” said Hamilton. “It doesn’t register. It’s quite humbling because I work with an incredible bunch of people who do an amazing job here and back home.

“And Valtteri doesn’t make it easy for me. It takes perfection to do laps like that so this is one of the things I enjoy most.”

Bottas said he expected it to be close. “We seem to be on

another level, pretty far ahead of the others. My laps were ok, but I couldn’t go faster really.”

Behind the two ‘black arrows’, the controversial ‘pink Mercedes’ of Racing Point were third and fourth with Lance Stroll and Sergio Perez ahead of a much-improved showing by four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc for Ferrari.

“I am very happy at the moment,” said Stroll. “Was strong all the way through qualifying, the whole weekend, really.”

Max Verstappen was a disappointing seventh for Red Bull, Lando Norris eighth ahead of his McLaren team-mate Carlos Sainz with Pierre Gasly, in his 50th Grand Prix, 10th for Alpha Tauri.

On a cool, damp afternoon at the Hungaroring, where blazing sunshine has been the norm over 35 years, the air temperature was 19 degrees and the track 28.6 as the session began. — AFP



Sayyid Khalid takes part in IOC meeting ‘remotely’



MUSCAT: Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) Chairman Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidi participated in the 136th session meeting of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Friday.

The meeting was presided over by IOC President Thomas Bach and attended by

members of the Executive Office, IOC members, heads of international federations and national Olympic committees.

The meeting was held via video conference for the first time in history due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

In his speech, Bach highlighted the importance of

sport in light of the global pandemic and in uniting the world through various IOC activities organised in social media and websites with participation of about half a million people around the world. The meeting also reviewed topics related to the development of the Olympic Movement.

SPORTS



LEEDS BACK TO EPL AFTER 16-YEAR ABSENCE

LONDON: Leeds United returned to the Premier League after a 16-year absence on Friday as West Bromwich Albion's loss at Huddersfield Town guaranteed them a top-two finish in the Championship.

A huge favour from Leeds' Yorkshire neighbours, who won 2-1, meant the celebrations could start in earnest at Elland Road.

The club's Italian owner Andrea Radrizzani will also be toasting promotion which is worth an estimated £170 million (\$213.64 million).

Leeds have 87 points with two games remaining, five more than second-placed West Brom who slumped to defeat at the John Smith's Stadium on Friday and have one game left.

Leeds are six points ahead of third-placed Brentford, who have also played 44, and a point from their last two matches will ensure Marcelo Bielsa's team rejoin the elite as champions.

They could even claim



Leeds United Manager Marcelo Bielsa.

the second-tier title on Saturday if Brentford fail to win at Stoke City.

"It's unbelievable and it's still not properly sunk in", captain Liam Cooper told the BBC. "Our club, our fans and our players have sacrificed so much -- we've been in the doldrums for 16 years.

"To be part of this team and to lead this team to promotion back to where we know we've always belonged is unbelievable.

"We deserve it -- we've

been the best team all season on a consistent level and we've got the job done. We set out to get promoted and now we want to go and be champions and lift that trophy".

SWEET SUCCESS

The success will be doubly sweet for Leeds who missed out on promotion last season in the play-offs despite looking favourites for automatic promotion for much of the campaign.

It also comes less than a week after the death of one of the club's greatest players -- England World Cup-winning centre-half Jack Charlton.

Three times English champions, Leeds were relegated from the Premier League in 2004 after hitting financial trouble and being forced to sell a host of big-name players such as Robbie Keane, Jonathan Woodgate and Lee Bowyer.

The problems were only just starting though and after three years in the Championship they slipped to the third tier and into administration with the future of the club in doubt.

While they eventually regained their place in the Championship in 2010 they never really challenged for promotion until the enigmatic Bielsa took charge in 2018.

They have been transformed under the former Argentina coach and can now look forward to renewing old rivalries with the likes of Manchester United and Liverpool.

