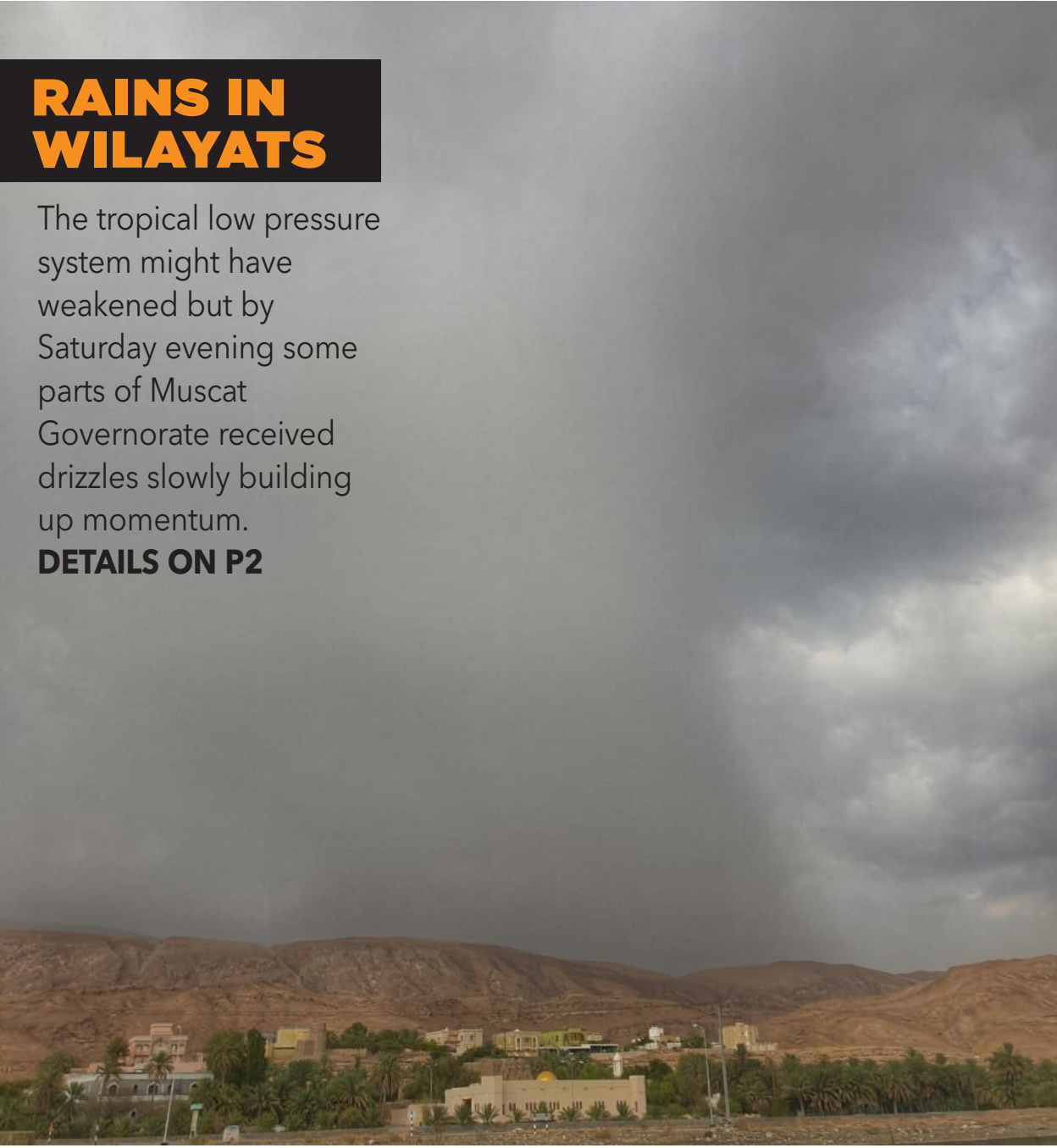


HM greetings
to Singapore
President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Halimah Yaqoub, President of the Republic of Singapore, on the occasion of her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to the President and the friendly people of Singapore further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

RAINS IN
WILAYATS

The tropical low pressure system might have weakened but by Saturday evening some parts of Muscat Governorate received drizzles slowly building up momentum.
DETAILS ON P2



Public complied with lockdown

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) continues to implement the decisions of the Supreme Committee on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic related to the ban on movement from 9 pm to 5 am, which will be effective from today until August 15.

The ROP thanked citizens and expatriates for cooperating and for complying with the precautionary measures aimed to stem the spread of the virus.

The ROP said that citizens and residents have complied with the decision of the Supreme Committee



banning movement in the evening, and its decision to lockdown the governorates of the Sultanate through the checkpoints set up by the ROP in cooperation with the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

During the Eid al Adha holidays, the ROP has stepped up monitoring to prevent gatherings as part of its efforts aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus.

PARENTS' OPINION SOUGHT ON REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

ZAINAB
AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: With less than three weeks left for the new academic year 2020-2021 amid COVID-19, the Ministry of Education has called on different segments of the society to participate in an electronic survey to find a suitable alternative for classroom education.

Within 17 hours of the launch of the survey on Thursday, more than 37,000 people took part in the survey, which closes today.

In light of the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry confirmed that it has developed several alternatives to provide education during the next academic year after consulting educational directorates in the governorates,...

TURN TO P6

Rumours on start of new academic year denied

The government has denied rumours regarding the start of the school academic year in Oman.

"The message circulating about the start of the school year is not correct, as this has not been announced yet. The authorities will officially announce it in a timely manner."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has been taking views of the community on the possible teaching methods for the new academic year.

OMAN

Parts of northern governorates get rain

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: The tropical low pressure system might have weakened but by Saturday evening some parts of Muscat Governorate received moderate rains.

The tropical low pressure that had developed over the north eastern part of the Arabian Sea that had been expected to bring in rain to the northern governorates of Oman did not have the opportunity to develop in its full strength to head over to Oman.

The final statement from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre on this weather system said the weather charts indicated that the expected direct effects from the weather system located north of Arabian Sea, off the coasts



of Pakistan is over.

The latest weather charts indicate that there are still chances of isolated rain, and the sea state along the coastal areas of Sea of Oman will be moderate with maximum wave height of

two metres while sea is expected to be rough along the Arabian Sea with maximum wave height of four metres.

In its statement, the Public Authority for Civil Aviation said it appreciated all the

efforts made by the National Committee for Emergency Management and civilian sector and the public response to the issued alerts.

“The upper level was dry which is why the prediction of the heavy rain did not work out. This is the main cause. When the clouds approached land they did not find enough moisture. The system was moving too fast as well. Pakistan recorded heavy rainfall,” explained a senior weather forecaster.

Along the coastal areas of Oman Sea winds will be variable light at night becoming northeasterly light to moderate during day and along coastal areas of Arabian Sea winds will be southwesterly moderate to fresh while over rest of the Sultanate winds will be southeasterly light to moderate.

Mazoon UP

2L

CAUTION AS WORK RESUMES TODAY

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: As offices reopen on Sunday after long holidays, employers and employees in both public and private sectors are taking extra precautions to curb spread of coronavirus.

Life is returning to normalcy as the number of COVID-19 cases decline, lockdown eases and more business activities set to reopen.

From Friday, some roads especially to those connected to Muscat saw heavy traffic as citizens started arriving from the wilayats.

The Supreme Committee has advised employers to adopt policies and best practices for the protection of staff and asked heads of respective departments to set precautionary measures to curb the spread of infection.

“There will still be lots of anxiety because the reopening is going to place a lot more responsibility on individuals. They’re going to have to weigh personal decisions based on health risk, psychological well-being and economic needs,” said Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

“We, as a society, should keep in mind that we’re all interconnected. We want to stay safe wherever we are. We are all equal from the virus’ perspective. So follow the rules to protect ourselves.”

Majority of COVID-19 patients are complying with quarantine measures to limit the spread of infection.

Hamed al Wahaibi, who will be



resuming work after the 14-day quarantine after he was tested positive for COVID-19, said, “From the very beginning, I was not worried because I had no major symptoms except mild fever and coughing. I was advised to remain isolated at home. I followed what I was told. My health is fine now.”

Working from home looks set to continue even after lockdown measures are progressively eased. “While in office I hold more responsibilities than before as I have to ensure that I follow the precautionary measures including physical distancing. I am bored being at home for so long,” said Mohamed Khamis, a public sector employee.

“Many people are acknowledging the benefits of being able to work in the comfort of their home, giving them greater flexibility over how and where they spend their time,” said Ahmed al Balushi, human resource manager with a finance company.

EXPAT WORKERS FALL BY 9.3PC

MUSCAT: The number of expatriate workers in the Sultanate fell by 9.3 per cent in the first half of this year compared to the same period of last year.

The number of non-Omani workers in the private sector dropped by 10.1 per cent while domestic sector and the government sector saw a decrease of 6.2 per cent and 5.7, respectively, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Nationality-wise, Bangladeshi workers made up 37.2 per cent (590,748) of total expat workers in the first half of this year, a decrease of 8.9 per cent compared with the corresponding period of 2019. Indian workers registered were 567,341, down by 11.2 per cent. Pakistani workers came in the third place with 192,676, a decrease by 8.9 per cent. Filipino and Egyptian workers were 47,537 and 33,234, respectively.

The number of expat workers in the Sultanate was 1,589,883 by the end of June including 1,259,814 employed by the private sector, 277,000 in the domestic sector and 52,462 in the government sector.

