

Sultanate witnessing unprecedented development

MUSCAT: Since the accession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to power in Oman, the Sultanate has seen unprecedented developments and continuous efforts to upgrade the march of national action in different sectors, putting Oman in the sphere of advanced nations.

In a report published on Sunday, *Al Dastoor* of Jordan pointed out that, in his first nation address, His Majesty has pledged to respect the Basic Law of the State, to fully protect citizens' interests and



liberties and to safeguard the independence of the country and the safety of its territories.

Al Dastoor added that late Sultan Qaboos perceived in

His Majesty Sultan Haitham all the traits and abilities that qualify him to shoulder the responsibility of the Sultanate's leadership.

The Jordanian daily

commended the new, confident reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham. It said that the historic speech he delivered at the inauguration ceremony charted out the parameters of future action for a brighter future. In the speech, the paper said, His Majesty the Sultan drew out the salient features of the present and future stages and sent direct and indirect messages, particularly with regard to domestic and foreign policies and the approach to be pursued by the Sultanate in future.

TURN TO P2

600 HEALTHCARE WORKERS TESTED POSITIVE



WITH THE RISE IN NUMBER OF PATIENTS IN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS, THE REQUIREMENT OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS IS ALSO MUCH LARGER THAN EXPECTED

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: A senior Ministry of Health official said that preventing the spread of the virus is not impossible, and it can be done by simply washing hands and keeping a distance of two metres between two persons.

The recovery percentage of total COVID-19 cases reported in Oman is around 66 per cent as per the statistics of the Ministry of Health.

As of Monday, 45,150 of

68,400 positive cases have recovered, though 326 people have lost lives.

The official also expressed serious concern over the fact that nearly 600 healthcare workers have been affected due to community transmission, which could affect the overall health activities.

With the rise in number of patients in intensive care units, the requirement of healthcare workers is also much larger than expected.

The ministry announced

1,739 new cases in the Sultanate, including 1,514 Omanis and 225 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases to 68,400.

A total of 3, 957 people were tested in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of tests in Oman to 274,475.

A total of 75 people were admitted to the hospital on Monday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 574, including 170 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

2 vaccines 'produce immune response'

PARIS: Two COVID-19 vaccine candidates have proven safe for humans and produced strong immune reactions among patients involved in two separate clinical trials, doctors said on Monday.

The first trial among more than a thousand adults in Britain found that the vaccine induced "strong antibody and T cell immune responses" against the novel coronavirus.

A separate trial in China involving more than 500 people showed most had developed widespread antibody immune response.

— AFP

OMAN

Sultanate witnessing unprecedented development

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The paper added that, in the past 6 months, the Sultanate has experienced continuous progress through nonstop efforts that began in the small hours of His Majesty's accession to the throne, showing a worthy model of leadership that accorded attention to citizens in every part of the country.

The report said that the first speech of His Majesty Sultan paid homage to late Sultan Qaboos and glorified his achievements, describing the late Sultan as “the dearest and finest of men... Words fall short of articulating a eulogy fit for a Sultan.”

Al Dastoor said that His Majesty Sultan Haitham also vowed to adopt the late Sultan's “upright leadership” and derive impetus from it, (quoting...) “for the responsibility thrust on our shoulders is

an immense one, and so are the ensuing responsibilities”.

The paper pointed out that His Majesty Sultan Haitham underscored the need for collective action to achieve progress and continue the quest for a better life, with the prime aim of safeguarding the gains of the blessed Renaissance.

In its analysis of the first speech of His Majesty Sultan Haitham, *Al Dastoor* said that the Royal address focused on the wellbeing of the citizen, being the means and goal of development. It also noted that His Majesty Sultan Haitham stressed that every citizen has a responsibility to apply this partnership through diligent resolve to be productive and faithful to the aspirations of the nation, a pledge that His Majesty the Sultan himself vowed to honour, said the Jordanian paper. — **ONA**

HIS MAJESTY GREETINGS TO KING OF BELGIUM

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Philippe of the Kingdom of Belgium, on his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to King Philippe and the Belgian friendly people further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty the Sultan has received a cable of thanks from Emperor Naruhito of Japan, in reply to His Majesty's cable of greetings to him on his country's National Day.

In his cable, Emperor Naruhito expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere greetings, wishing His Majesty good health and happiness and the Omani people further progress and growth. — **ONA**



Shura discusses draft VAT law

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'Shura discussed the value added tax (VAT) draft Law, which was referred by the Council of Ministers, on Monday.

The members voted on each article separately after extensive discussions, in light of the report of the Economic and Financial Committee in Majlis Ash'Shura. The report included several amendments and observations made by the committee on some of the articles of the draft law that is made up of 106 articles. The report took into account the importance of the project's compatibility with the economic and financial situation of the Sultanate and future aspirations that may have an impact on the national economy. Each article was read separately in the session, according to articles (133-137) of Shura bylaw. The session was presided over by Khalid bin Hilal Al

Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'Shura. Some Shura members from the governorates participated in the session via video conferencing.