— Reuters

FEATURES



THE UNSUNG HEROES

The challenging COVID19 era have taught us many lessons and has given us so many images of heroes from different sectors of society. From doctors, to paramedics and nurses, from store attendants to street cleaners, here's why we should celebrate these unsung heroes... **page 20**

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The Unsung Heroes

KABEER YOUSUF

"Being positive is the most negative word of the season", a lesson taught by the pandemic Coronavirus during this period of uncertainty.

However, albeit teaching so many lessons, the season has also given us myriad images of heroes from different sectors of society. Doctors and paramedics belonging to the Ministry of Health, the dedicated officials of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and NGOs reaching life-saving medicines across the breadth and width of the country.

Never to forget the cleaners belonging to various contracting companies and Muscat Municipality who sacrifice themselves in setting hygiene, healthy surrounding congruent to a Corona free environment.

The medical fraternity has been delivering commendable service to humanity on a 24/7 basis during the period with no stones unturned towards making sure the country is free from the virus.

The Health Ministry had set up six testing centres in the capital area, Sablat Muttrah, Muttrah and Jibroo PHC's, Muttrah Municipality Parking area, Hasan bin Tabit School and Hai al Mina Centre in the initial days of the virus outbreak to check both citizens and expats for infection.

"Health workers are in the front-line of COVID19 outbreak response team and this exposes them to hazards including exposing to the pathogen (COVID19), fatigue, burn-out, psychological stress and the like," Dr Saleha al Jadidi, Head of Consultant Psychiatry and Geriatrics at Al Masarra Hospital.

"Life has become hectic after COVID19 erupted. However, taking it positively that we can fight the pandemic", Dr Sulaiman, Senior Specialist who is doing clinical duties in North Sharqia Health Center and assisting patients seeking consultation and treatment, sending them to reference hospitals, and the like.

"Medical or healthcare profession is one profession where the balance has to be maintained between social distancing as well

as healthcare of the patients. Hence, a doctor and medical staff have to be physically present to see the patients regularly but were advised to use proper healthcare measures.

Moreover, she said, health workers are also mentally stressed about the possibility of transmitting the virus to their families and stress among Health workers is quite normal situation-based on circumstances of COVID19.

"However, it can cause a major effect on them as they may develop depression or anxiety along with other psychiatric problems and these may affect them and their families. Therefore managing psychosocial wellbeing is highly important just as physical health".

Dr Raman, Chairman and Senior Consultant Cardiologist, Al Hayat International Hospital feels that the very thought of death from corona brings more fear, anxiety and in some even panic the reasons are manifold although the fear of death is universal.

"It is part and parcel of the survival instinct."

"We have been rendering testing services and have carried out scores of tests so far ever since our Hospital has been dedicated to COVID-19 test and treatment", says Doctor Hamed al Harthy, Hospital Director, Al Nahda Hospital.

"We have so far dealt with both positive and negative cases until now. We divided our emergency department into two separate areas, one to receive the Corona cases and the other one to receive normal cases and they are following guidelines and pathways in managing and administering the cases", adds he.

At a time when the world is passing through the COVID-19 pandemic and petrifying news daily, these frontline warriors in the battle, the doctors, nurses, paramedics, and administration and support staff personnel are standing head and shoulders above the rest in making themselves all prepared to fight till the end for the sake of the society.

These heroes need to be illustrated and made known. Families of these unsung heroes can be proud for they have a member who let everything go in protecting the society from all evils.

FEATURES

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Milan goes ‘phygital’ for first apres-lockdown fashion week



MILAN KICKS OFF its first Digital fashion Week on Tuesday with two live runway shows, including from heavyweights Dolce & Gabbana, to send out a message of “positivity.” Running through Friday, this “phygital” fashion week — featuring both physical and digital shows — will present the Men’s Spring/Summer 2021 collections, as well as men’s and women’s pre-collections. This is the third such show after London and Paris and Italy’s first fashion week after

the coronavirus crisis. Thirty-seven brands answered the call, including two who opted for real, in-person fashion shows: D&G and the Italian house Etro. “We decided to present the collections with a physical fashion show to give a strong positive message, fundamental at this time for the fashion system and the city of Milan,” wrote Kean and Veronica Etro in a statement. “Real interaction is fundamental to fashion.” Etro will be hold its show at