The number of expat workers registered by the end of 2019 was 1,712,798 of whom 79.6 per cent were working in the private sector, 17.2 per cent in the domestic sector and 3.2 per cent in the public sector. — ONA



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FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020

OMAN **Observer** DAILY

Be Careful, Be Responsible! Stay with COVID

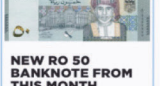
ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHARBI VOL. 38 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER



MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Said bin Abdulrahman bin Ahmed al-Habsi took the oath of office as the new Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries on Thursday.

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH



MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Republic and in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Omani Revolution, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a new series of RO 50 banknotes, which will begin circulation this month.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN



SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

A drive around the downtown Muscat and its surrounding areas reveals how recklessly people are ignoring social distancing guidelines and how they are not following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not.

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN



NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

جلالة السلطان يوجه بتشييد مشاريع تنموية بقيمة ٢٠٠ مليون ريال



السلطان يوجه بتشييد مشاريع تنموية بقيمة ٢٠٠ مليون ريال

السلطان يوجه بتشييد مشاريع تنموية بقيمة ٢٠٠ مليون ريال



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#Living_with_COVID19

Military charity names team for The Walk of Oman

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: Walking With The Wounded (WWTW), a military charity, has announced the final six-member team participating in The Walk of Oman expedition.

The team of David Adams, Ben McComb, Sean Gane, Brian O'Neill, Ashley Winter and Andrew Phillips were selected after a rigorous selection process which took place in Grasmere village, Lake District.

The 22-day walk is from November 20 till December 11 and the team will take on an epic trek inspired by Wilfred Thesiger (1910-2003).

Thesiger, a British military officer, travelled across the Arabian Peninsula in the 1940s, and the trek will see the team embrace the same hostile conditions in the Omani desert.

The expedition will end on December 11, the Armed Forces Day.

The team comprising five ex-military personnel and one service member have physical or cognitive injuries. They will tackle one of their toughest challenges as they pull a custom-built cart weighing in excess of 300kg across the Omani desert.

The final team was chosen following a five-day selection process in which they hiked



(From left) David Adams, Ben McComb, Sean Gane, Brian O'Neill, Ashley Winter and Andrew Phillips.

across different peaks in Grasmere, Cumbria. With the walks varying each day from 5 km to 20 km, the team was able to test their physical capabilities, while walking in an unpredictable climate and across tough terrains.

The Walk of Oman is supported by The Duke of Sussex in his role as the official Expedition Patron, along with support from the Royal Office and in partnership with the Sultan Armed Forces. The team will be followed by a support team in case of emergencies during the course of the expedition.

The supporting partners for the expedition include INEOS, Craghoppers, Avanti Communications, Monster Energy, The Invictus Games Foundation, Shard Capital and Clinova.

Ed Parker, CEO of WWTW, says: "The team faces an immense challenge ahead of them and each will be tested mentally and physically. Throughout the selection week process, each candidate embraced the task ahead and cemented the bond formed between them that will put them in good stead for the Omani desert."

Highlighting the

extraordinary courage of the men and women who have been injured, both physically and mentally, while serving their countries, the walk will showcase the need for continued support in aiding the transition from the Armed Forces into civilian life.

WWTW is a charity established to support the employment aspirations and vocational outcomes of our wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women, those who have been physically, mentally and socially disadvantaged by their service.

MENTAL FITNESS IMPORTANT IN COVID-19 FIGHT

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: One must stay physically and mentally fit to fight COVID-19, says a psychologist. Paying attention to one's calling, nurturing healthy relationships and learning skills are some of the tips to stay mentally and physically healthy, said Dr Amira al Raidan, Head of Mental Health Section, Non-communicable Diseases Department, Ministry of Health.



"Stay positive, develop soft skills, strengthen bonds with family, friends and relatives, offer moral

support to the fellow beings who are hit by the pandemic."

According to her, we must focus on boosting our immune system with healthy lifestyle habits like eating foods rich in vitamins, drinking plenty of water (an average of 2 litres a day), finding time for exercise and practicing breathing techniques to maintain healthy lungs.

"Spend time with family, stay connected to

relatives and friends, follow social distancing and maintain the emotional security that you need," said Dr Amira, who is also a senior medical officer at the deaddiction clinic of Al Massara Hospital .

Believe in the fact that staying safe is an individual responsibility and we are solely responsible for protecting ourselves, our beloved ones and our society, she said.

GCC, Iraq ministers discuss oil



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas, took part in a ministerial teleconference between the GCC and Iraq on Friday.

They reviewed the recent developments in oil markets, the continued recovery in the global economy and oil demand, and the progress made in rebalancing the oil market.

At the end of the call they issued the following statement:

“The ministers are very encouraged by the recent signs of improvement in the global economy and commend the efforts taken by countries all over the globe to re-open their economies in a safe way.

“The ministers reaffirmed their full commitment to the OPEC+ agreement. They emphasised the importance for all OPEC+ countries to meet their production targets in order to accelerate the rebalancing of the global oil market, and for those who overproduced in May, June and July to compensate those volumes.

“The ministers expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Iraqi Oil Minister for his great efforts and cooperation to achieve the balancing of the oil market, while stressing Iraq’s importance to the success of the OPEC+ agreement.”

— ONA

CELL TOWER RADIATION TO BE ASSESSED

SAMUEL KUTTY

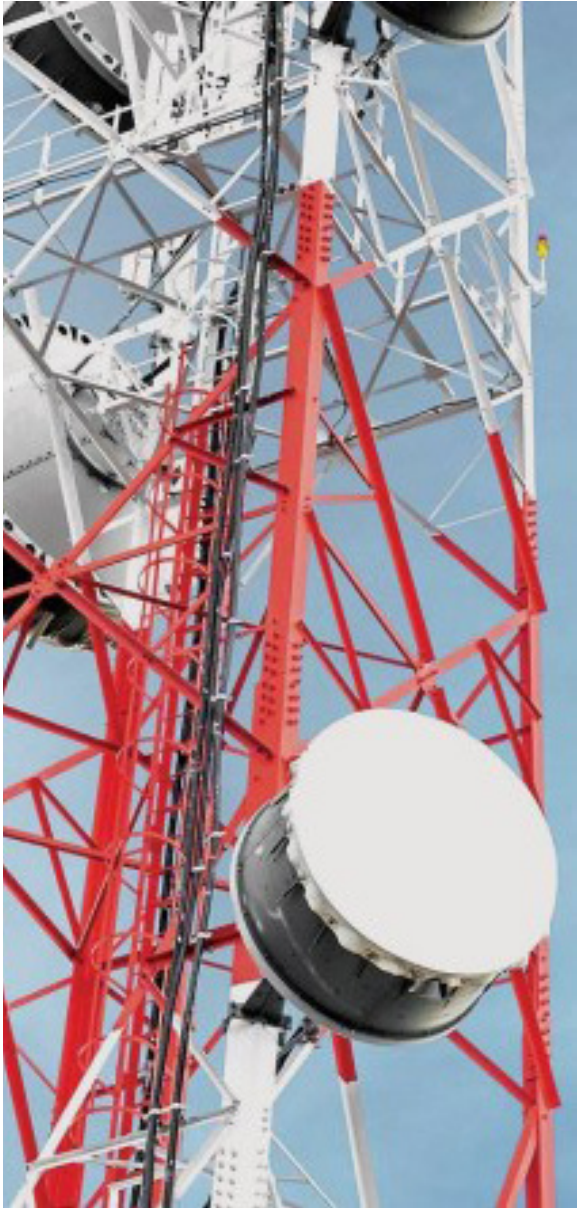
MUSCAT: The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority is all set to study the impact of electromagnetic radiation from mobile phone towers in the Sultanate.

A tender has already been issued by the Authority inviting qualified and experienced companies to submit their offers.

According to Dr Bourdoucen Hadj, Ex-Dean of the College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University, who led a study on the subject, emissions from towers can prove harmful if they exceed a certain threshold.

The results at the time of the study have shown that the electromagnetic radiation levels emitted from the cell phone towers at SQU campus were well below the threshold limits set by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).

“It injected more fear into



the people living near the radiating points and affected property values over time. These risk perceptions even culminated in enmity against these technologies,” Dr Hadj told the Observer.

Apart from the benefits obtained from mobile

communication systems, the technologies involved in them have raised public fear and concerns on having potential health risks by exposure to the emitted electromagnetic fields, he says.

According to Dr Hadj, strong intensity radiations can generate induced currents capable of delivering electric shocks to humans especially at higher frequencies.

“On the other hand, biological hazards are best understood by the increasing body temperature, where exposure near high power transmitting antennas become harmful and could cause thermal damages in the form of severe burns,” he said.

A measure of the heating effects on a human body is the specific energy absorption rate (SAR) in watts per kilogramme. Other hazards include sparks generated by extremely high power radiations capable of generating strong induced electric currents.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding (NH) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)
EHC/2020/6	EMPLOYEE GROUP LIFE AND DISABILITY INSURANCE FOR NAMA GROUP (2020)	13-Aug-2020	20-Sep-2020	25/-

- Bids to be submitted by email as following:
 - Bids to be sent to this email: NHProcurement@Holding.nama.om
 - The email subject to be the tender reference number and name.
 - A copy of the bid bond to be clearly attached.
 - The original bid bond to be submitted later upon confirmation of client.
 - Bids should be submitted before 12.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday 20-Sep-2020.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company website (www.nama.om/tenders).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned).
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 274
E-Mail: Aisha.Albahri@Holding.nama.om

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding (NH) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	TIME & LAST DATE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION	TENDER FEE (OMR)
EHC/2020/7	ACCOUNTING SERVICES FOR GPDC, WJPC AND NICD	13-Aug-2020	20-Sep-2020	25/-

- Bids to be submitted by email as following:
 - Bids to be sent to this email: NHProcurement@Holding.nama.om
 - The email subject to be the tender reference number and name.
 - A copy of the bid bond to be clearly attached.
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OMAN

Indulging in home delicacy during lockdown



MANY PEOPLE ADMITTED THAT DESPITE THE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, THEY ENJOYED THE HOME-MADE FOOD

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH: It was the first Eid in the memory of everyone that was celebrated under a lockdown. It seemed difficult to digest the very idea of being mostly at home during the festival time or all through the Eid holidays, but many admitted that besides obeying the national order to bring down the COVID-19 numbers, they enjoyed the home-made food.