During the session, Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Head of the Economic and Financial Committee and its rapporteur, read the articles of the law, and responded to the comments and inquiries submitted by members about articles of the draft law. While reading the committee's report, he pointed to the importance of ensuring basic standards, in addition to other proposals that are touched by the report of the committee. The members' observations regarding the articles of the law were taken into account.

Majlis Ash'Shura will continue discussion on draft VAT law and the rest of its scheduled agenda on Tuesday. — **ONA**

OIA HOLDS MEETING WITH NEW CHAIRMEN

MUSCAT: Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, head of OIA, on Monday met with the chairmen of the board of directors of state-owned companies which have been restructured, recently.

The meeting discussed the basics and principles adopted by the OIA in managing the companies under its supervision, and the ways for achieving integration between them in a bid to realise economic growth and expand businesses in the Sultanate.

The chairman of OIA reviewed a number of principles and values that govern the relationship between the authority and the companies under its

supervision, and the principles that will be highlighted in the upcoming period such as enhancing In-Country Value (ICV) of contracts and purchases, empowering the private sector and cooperating with it to push forward development, discarding competition between two sectors and committing to the principles of governance to protect public funds.

The chairman of OIA called for striking a balance between the governance procedures in order to avoid delay and complication of work and streamline the workflow. He underscored the adoption of annual performance indicators to measure the performance and evaluate the executive management in each company. — **ONA**

SAF Command and Staff College holds graduation



Muscat: The Command and Staff College of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), celebrated the graduation of the 33rd Batch, under the auspices of Lt-Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, SAF Chief of Staff, at its headquarters in Bait Al Falaj Camp on Monday.

The ceremony began with a speech delivered by Commodore Abdullah bin Ali al Sulaimi, Commandant of the Command and Staff College. All precautionary measures were taken in the ceremony to ensure the safety of all attendees.

A presentation was shown in the ceremony about the batch and its curricula, lectures, visits, exercises, and military

and national events and occasions during its academic year 2019/2020.

After that, the SAF Chief of Staff handed over the prizes to the toppers and certificates to other graduates.

It is worth noting that the thirty-third session included a number of officers from the Ministry of Defense, the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman, other military and security authorities, a number of officers from the GCC states and from some other sisterly Arab countries and friendly countries. The curriculum included three semesters.

The curriculum also included tactical exercises, a number

of lectures by under-secretaries, ambassadors, and some experts and specialists from brotherly and friendly countries, which contributed in enriching the information of the students. At the end of the course the participants carried out the Al Hazm (decisiveness) exercise.

The graduation ceremony was attended by Maj. Gen Matar bin Salem al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Oubaidani, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), and Rear Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). — **ONA**

Vehicle inspection resumes at ROP service centre

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: Fitness inspection of vehicles above 10 years old can be done at the Royal Oman Police service centres across the country. This was stopped along with other services after the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Technical fitness inspection of such vehicles which were suspended from March 21 after the coronavirus spread, can be done at all ROP service centres," a source at the ROP said.

It is mandatory to get any vehicle above 10 years to get checked before renewal of registration.

The ROP had said earlier that owners of these vehicles could renew their vehicle registration online even if it required a mandatory technical inspection.

As part of the national efforts to combat COVID-19, all ROP customer services were suspended.

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Ministry’s records system endorsed

MUSCAT: Dr Abdulmunim bin Mansour al Hasani, Minister of Information, and Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhoyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), on Monday signed an agreement to endorse the system of classification of records and documents at the Ministry of Information.

The endorsement, which took place at the Ministry of Information, streamlines the ministry's records in accordance with the system,

principles and procedures of the NRAA Law and its executive regulation (bylaw), and in line with the review conducted by the ministry's working team in coordination with NRAA specialists.

Exclusive Records signify the type of documents that are characteristic of each government unit and make it unique/distinct from other units. As many as 72 government departments have had their record systems endorsed so far.

— ONA

LANGUAGE IS NOT A BARRIER IN COVID-19 SURVEY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: Al Buraimi Governorate along with other governorates is completing the first week of National Covid-19 Survey and that is expected to give an insight on the extent of virus infection within the Omani community.

The first cycle of the survey began on July 12 at the Directorate of Communicable Disease Surveillance and Control in Buraimi Governorate in coordination with other directorates of health services. After the first cycle there will be a two weeks break throughout the governorates of the Sultanate.

“After several meetings we established specific clinics for the participants of COVID-19 survey. At the polyclinic once the participant comes they are directed immediately to the special clinic and within five minutes the forms are filled with the assistance of the doctors,” explained Dr Ahmed Yar Mohammed al Balushi, Director of Disease Surveillance and Control, at Directorate General of Health Service, Al Buraimi Governorate.

Another aspect of the survey is the call centre with the facility of speakers of different popular languages to hold a clear communication with the potential participants as the Ministry of Health has been randomly choosing the participants.

Dr Al Balushi explained further, “As this survey is for

Omanis and non-Omanis we have established call centres and many people are working there capable of speaking other languages for people who cannot speak Arabic or in some instances English as well. So we have been able to communicate with them in their language.”