the Four Seasons Hotel located in a converted 15th century convent while D&G has chosen the gardens of the university campus of the Humanitas Hospital, which has been involved in coronavirus research and which the fashion brand supports financially. Last month, Sicilian designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana announced their return to the Italian fashion Chamber (Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana) and to the official calendar. Since 1998 they have shown

their collections outside the official calendar, due to differences with the management at the time. The chamber’s president, Carlo Capasa, called it “a great return.” “It comes at a difficult time for fashion and shows the strong bond that the designers have with our country. Today, more than ever, it is important to be united to safeguard our unique industry in the world”, Capasa said in a statement. Dolce and Gabbana said that “today, more than ever, fashion needs positivity and strong unity”.

DIGITAL VERSUS REAL The hybrid fashion Week will be kicked off by MSGM at noon on Tuesday (1000 GMT), a day also marked by shows from Prada, Moschino and Philipp Plein. On Wednesday Etro and D&G follow suit, with Salvatore Ferragamo, Tod’s and Dsquared2 on Thursday. The week closes Friday with Gucci, Ermenegildo Zegna and Missoni. To accomodate buyers, the chamber will offer live appointments round the clock over various time zones. In addition to the fashion shows, brand presentations, interviews and backstage sessions, there will be virtual “theme rooms” covering a wide range of topics, from sustainable development to diversity and technological innovations. Two other digital events, International Hub Market and Together for Tomorrow, are dedicated to upcoming designers. It remains to be seen how buyers and the media react to Milan’s hybrid fashion week. The Paris shows that ended Monday were presented in video, with some critics saying the new format fell somewhat flat. — **AFP**

FEATURES



Hagia Sophia the latest tussle over holy sites

ISTANBUL'S ICONIC HAGIA Sophia is to reopen for Muslim worship as a mosque after an almost nine-decade hiatus, in the latest historic tussle with Christianity over religious sites.

The UNESCO World Heritage site was constructed as a cathedral during the Byzantine empire but converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

A Turkish court on Friday overturned a 1934 cabinet decision to turn Hagia Sophia into a museum, clearing the way for a July 24 reversion to its status as a mosque.

The move adds to a long list of such conversions of holy sites over the centuries. The following are examples:

ALGERIA

Algiers' Ketchaoua Mosque was built in about 1612 and enlarged in 1794, making it one of the country's main mosques.

The French, a year into their 1830-1962 colonial reign, turned it into the Catholic church of Saint Philippe.

The first mass was celebrated

there on December 24, 1832.

In 1838, it was consecrated the Algiers Cathedral and enlarged, destroying most of the old mosque.

But with Algeria's independence in 1962, Ketchaoua again became a mosque, hosting its first Friday prayer in 130 years. Since then, it has been renovated with Turkish funding.

CYPRUS

Selimiye mosque in northern Nicosia, originally the Roman Catholic cathedral of Saint Sophia, was the work of French masons who accompanied the Crusades.

It was built in the 13th century during the reign of the Frankish Lusignan dynasty on the eastern Mediterranean island.

The cathedral was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman seizure of Nicosia in 1570.

Tradition has it that imams preparing to deliver the Friday sermon climbed into the minbar, or pulpit, leaning on a sword used during the conquest of the city.

The finest example of Gothic architecture on the island, the Catholic cathedral of Saint

Nicholas in the northeastern city of Famagusta was consecrated in the 14th century during the Lusignan period.

It was transformed into Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque after the Ottoman empire captured the coastal city in 1571.

EGYPT

Attarine Mosque in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria was originally an octagonal church dating back to 370 and dedicated to St Athanasius, a pivotal figure in the Coptic Orthodox church.

The place of worship was converted into a mosque during the Islamic invasion of the seventh century, and it is named after its location in the old spice market of Alexandria.

During the Napoleonic invasion, explorers believed the tomb of Alexander The Great was buried inside the mosque in a green sarcophagus.

It was renovated several times during Ottoman rule, and has been open to the public since its latest rebuilding in 1976. — AFP