Be it grandmother's recipe or modern food like pizza, pasta, noodles, or cakes, it was a matter of delight for Rashid and his family, to enjoy the home-made delicacy that too with

a variety of them, cooked by mother, wife, sisters, and even daughters.

Rashid admitted to having given some helping hand in the kitchen. It was one of the most memorable moments for him. Otherwise, every Eid he would hardly be at home. He would pass all his holiday by visiting friends and relatives and come back home with complaints of 'overeating' here and there.

Despite regular Eid cooking, it was a practice in his house to order food from restaurants. To make the best use of lockdown and curfew, it was a family decision to cook everything at home and relish whatever was cooked.

"It was a great decision,

as everyone enjoyed being at home and happiest was my mother to see all of us sitting and eating together. The family bond was at its best and we realised that our womenfolk are gifted with so many talents. I didn't even know that my daughter, Rahma cooks so tasty cakes and pastries. They were Eid special and I can't describe how tasty they were."

All the 10 days traditional foods were also prepared at home, mainly on the insistence of Rashid's mother. She wanted the girls at home to learn the traditional food and their way of cooking.

"She gave instructions to make Sakhana (a thick sweet soup made of wheat,

date, molasses and milk and Fatta (a meat and vegetable dish, mixed with Khubz rakhal (thin Omani bread) made out of unleavened dough, Harees, and Mishkak. There are many other sweet items the names of which I do not know correctly. Everything came out nicely and I never had bowel upset on any of the days despite my indulgence in food."

He admitted to having enjoyed Harees, which is prepared with wheat mixed with meat.

Mishkak is his favourite that is skewered meat grilled on charcoal. He, however, missed Shuwa, a typically Omani delicacy prepared only on very special occasions.

Parents' opinion sought on reopening of schools

FROM PAGE 1

...and best international experiences, especially on integrated education which combines e-learning and classroom teaching.

The survey discussed four options. Going to school daily while reducing student density and taking necessary health precautions; determining educational priority classes for students to go to school and classes suitable for distance learning;



students stay at home and adopt distance learning during the first semester and return to schools during the second semester if the pandemic is over; and classroom learning on some days and distance learning on other days.

ing the second semester if the pandemic is over; and classroom learning on some days and distance learning on other days.

Work in schools and other educational institutions remains suspended in Oman from March 15. The government also decided to end the academic year for all students in public and private schools on May 7.

The Ministry of Education was asked to adopt appropriate alternatives to calculate the results of students and the mechanism for restudying in grades one to 12 and their equivalent.

LEAGUE READY TO MOBILISE ARAB EFFORTS TO HELP LEBANON TURKEY OFFERS TO REBUILD PORT

BEIRUT: Arab League Chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Saturday he would seek to mobilise Arab efforts to provide support to Lebanon after this week's catastrophic explosion in Beirut destroyed parts of the capital. Speaking to reporters after a meeting with Lebanese President Michel Aoun, he also said the Cairo-based league of Arab states was ready to assist the investigation into the blast.

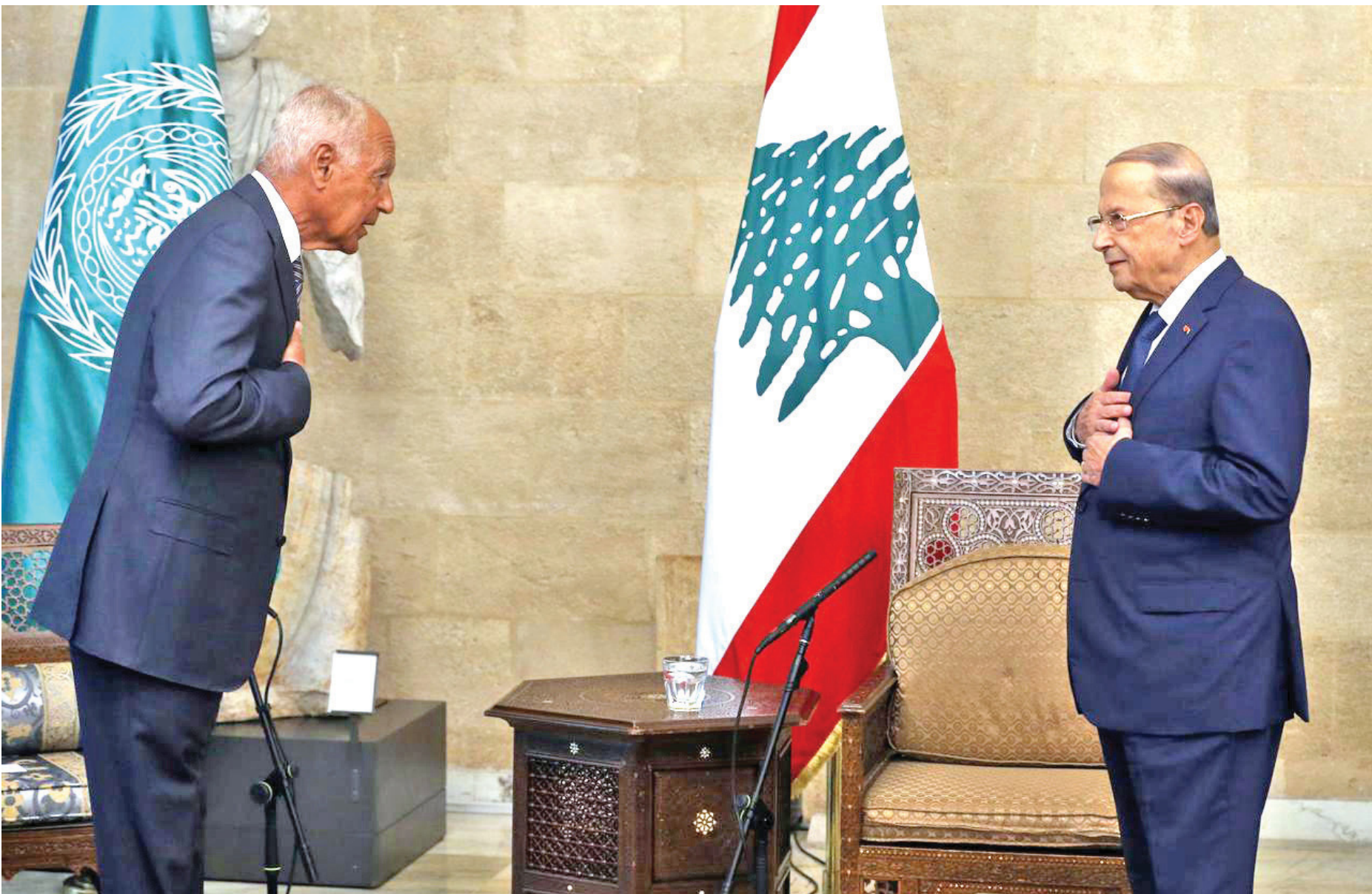
"We are ready to help with all our means," he said, adding that he would take part in an international conference call to be organised by France on Sunday to discuss aid for Lebanon.

Also speaking after meeting Aoun, Turkish Vice-President Fuat Oktay said his country is ready to help rebuild the port.

Turkey's Mersin port, on the Mediterranean, is ready to help Lebanon with customs clearance and warehousing services of large shipments until the Beirut Port is reconstructed, he added.

"We have said the goods could be transported with smaller ships and other means of transportation from Mersin to Lebanon," he said.

The explosion killed more



Arab League Chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit greets Lebanon's President Michel Aoun at the presidential palace in Baabda, on Saturday. – Reuters

than 150 people, injured 5,000 and left up to 250,000 without habitable homes. The blast occurred at a port warehouse containing 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, used in fertilisers and explosives.

TRUMP TO JOIN AID MEET US President Donald Trump said on Friday that he will join a conference call with Lebanon's president and other world leaders on

Sunday to discuss aid to Lebanon in the wake of this week's devastating Beirut port explosion.

Trump said on Twitter that he spoke separately with Lebanese President Michel Aoun and French President Emmanuel Macron, who also will join the call.

"We will be having a conference call on Sunday with President Macron, leaders of Lebanon, and

leaders from various other parts of the world. Everyone wants to help!" Trump tweeted.

He said he told Aoun that three large US aircraft were en route to Lebanon to deliver supplies and personnel.

Also on Saturday, some Lebanese angered by their government's response called on foreign states to topple their leaders and run the country. — Reuters

CHILDREN WALK BACK TO SCHOOL IN GAZA

JABALIA, GAZA STRIP: Hundreds of thousands of children walked through the streets of the Gaza Strip on Saturday to return to classes after five months of shutdown - though authorities said they were ready to close schools again if coronavirus cases spike.

Pupils mingled freely before heading into playgrounds for roll call and filing into classrooms. At one school in the northern Jabalia refugee camp, teachers wearing face masks welcomed children and offered to sanitise their hands. Gaza, mostly cut off from the world by an Israeli-

led blockade, has not recorded any COVID-19 cases in the towns and refugee camps where around two million Palestinians live. — Reuters

S KOREA FLOODS, LANDSLIDES KILL 26

SEOUL: At least 26 people have died after 46 days of heavy rains in South Korea, with the country's longest monsoon in seven years causing more flooding, landslides and evacuations on Saturday.

Nearly 5,000 people had been evacuated as of 4:30 pm local time on Saturday, according to Ministry of the Interior and Safety data, as rains battered the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Ten people

are missing. About 100 metres of levee collapsed at the Seomjin River in the southern edge of the peninsula on Saturday and flooded the area, an official at the South Jeolla province said. — Reuters

BLAST ROCKS MOGADISHU MILITARY BASE

MOGADISHU: A huge blast rocked a military base in Somalia's capital Mogadishu near a stadium on Saturday, killing at least eight people and injuring 14, emergency workers said, and the militant group Al Shabaab claimed responsibility. — Reuters

WORLD

PROBE INTO KERALA PLANE CRASH UNDER WAY, DEATH TOLL RISES TO 18

KOZHIKODE, India: The death toll from an Indian passenger aircraft accident has risen to 18, while 16 people have been seriously injured, a senior government official said on Saturday.

The Air India Express plane, which was repatriating Indians stranded in Dubai due to the coronavirus pandemic, overshot the runway of the Calicut International Airport in heavy rain near the southern city of Kozhikode on Friday. It was India's worst passenger aircraft accident since 2010.

The flight was carrying 190 passengers and crew.

The plane's pilot and the co-pilot were killed in the accident.

Some 149 patients remain in hospital after some were discharged on Saturday.

INVESTIGATION

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri visited the site of the accident on Saturday.

"It (the plane) overshot the runway while trying to land amidst what were clearly inclement weather conditions prevailing at that time," Puri told a news conference, adding that it would be premature to speculate on the precise cause of the accident.

Puri said two separate teams had already reached



A security official inspects the site where a passenger plane crashed at the Calicut International Airport in Karipur, on Saturday. — Reuters

Kozhikode from New Delhi to carry out an investigation into the crash.

He said authorities managed to rescue most of the passengers because the plane did not catch fire while descending the slope at the end of the runway.

The flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder have been recovered from the site, a top official at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said.

Giving a breakdown of all those on board the plane, Puri earlier said they includ-

ed 10 children, 174 adult passengers, four cabin crew and two pilots.

EXPERIENCED PILOT

Family, friends and relatives of Captain Deepak V Sathe, the pilot who was killed in the crash, find it hard to believe their loss.

"It's hard to believe that Deepak Sathe, my friend more than my cousin, is no more..." said a stunned relative Nilesh Sathe on his community's social media post.

Nilesh described his cousin as an "experienced aerial

operator with 36 years' flying experience", who passed the National Defence Academy, Pune, with flying colours by topping the 58th Course and was awarded the 'Sword of Honour'.

His ex-colleagues said Capt Sathe also topped the Air Force Academy, Hyderabad, and was conferred the President's Gold Medal and later served in the Indian Air Force for 21 years before joining as a commercial pilot with Air India in 2005.

— Reuters/ANS

US marks 160,000 COVID-19 deaths as relief talks fail

NEW YORK: More than 160,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the United States, a Reuters tally showed on Friday, as President Donald Trump said he would unilaterally grant financial relief to Americans after talks with congressional Democrats stalled.

The grim milestone, which includes 10,000 deaths nationwide in the past nine days, comes as Americans and their polit-

ical leaders remain divided over such issues as reopening schools, testing, business closures and mask orders.

"Elected leaders need to begin to address this crisis as a public health rather than a political issue," said Dr Melanie Thompson, an internist in Atlanta.

"Federal and state governments should subsidise access to serial rapid testing for schools and all senior living facilities.

Congress needs to provide a financial safety net for the most vulnerable, including our essential workers," Thompson said.

Trump said he would issue an executive order suspending payroll taxes for all Americans through the end of this year and extending supplemental unemployment benefits if the White House could not reach a deal on a relief package with top Democrats in Congress.

Trump, speaking at a news conference at his golf property in Bedminster, New Jersey, made the vow after negotiations between the two sides broke down on Friday.

Democrats said they agreed to reduce their \$3.4 trillion proposal but Republicans would not agree to more than double their \$1 trillion counter-offer.

— Reuters

ANALYSIS



Workers unload coal from a ferry at a market in Dhaka. — Reuters

Bangladesh looks to cut future coal use as costs rise

NAIMUL KARIM

Bangladesh plans to review the number of coal-based power plants it hopes to build, with an eye to reducing its dependence on coal as costs for the fuel rise and power demand grows more slowly than expected, a government official said. About 3 per cent of the country's power currently comes from coal, but plans to build 29 new coal-fired power plants in the next two decades would boost that to 35 per cent. But officials now say they may rethink their strategy as the country prepares its next energy plan later this year. "In 2009 our plan was dominated by coal as it was cheap and we needed other sources of energy apart from gas. But it's not cheap anymore and our energy demand hasn't grown as expected", said Mohammad Hossain, head of Power Cell, a technical arm of the ener-

gy ministry. "It's also not good for the environment. Because of all this we may have to review our coal projects and reduce our dependency on them", he said. More than half of the projects are still in planning stages and "can be reviewed if required", he added. Climate change activists say that building new coal power stations is incompatible with achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit planetary heating - and could put the low-lying country at increasing risk from serious climate impacts. Under the 2015 Paris accord, about 200 countries agreed to slash emissions to keep global temperature increases "well below" 2 degrees Celsius. But the planet has already warmed more than 1 degrees Celsius, and is on track for at least 3.5 degrees Celsius of warming as emissions continue to rise around the globe, scientists say. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Social Media: A 'woke' beast with many heads



Ray Petersen

r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

There is something to be said for saying what you think, right? For expressing your thoughts, whether they are good thoughts, bad thoughts, conservative, liberal, social, religious or whatever? It is the very thing that raises mankind above other species, not to feel something, but to be able to express it in a profound and articulate manner. Maybe that is why the current 'woke' culture, which takes its name and pseudo-political purpose from the African-American vernacular expression to 'stay woke,' refers to an ongoing awareness concerning racial, social and community justice, is discomfiting for many? Former president of the United States, Barak Obama, in a speech to the Obama Federation last year appeared to make a particularly good point when he explained that 'calling out' people on social media did not bring about change, because of the complexity of change. Obama told his audience: "I get a sense among certain young people on social media that the way of making change is to be as judgemental as possible about other people. If I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right, or you used the wrong verb, then I can feel good. "I called you out! Man did you see how 'woke' I was?" He explained that there was more to change than 'throwing stones' on the internet, and if, for you, that is it, you are probably not going to get too far!"

Those who want change, in anything, must use the articulation they have, use their intelligence, use their passion and compassion to stimulate and convince others. Demonstrations, marches and protests all have their place, but riots, looting and bloodshed, not so much. The thing is that our modern world, and our current generation have been seduced by the power of the Internet, and the vicarious nature by which some people have chosen, not only to live their lives, but the lives of others. It is blatantly clear that the Internet is a good thing that in many respects is the salvation of mankind. However, in social media, we have unleashed a Hydra, a mythological many-headed beast that diversely allows us to communicate and share experiences with others, to buy and sell to hire and fire with impunity, to insult and assault without consequence, to abuse, berate, to indulge in self-promotion, and to manipulate and present yourself as more than you are. Aren't influencers wonderful? Moreover, politicians and their acolytes have learned how to manipulate and utilise social media for governance. How Orwellian is that? What hurts most about the wokeness of today, and social media, is that a lot of people have done a lot of good things yet are being torn down by their mistakes. Even the greatest have flaws, and I wonder if those baying loudest for heads, have ever stopped to consider their own?

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

Grand Prizes

Maisarah Anniversary Prizes April

5,000 OMR
for 1 winner/ per branch

Monthly Grand Prizes

2,000 OMR
for 1 winner per month

Yearly Grand Prizes

25,000 OMR
For 1 winner

50,000 OMR
For 1 winner

100,000 OMR
For 1 winner

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‘SECTOR CHAMPIONS’ TO HELP DIVERSIFY OMANI ECONOMY

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: A number of sector flagships created by the Omani government to drive investment and development in strategic areas of the economy have been mandated to support the country's economic diversification goals, according to a key official of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), under whose broad umbrella all of these flagships were brought recently.

Dubbed 'sector champions', these flagships are essentially holding companies of government-owned assets in strategic economic sectors, notably logistics, tourism, aviation, mining, food, fisheries and Information Technology, among others, said Muneer al Muneeri, CEO – Rakiza, an infrastructure-focused fund operating under the ambit of OIA.

The Authority was formally established last month as a result of the integration of a number of Omani sovereign wealth funds, government holding companies and state-owned enterprises previously administered by the Ministry of Finance.

Participating in a webinar hosted recently by The Business Year (TBY), Al Muneeri said the sector-specific flagships created by the government in recent years but now placed under the remit of Oman Investment Authority, have been designated as 'Sector Champions'.

"These entities focus on different sectors – logistics, mining, tourism, aviation, food and so on; they are sector champions – they have the mandate to develop and execute a strategy for their respective sectors. These are the sectors that the government is pushing hard to diversify based on demand and supply (market economics)," Al Muneeri noted.

TURN TO PAGE 12

STRATEGIC FOCUS:

The Sector Champions of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) are holding companies focused on strategic economic sectors, notably logistics, tourism, aviation, mining, food, fisheries and Information Technology, among others.



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Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. SAOG

P.O.Box: 57 , P.C: 116 , Mina Al Fahal , Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24610200, Fax: 24610201, Website: www.almaha.com.om

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the unaudited Financial Statements for the six months period ended 30 June 2020.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (RO'000)

	Jan-Jun 2020	Jan-June 2019	Inc /(dec)	Inc/(dec) %
Sales	171,615	233,895	(62,280)	(27%)
Gross profit	10,283	14,074	(3,791)	(26%)
Other income	1,526	867	659	76%
Total expenses	(11,907)	(12,896)	(989)	(8%)
Net profit after tax	(98)	2,045	(2,143)	(105%)

Earnings per share (RO)	(0.0014)	0.0296	(0.0310)	(105%)
Book value per share (RO)	0.585	0.637	(0.052)	(8%)
Net equity (RO'000)	40,375	43,940	(3,565)	(8%)

It is to be noted that the II quarter 2020 has been the most challenging period that we have encountered in the last two decades of our business due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The sharp fall in the road and air travel due to the lockdown in the late I quarter and large period of II quarter, saw significant decrease in fuel consumption by our customers affecting our performance.

Total sales during the period dropped by RO 62.3 million i.e. about 27 % from RO 233.9 million during Jan-Jun 2019 to RO 171.6 million in Jan-Jun 2020 mainly due to decrease in sales activity as a result of lockdown measures adopted by the Government during April & May 2020 to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused largescale disruptions to our activities. Further, steep fall in fuel prices mainly the international aviation fuel prices, during the period, resulted in significant stock value losses leading to decline in the gross margins and reduction in net profit during the period Jan-June 2020 in comparison with the same period last year.

MARKETING PERFORMANCE

Retail segment remains the main focus as we continue to modernize our retail outlets and its activities & services. Reduced economic activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused changes in retail fuel supply and demand patterns during the period.

Commercial segment, despite the low demand environment, witnessed improved performance in a specific customer segment.

Aviation segment performance is largely affected by the halting of Oman Air and other international airlines as a result of the pandemic.

MARKET SHARE

Based on the information published in the financial results of the other petroleum products marketing companies, your Company's market share at the end of II quarter 2020 stood at 29%.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

As the Coronavirus wreaks economic turmoil around the world, our business too faces un-precedented stress in the short run. It all depends on the longevity of the Covid-19 and the expected return to normalcy and that we can indeed come out of the crisis and restore normalcy in our business operations.

Despite the negative effects of the pandemic, we also notice the tremendous positive changes that are unfolding at the same time. We are revisiting our business models, getting leaner and stronger as a stepping-stone to better outcomes in the days to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors and executive management, I take this opportunity, to express our most sincere gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his efforts in continuing the legacy of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos towards a prosperous Oman.

We thank our shareholders, customers, the officials of Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market for their valuable support and co-operation. We also appreciate the dedicated and committed service of our staff members.

Juma Ali Juma Al Juma
Chairman
29 July 2020

Financial statements for the six months ended 30 June 2020

Statement of Financial Position

	At 30 June 2020 RO'000	At 30 June 2019 RO'000	At 31 Dec 2019 RO'000
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	30,581	32,067	31,079
Investment property	611	658	635
Right of use asset	3,712	5,604	3,515
Contract assets	972	873	1,026
Deferred tax assets	2,157	1,841	2,157
Total non-current assets	38,033	41,043	38,412
Current assets			
Inventories	3,464	4,142	4,522
Trade and other receivables	59,414	60,409	58,925
Short term deposit	-	-	20,000
Bank balances and cash	18,157	23,776	28,722
Total current assets	81,035	88,327	112,169
Total assets	119,068	129,370	150,581
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Share capital	6,900	6,900	6,900
Legal reserve	2,300	2,300	2,300
Retained earnings	29,071	32,636	33,999
Special reserve	2,104	2,104	2,104
Total equity	40,375	43,940	45,303
Liabilities			
Non-current liability			
Non-current portion of lease liability	2,902	4,467	2,631
Employees' end of service benefits	213	328	333
Total non-current liabilities	3,115	4,795	2,964
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	32,811	44,492	45,228
Bank borrowings	41,478	34,647	55,032
Current portion of lease liability	1,109	1,137	1,025
Contract liabilities	196	-	112
Taxation	(16)	359	917
Total current liabilities	75,578	80,635	102,314
Total liabilities	78,693	85,430	105,278
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	119,068	129,370	150,581
Net assets per share (RO)	0.585	0.637	0.657

Statement of Comprehensive Income

	Jan-June 2020 RO'000	Jan-June 2019 RO'000	Jan-Dec 2019 RO'000
INCOME			
Revenue	171,615	233,895	468,140
Cost of sales	(161,332)	(219,821)	(438,829)
Gross profit	10,283	14,074	29,311
Other Income	1,526	867	2,079
Total Income	11,809	14,941	31,390
EXPENSES			
Salaries and other employee related costs	(2,728)	(2,516)	(5,377)
Operating expenses	(3,789)	(4,768)	(9,982)
Administration expenses	(1,793)	(2,205)	(5,418)
Depreciation & amortisation	(2,617)	(2,607)	(5,476)
Finance charges	(996)	(448)	(1,128)
Total Expenses	(11,923)	(12,544)	(27,381)
Profit before income tax	(114)	2,397	4,009
Income tax expense	16	(352)	(601)
Net Profit and comprehensive income	(98)	2,045	3,408
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	(0.0014)	0.0296	0.0494

Note:
The complete report is available with the Muscat Securities Market on the company website.
The complete report will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the above mentioned address.

KEY OMAN COPPER-GOLD PROJECT REPORTS PROGRESS DESPITE PANDEMIC SETBACKS

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Constraints posed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic notwithstanding, an Omani-Australian company behind the development of a major copper-gold project says it is pressing ahead with the venture — a landmark initiative that heralds the revival of copper mining in the Sultanate.

Al Hadeetha Resources Company (AHRL) — a partnership of Alara Resources of Australia and a number of Omani investors — acknowledged some setbacks in its efforts to progress the implementation of the Al Hadeetha Copper Gold Project at Washihi-Majazza in North Al Sharqiya Governorate, but pledged to push ahead with its delivery.

The project, stemming from the award in June 2018 of Oman's first copper mining license to an overseas-led developer, centres on the commercialisation of an estimated 16 million tonnes of copper ore — billed as the largest single copper resource in the Sultanate to date. It includes plans for a 1 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) copper concentration plant with an initial 10-year mine life.

"Despite (pandemic-related lockdown) conditions, the Alara team remains safe and well and is continuing work with necessary precautions," said the Australian investor in its latest update on the project.

"Restrictions prevent new construction teams entering the Sultanate, however Alara's drilling teams, already in country, have completed over 3200m of drilling and 19 new boreholes at the Al Hadeetha Project Site. This has provided fresh core samples which have now been

shipped for testing. The results will be incorporated into the Project's detailed engineering design."

However, arrangements with its EPC contractor, Chinese state-owned enterprise China National Geological & Mining Corporation (CGM), have been "halted", said the JV, citing impacts from the pandemic, "including airport closure, domestic travel restrictions, shipping and other related concerns".

"The company has since investigated having the engineering outsourced, procurement owner managed and the construction contractor managed by an AHRL team, together with Project

Management Consultant, Progesys," it noted. "New engineering and mining service agreements have also been prepared for execution and are planned for announcement later this quarter."

Despite these developments, attributable primarily to the pandemic, the overall outlook for the project continues to be robust, especially in light of the recent rally in copper and gold prices on international commodity markets. Copper rose by nearly 50 per cent to \$6,545 per ton in July, up from \$4,617 per ton in March.

"These signs, along with gold at ~\$1900/oz see project financials remaining strong and first production scheduled for Q1 2022," the company said. "Global demand for copper concentrates remains strong. Copper imports by China, the world's largest importer, were up 22.5 per cent on last year at the end of April. Finding buyers for copper does not present a challenge for the company," it further added.

POSITIVE OUTLOOK:

The project, stemming from the award in June 2018 of Oman's first copper mining license to an overseas-led developer, centres on the commercialisation of an estimated 16 million tonnes of copper ore — billed as the largest single copper resource in the Sultanate to date.



BUSINESS

UK-Japan make headway but fail to agree trade deal

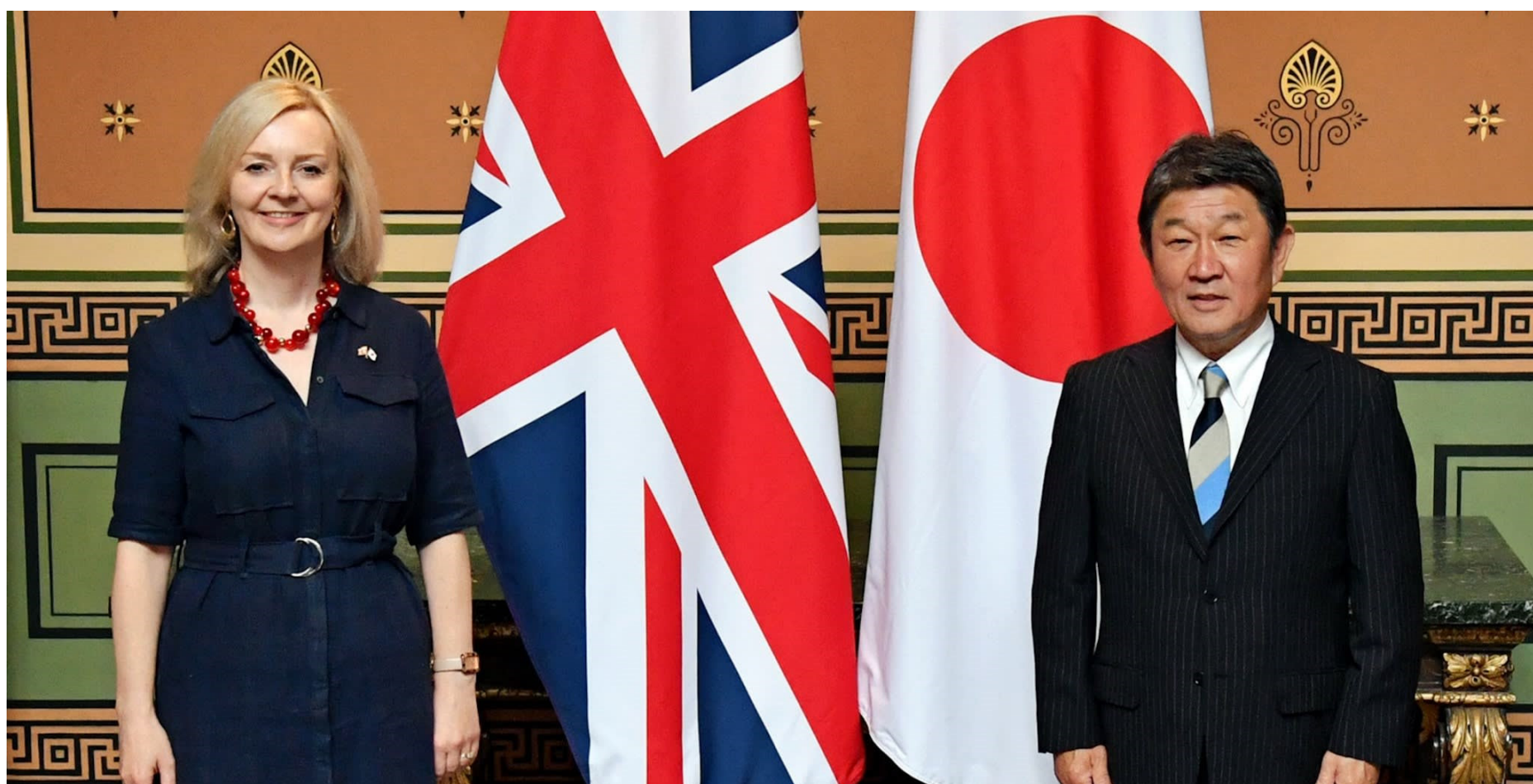
LONDON: The Britain and Japan on Friday reached agreement on “major elements” of a post-Brexit trade deal but failed to wrap up negotiations as Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi ended his three-day trip to London.

The two parties reached agreement in areas such as digital, data and financial services, with British media reporting that some aspects of the agriculture sector were still up for debate.

“Negotiations have been positive and productive, and we have reached consensus on the major elements of a deal”, said British Trade Minister Liz Truss in a statement.

“Our shared aim is to reach a formal agreement in principle by the end of August”.

Motegi told reporters that “we substantially agreed” on most issues and that the partnership will include investment services and e-commerce. “The Japan-UK economic partnership



Liz Truss, the United Kingdom's secretary of state for international trade, meets with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi in London.

will further expand investment in trade between the two countries”, he added.

It was Motegi's first face-to-face meeting with Truss since they kicked off the trade negotiations via videoconference on June 9.

Bilateral trade is currently conducted under a broad EU-Japan deal that came into effect last year, but the agreement will no

longer apply to Britain from December 31.

Britain left the EU in January but agreed a standstill transition until the end of the year — and is racing to strike both replica and new trade agreements before that date.

London remains locked in talks with Brussels and the United States, but hopes that the Japanese

deal will be struck quickly.

“Both sides are committed to an ambitious timeline to secure a deal that will enter into force by the end of 2020 if at all possible,” a British ministry spokesman said.

UK-Japanese trade was worth more than £30 billion (\$39 billion) last year, according to the British government. — AFP

‘Sector Champions’ to help diversify Omani economy

FROM PAGE 10

Notable examples of ‘sector champions’ operating under the remit of OIA include: Asyad Group (focusing on the logistics industry), Oman Aviation Group (aviation, airports management and air-cargo), Omran Group (tourism and hospitality), Mineral Development Oman (mining and mineral processing), Oman Food Investment Holding Company (food sector), Fisheries Development Oman (fisheries and aquaculture), Nama Group (electricity) and Oman ICT Group (Information and Communities Technology).

The official noted in particular Oman ICT Group's

role in promoting the Sultanate's digital transformation. “The idea behind the establishment of this group is to hold all of the assets previously held by the State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) and other government entities in the ICT sector. Its mandate and vision is to work on a framework to support the country's development when it comes to technology. Digitisation of the economy and government entities is part of their mandate.”

Oman ICT Group, said Al Muneeri, had recently signed a contract with US computer tech giant Oracle for the establishment of the first private cloud-based service within

the country. The move marks the start of the implementation of a strategy under development over the last year, he noted.

Asked about Rakiza's plans to leverage high international investor interest in gas infrastructure assets, such as pipelines, the CEO stated: “Our strategy at Rakiza is to invest in all infrastructure projects, and electricity is certainly a core infrastructure area, similar to gas pipelines. We are indeed looking at different projects today in Oman, with regard to electricity, as well as infrastructure related to the midstream oil and gas industry. We are inviting investors to

come along with us through Rakiza – either to invest in Rakiza itself or in the opportunities we have in hand. At the same time, we can also go along with strategic investors in these industries itself. We are here to add value to investors that have an interest in Oman.”

Rakiza, a first-of-its-kind fund, was launched in 2018 to enable foreign equity investors to explore opportunities in Oman's broader infrastructure sector. Areas of strategic investment interest include: Renewables, Oil & Gas, Social Infrastructure, Power and Water, Telecommunications, Transport & Logistics, and the Environment.

“

At a time when we are fighting a global pandemic... a trade dispute is the last thing anyone needs – it will only hurt the economic recovery on both sides of the border. However, this is what the US administration has chosen to do.

CHRYSTIA FREELAND, →
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Canada to impose retaliatory tariffs on US goods



OTTAWA: Canada will slap retaliatory tariffs on C\$3.6 billion (\$2.7 billion) worth of US aluminium products after the United States said it would impose punitive measures on Canadian aluminium imports, a senior official said on Friday.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland told a news conference the countermeasures would be put in place by September 16 to allow consultations with industry.

The move marks the latest ruction in a choppy relationship between the neighbors and close allies since President Donald Trump

took office in 2017.

Trump moved on Thursday to reimpose 10 per cent tariffs on some Canadian aluminium products on August 16 to protect US industry from a “surge” in imports. Canada denies any impropriety.

“At a time when we are fighting a global pandemic...

a trade dispute is the last thing anyone needs – it will only hurt the economic recovery on both sides of the border. However, this is what the US administration has chosen to do”, said Freeland.

“We do not escalate and we do not back down”, she said later, variously describ-

ing the US decision as “entirely unacceptable”, absurd and ludicrous.

The Canadian list of goods that might be subject to tariffs includes aluminium bars, plates, refrigerators, bicycles, washing machines and golf clubs. Trump is a keen golfer.

“I think the very best outcome would be for the United States to reconsider”, said Freeland, adding that she was confident common sense would prevail.

The list of goods subject to tariffs is narrower than the last time Ottawa struck back at Trump because the two sides agreed in 2019 to limit the scope of retaliation in disputes over steel and aluminum, said a Canadian government source who requested anonymity.

In 2018, Ottawa slapped tariffs on C\$16.6 billion (\$12.5 billion) worth of goods ranging from bourbon to ketchup after Washington imposed sanctions on Canadian aluminum and steel. — Reuters

US ECONOMY SEES SLOWING JOB GAINS

WASHINGTON: The US economy regained 1.8 million jobs in July, a solid but unremarkable result that comes as President Donald Trump prepares for a difficult re-election bid, but economists warn challenges to the pandemic recovery are growing.

With millions still on unemployment rolls, Trump’s economic team on Friday failed to reach a deal with Democratic leaders in Congress on a new emergency spending bill to renew aid that has supported wages and consumer spending in the

past three months.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Trump will go ahead with presidential action over the weekend, including on expanded unemployment benefits, student loan repayment deferrals and evictions.

“The President would like us to make a deal. But unfortunately, we did not make any progress today”, Mnuchin said after yet another meeting with Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator Chuck Schumer.

Pelosi said Democrats



Hundreds of people line up outside a Kentucky Career Center hoping to find assistance with their unemployment claim in Frankfort, Kentucky. — Reuters

had agreed to lower the package size to \$2 trillion from \$3 trillion, but the White House balked and continues to resist aid to state and local governments that economists say will be critical to avoiding a new round of layoffs.

While the sides are open to further talks, Pelosi was standing firm.

“I’ve told them, come back when you when you are ready to give us a higher number,” she told reporters after the hour-long meeting. — AFP

BUSINESS

PDVSA CHANGES OIL DEALS TO INCLUDE SHIPPING AS SANCTIONS BITE

CARACAS: Venezuelan state-run oil firm PDVSA has begun offering to ship its own oil, figuring in the costs in crude supply deals to help customers who have struggled to hire vessels to carry the country's oil due to US sanctions, according to company documents.

The United States has blacklisted vessel owners, shipping operators and threatened to sanction any tanker facilitating the country's oil exports as it tightens restrictions on trade with the South American country.

Washington has been trying to weaken socialist President Nicolas Maduro by choking the Opec member's oil exports, depriving the government of petrodollars — its main source of revenue.

Most shipping firms are avoiding Venezuela because of the sanctions, making it difficult and expensive to hire tankers to load crude there and helping drop the country's oil exports to their lowest in nearly 80 years.

PDVSA has agreed since at least April with both long-term and new customers to oil deals that make the state firm responsi-

WASHINGTON HAS BEEN TRYING TO WEAKEN SOCIALIST PRESIDENT NICOLAS MADURO BY CHOKING THE OPEC MEMBER'S OIL EXPORTS, DEPRIVING THE GOVERNMENT OF PETRODOLLARS — ITS MAIN SOURCE OF REVENUE.

ble for transportation costs, and sometimes customs fees.

In previous deals, buyers sent ships to Venezuelan ports to load the crude.

"We are starting to use our own fleet and controlled fleet", a PDVSA executive said.

Under the new deals, buyers designate the port for delivery and PDVSA is responsible for getting the oil there, according to the documents.

The strategy, also used by other countries under US sanctions such as Iran, could be short-lived if PDVSA is unable to gather enough vessels.

Of the more than

two dozen vessels PDVSA controls, only four have valid classification and insurance, according to company and shipping sources.

Aside from some short trips to Cuba, most of PDVSA's tanker fleet has stayed in Venezuelan waters for the last year because sanctions have left them lacking the insurance or certification needed to navigate international waters, or because they are unseaworthy.

Some vessels no longer have operators because PDVSA failed to pay the

firms that managed the vessels and crews.

Germany's Bernhard Schulte Ship management returned over a dozen vessels to PDVSA in 2019 after the Venezuelan firm failed to pay fees due for managing them.

Other ships need maintenance. PDVSA has struggled to get the work done because it cannot get needed parts or afford to pay for the work. The company has also faced lawsuits and seizure attempts by foreign shipyards that did repairs.

Since last year, PDVSA has kept vessels close to home to avoid the danger that they or their cargoes may be retained by foreign creditors. PDVSA owns four China-built very large crude carriers (VLCCs) along with PetroChina that can transport up to 2 million barrels of oil each.

— Reuters

A man walks past a sculpture outside the building of Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA in Caracas. — Reuters



MCLLROY SAYS HE DOES NOT MIND A BREAK FROM TIGER MANIA

SAN FRANCISCO: Rory McIlroy said while he would prefer to have spectators at this year's PGA Championship, he acknowledged that when grouped with fan favourite Tiger Woods, it does provide a welcome relief from the usual mania. Woods and McIlroy were grouped with world number one Justin Thomas in the first two rounds of the major, which is being held without fans due to the COVID-19 crisis.

But a few dozen die-hard fans were able to catch a glimpse of the trio teeing off on TPC Harding Park's 12th hole by peering through tears in a canvas covering of a chain-link fence.

And 15-time major winner Woods got the biggest ovation.

"100%" McIlroy said with a laugh when asked if it is easier to play alongside Woods without the usual commotion.

"It's so much easier. I'm happy to be drawn with him every week until fans come back."

McIlroy on Thursday said it was strange to hear Woods introduced at the start of the round to

complete silence but said a quieter atmosphere was something players were getting used to. He said the lack of fans also speeds up the pace of play as there's less waiting for cheers to die down.

"Even the 12th hole, the tee box

100 per cent, it's so much easier. I'm happy to be drawn with him every week before the fans come back

RORY MCILROY



there alongside the road, Tiger gets on the tee and everyone goes crazy and you have to wait for them to settle down.

"The fact that we don't have to deal with that and the fact that he doesn't have to deal with that every week is sort of nice.

"I still want crowds to come back and fans. It's much better to play in front of them. But it does make it easier."

Woods shot a two-over 72 on Friday to finish at even par through 36 holes, while McIlroy is one under and Thomas one over heading into the weekend of the year's first major.

— Reuters

NETS, MAGIC FILL OUT EAST PLAYOFF FIELD

ORLANDO, US: Tobias Harris scored 23 points and grabbed 15 rebounds to lift the host Philadelphia 76ers past the Orlando Magic 108-101 on Friday near Orlando, but the Magic ended up the day's big winner nonetheless.

Despite the loss, Orlando clinched the Eastern Conference's final play-off spot after the Washington Wizards lost to the New Orleans Pelicans later in the day.

Joel Embiid added 23 points and 13 rebounds while Alec Burks scored 22 points. Al Horford had 21 points and nine rebounds and Shake Milton handed out a career-high eight assists for the Sixers, who won their third in a row. The Sixers played without All-Star Ben Simmons, who will remain sidelined indefinitely with a partially dislocated left kneecap.

Nikola Vucevic led the Magic with 21 points and 12 rebounds while Evan Fournier added 22 points. D J Augustin scored 16 points, James Ennis III added 14 and Markelle Fultz had 13 for the Magic, who fell to 32-38. Terrence Ross missed all 10 of his field-goal attempts and did not score a point.

Brooklyn Nets 119 - Sacramento Kings 106
Brooklyn improved to 3-2 since the restart and rebounded nicely from a 149-115 loss to the Boston Celtics on



Wednesday night to join the Magic in clinching an Eastern Conference playoff spot.
Caris LeVert made 9 of 21 shots and also handed out seven assists as the Nets shot 48.8 per cent, made 17 3-pointers and handed out 30 assists. Joe Harris added 21 points and centre Jarrett Allen nearly posted a triple-double with 17 points, 11

rebounds and a career-high eight assists.
The Kings fell to 1-4 since the restart after going 10-5 in their final 15 games before the pause on March 11. Sacramento dropped to 13th in the Western Conference, 3 1/2 games behind eighth-place Memphis. Bogdan Bogdanovic led Sacramento with 27 points on 11-of-19 shooting. — Reuters

SPORTS

NATIONAL SINGLES ONLINE CHESS TOURNAMENT BEGINS TODAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: As many as 140 players will take part at the National Singles online Chess championship which will begin on Sunday. The sixth edition of the tournament, which is run under the supervision and organisation of Oman Chess Committee (OCC), will conduct the event through the approved online “Lichess” platform.

OCC had launched since April a series of virtual activities including the training webinar and e-tournaments which opted as several tournaments were cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The tournament will feature participants from four categories including the senior’s category which registers confirming of 68 players while 36 players are registered for the U-16 male category. 15 players from the female participated in the U-16 category while 23 ladies confirmed for the above 17 years category.

The technical system of the virtual championship will be through the approved rules and regulations of the online tournaments by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) and the organising committee of OCC. The matches of the online championship will be played under the ‘Swiss classic’ system. The event will begin with the qualification stage and followed by the finals which will witness 12 players. The qualification stage will feature seven rounds while the finals will be from nine rounds.

OCC made some rehearsals to ensure the success of the e-tournament prior to the official start of the event. The top senior category had their trial e-tournament on Thursday and Friday. All the details including the tournament’s rules and regulations, the playing



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mechanism, points registering, camera position and other clarifications have been delivered to all the players.

The international referee, Musallam al Wadhay, will be in charge for the umpiring task with the assistant of the international referee Hamdan al Hinai besides many domestic umpires. Cash prizes and trophies will be delivered by the organising committee to the top winners.

Oman’s top senior chess players confirmed their participation at the event including Mohammed al Omri, Salim al Omri, Ameen al Ansi, Salim Shimas and Salim al Mashikhi. The national chess coach, Basheer al Qudaimi, will be present during the e-tournament and note down all the comments for the player’s performance especially the junior categories as OCC is keen to establish a strong national chess team with good ranking players for the upcoming international competitions.

SPORTS

KOEPKA OVERCOMES STIFFNESS TO STAY IN CONTENTION AT PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

NEW YORK: Brooks Koepka required treatment three times for hip tightness during the PGA Championship on Friday, but the American played down injury concerns after posting a second-round 68 that left him tied for second place.

Two-time defending champion Koepka, who struggled with left-knee soreness after the PGA Tour resumed in mid-June, was worked on by physiotherapist Marc Wahl as he lay on the grass, sparking concerns that the knee problem was bothering him again.

"It was my hip. Nothing to do with my knee... I woke up this morning, it was tight, and worked out and it got even tighter and we loosened it up," Koepka told reporters at TPC Harding Park.

"It was a little tight when I was hitting balls on the range, but it's nothing to be worried about.

"My TFL (tensor fascia latae) is usually pretty tight on the side. It just

kind of moved to the front and tightened up the front and kind of the inside and groin. It'll be fine."

Koepka, who last needed mid-round treatment during the Arnold Palmer Invitational in 2015 for a rib injury, said his hip began to feel better only towards the end of the round.

"I think the one going into 16, where he yanked on my foot, I don't know what Marc does, but it popped and it felt like it just repositioned itself and that's when it felt a lot better," Koepka added.

The American then birdied the par-four 18th to go six-under at the halfway stage of the tournament, two shots behind leader Li Haotong of China.

"It was nice to finish that round with a birdie. It got, I thought, pretty difficult from about 11 on," Koepka said. "The wind picks up, and it's quite difficult. It's not an easy golf course."

— Reuters

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**BROOKS
KOEPKA,
DEFENDING
CHAMPION**



FEATURES

GHOST GEAR: THE KILLER BENEATH THE WAVES

Every year, growing quantities of 'ghost gear' kill over 136,000 sea mammals. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that 'ghost gear' makes up as much as 10% of all ocean litter. Given the gravity of the situation, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has been focusing on ways to contain and reduce the impact of 'ghost gear'... **p20**

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Hamster hero? How a
Japanese cartoon became
Thai youth protesters' symbol



Giant cherry with cream, fly
and drone unveiled on
London's Fourth Plinth





MARY OOMMEN

A staggering 12 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the ocean every year, the equivalent of emptying a truck full of trash into the ocean every minute. Amidst this waste are some kinds of nylon and plastic that are particularly hazardous.

Abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear — otherwise known as ‘ghost gear’ — is a problem that is proving to be catastrophic for an already fragile marine ecology. These stray nets get dragged around by ocean currents and storms and end up trapping, killing and destroying marine life and coral reefs. Dolphins, whales, turtles and seals get caught in these nets and suffer terrible wounds, infection, starvation and eventually die.

Every year, growing quantities of ‘ghost gear’ kill over 136,000 sea mammals. In fact, 45 per cent of all marine mammals on the Red List of Threatened Species have been impacted by lost or abandoned fishing gear. Some of these are almost invisible in the water, and are extremely strong and resistant to biting and chewing by entangled animals.

In the past, most equipment was made of hemp or cotton that were degradable underwater. These days, most of it is made of tough, synthetic nylon which is light, buoyant, durable and cheap making it ideal for fishing. Unfortunately, it is these same qualities that also make fishing gear a fatal and growing threat. As it gets tossed about

Ghost gear: The killer beneath the waves



by the waves, ‘ghost gear’ continues to trap fish and marine life for years or even decades after it goes in the water.

The biggest problem is that discarded fishing gear doesn’t break down easily. Nylon and plastic can take centuries to break down. When they do eventually disintegrate, they not only leave deadly polyurethane

chemicals behind but also form tiny particles that enter the food chain and potentially harm marine life and ecosystems.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that ‘ghost gear’ makes up as much as 10% of all ocean litter. According to an FAO report, over 700,000 tons of fishing gear finds its way into

the sea every year. A recent study estimates that ‘ghost gear’ accounts for nearly half of the debris in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Given the gravity of the situation, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has been focusing on ways to contain and reduce the impact of ‘ghost gear’ in the waters off the coast of Oman. Teams from the ESO have been actively engaging with fishermen and educating them on the impact that ‘ghost gear’ has on marine life. Large bins have been made available so that they are able to dispose of nets responsibly. Regular communication with boat crews have resulted in an estimated 332 kg of waste nets being collected, in addition to 293 kg of loose plastic and ropes and 832 kg of general waste.

Additionally, ‘ghost gear’ and fishing net clean ups by the ESO on Masirah island last year saw the collection of 197 tons of abandoned fishing gear. Over the last three years an estimated 425 tons of abandoned fishing gear have been collected from 78 km of vitally important turtle nesting beaches. According to ESO reports, this is possibly one of the largest dedicated net clean-ups of fishing gear globally and is one of their proudest achievements to date.

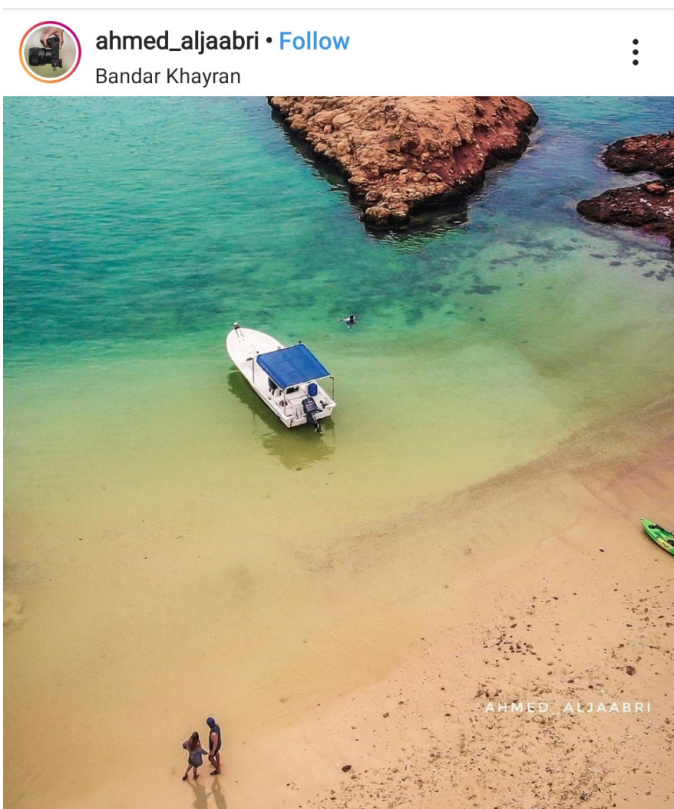
While effective solutions are being implemented locally it is important that a concerted global approach be taken to monitor and fight this threat. By working together, we can protect marine life and move towards a future free from the ‘ghost gear’ threat.

FEATURES

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Hamster hero? How a Japanese cartoon became Thai youth protesters' symbol

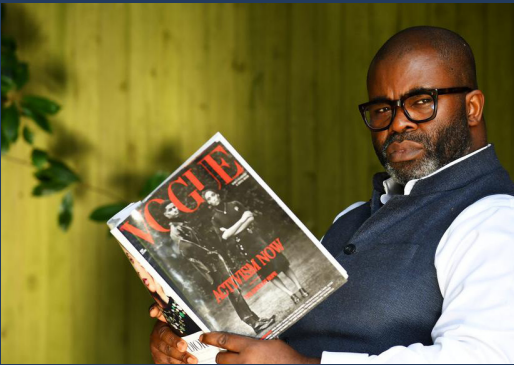


THAILAND'S emerging student pro-democracy movement has adopted a Japanese cartoon hamster, Hamtaro, as a creative way to get support from young people around the country. University and high school students have rallied almost daily in the past two weeks to demand the dissolution of parliament, an end to harassment of government critics, and amendments to the military-written constitution that critics say help maintain the influence of the army over the political system. This past week, three of the protests were themed around "Hamtaro," where protesters ran around public places in circles, like a hamster wheel,

while singing a modified version of the cartoon's jingle, saying the government loves feasting on taxpayer's money and demanding Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha dissolve parliament. "The Hamtaro cartoon is what on television every morning, so it connects with use easily," said Pumiwat Rangkasit, 20, a student activist from a group called New Life Network. Japanese publishing house Shogakukan, which owns the license to Hamtaro, declined to comment on the use of the cartoon in Thai protests when contacted by Reuters. Student groups have used social media to find new ways for protests, via hashtag #Ideaformob, leaders

told Reuters. Groups are also planning other themes for protests, including Japanese cartoon character Naruto and Harry Potter. "Young people grew up with these popular culture characters and they help add new dimensions to our movement, making it relatable and easy to communicate with young people," said Jutatip Sirikhan, 21, president of the Student Union of Thailand. Activist Chutimon Kritsanapanee, 21, from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, said: "Some people may not be able to relate but the main thing is we want to tell others about the failure of this government through these gimmicks." — **Reuters**

Makeover: UK fashion bible Vogue turns serious for September



LONDON (Reuters) - Misan Harriman hopes to encourage employers to cast the recruitment net more widely with his Vogue cover portrait of influential Black activists in place of the usual pouting stars. Footballer Marcus Rashford, who helped force a UK government U-turn on children's meal vouchers, and Adwoa Aboah, a model and mental health campaigner are featured with the banner "Activism Now, The Faces of Hope" on the front of the fashion bible. For Harriman, the first Black male photographer to shoot a UK Vogue cover, the picture is "really of this moment", reflecting a summer of protest for social justice following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. It was Harriman's pictures of London's Black Lives Matter movements that brought him to the attention of UK Vogue editor-in-chief Edward Enninful, himself the first Black person to lead the magazine. Vogue needed to change in the wake of the protests and the coronavirus pandemic, Enninful told the BBC, and that is what led to Harriman's cover for the September issue. "You couldn't just sell, you know, beautiful clothes and shoes when the world was going through such a crisis," the editor said. — **Reuters**

FEATURES



Giant cherry with cream, fly and drone unveiled on London's Fourth Plinth

A 9-TONNE sculpture of a giant swirl of whipped cream with a cherry on top, as well as a fly and a drone, was unveiled on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth in London on Thursday.

The sculpture by Heather Phillipson, entitled "THE END", is the latest in a series of contemporary artworks to be displayed on the plinth over the past two decades.

Phillipson told Reuters that she got the idea for the work in

patch of Trafalgar Square to the website <http://www.theend.today>.

At more than 9 metres in height, THE END is the tallest work to date to be displayed on the plinth. Phillipson said she wanted the cherry's stalk to be very tall to rival Nelson's Column, the centrepiece of the square.

Phillipson said she had attended both festivals and protest marches in Trafalgar Square, and also often walked through the square in

At more than 9 metres in height, THE END is the tallest work to date to be displayed on the plinth. Phillipson said she wanted the cherry's stalk to be very tall to rival Nelson's Column, the centrepiece of the square

2016, when Britain had just voted to leave the European Union and Donald Trump was campaigning for the U.S. presidency.

"Cream is this slightly impossible substance when wet, it's full of air so it means it's always on the verge of collapse, which is a state I felt we were in," she said, adding that some of those unsettling feelings had been heightened by recent events such as the coronavirus pandemic.

The sculpture depicts a fly crawling up the side of an enormous swirl of cream, which is topped by a glossy cherry on which a drone rests. The drone's camera transmits a live feed of a small

her daily life, and she wanted to reflect those different dimensions in her sculpture.

"It kind of speaks to ideas of celebration, but also something very uneasy at the same time. You know, that there's something potentially imploding," she said.

The unveiling of the work was delayed by four months because of the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. It will remain in place until the spring of 2022.

Previously, the plinth in the northwest corner of the square in central London lay empty for more than 150 years after funds ran out to erect an equestrian statue as originally planned.— **Reuters**