He pointed out there are challenges as in the case when some people do not respond to the call or others who do not have the right phone number.

“On the other hand, so many people are encouraging and want to participate in the serological survey,” he noted.

The number of COVID-19 cases has been increasing and he feels the main reason continues to be gathering of people.

“I feel the main cause of increase in the cases is gathering whether it is at the workplace or family or in public places. So my advice to the public is to follow the instructions of the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health on maintaining distance between people, wearing a mask in public places and crowded areas and washing hands with soap frequently.

“Especially during the Eid we must avoid family gatherings. We have seen so many cases that have been transmitted because of family as well as workplace gatherings. Please keep the distance and wear masks,” requested Dr Ahmed.



Omantel leverages E- learning to upgrade employee skills during pandemic

Learning and employee skill building continue smoothly remotely through programs in technical, managerial and leadership levels as Omantel aims towards uncompromised service and quality

Muscat, 20th July 2020 — Omantel - the leading provider of integrated telecommunications services in the Sultanate – very well understands its role as an enabler on various levels. It believes in empowering its manpower with the highest and latest skills and capabilities to help achieve the company's objectives of providing superior services and consistently maintaining quality.

For this, Omantel's specialized E-learning programs for its employees, especially during COVID-19 -. These tailor-made programs focus on raising the efficiency of employees through training and equipping them with skills required to boost Omantel's overall performance. Hence, Omantel attaches great importance to the e-learning programs as these important tools have a direct and indirect impact on its subscriber base.

By focusing on technical, managerial and leadership areas, E-learning targets employees at various levels to equip them with skills that enable them keep pace with the ever-changing market environment, technology and customer demands. The company uses different learning platforms to provide participants of the e-learning programs with a wide array of insights in their field of expertise.

Commenting on the program, Saif bin Sultan Al-Abri, Senior Manager of Learning and Development at Omantel's Human Resources Unit pointed out: “E-learning is one of the many methodologies used by the Human Resources Unit to help employees gain required skills in various fields and specialties. These tailored programs are in technical areas like artificial intelligence and digitization, besides in business and human resources management specializations such as e-marketing and other areas.

“The E-learning programs have contributed towards developing the skills of employees and exposed them to successful experiences which they can emulate in their own functioning. The E-learning programs have enabled our staff to provide better services using innovative methods. E-learning has now become a major contributor to meeting the strategic needs of the organization itself and meeting the requirements of future recipients.”

Al-Abri further noted: “E-learning is one of the most important fields of investment in employee development as it raises their job competencies and their skills. Moreover, E-learning in Omantel, which has witnessed a great success, provides many advantages compared to the



traditional forms of training. Through E-learning, a participating Omantel employee can choose the field of training that he desires and that fits his daily schedule. This is a good advantage especially during time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programs are a testimony to Omantel Human Resources Unit's endeavor in finding alternatives that enable its employees to continue learning and develop their skills and abilities despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.”

It is worth noting that Omantel, as part of its employee development initiatives, has launched several initiatives in recent times, the highlight of which are its specialized academies. It also recently launched the Future Academy “to be one of the sources through which Omantel can invest in training its national cadres and raising their level of technical and leadership qualifications so that they can lead the digital transformation in the Sultanate during the next stage” Al-Abri concluded.

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While seeking to obtain optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.

MTC TAKES PART IN GCC MEETING

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) participated on Monday at the GCC eGovernment Ministerial Committee Meeting and the GCC Ministerial Committee Meeting for Post and Telecommunications, which were held through the video conference call.

Eng Azza bint Sulaiman al Ismailiya, Minister of Technology and Communications, along with top officials took part in the meeting.

The eGov Ministerial Committee Meeting discussed the launch date of the platform of malicious



software analysis along with reviewing the memo of the General Secretariat of the joint initiatives proposed to be implemented.

The committee also reviewed the report of the General Secretariat on the future direction of the committee's work and the ICT initiatives of the GCC countries in facing the spread of Coronavirus. In addition, the committee went through the General

Secretariat report on the progress of implemented initiatives of the GCC Guidelines Strategy as well as the report of developing specific curricula on cybersecurity in the GCC countries. — **ONA**

Book on nutritional neuroscience to be unveiled

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: A new prestigious book series titled **NUTRITIONAL NEUROSCIENCE** will be launched by Prof Rahma al Mahrooqi, Deputy Vice Chancellor — Research, Sultan Qaboos University on July 24. The book series is published by Springer Nature.

Dr Mohamed Essa, **(pictured)** Associate Professor of Nutrition, SQU will be the Editor-in-Chief for this series. He is an expert in the field of Nutritional Neuroscience and he has published more than 150 papers, 54 book chapters and 11 books. Dr Essa is also Editor-in-Chief for International Journal of Nutrition, Pharmacology, Neurological Diseases published by Wolters & Kluwer, USA. Dr Essa is also acting as an Editor for Frontiers in Neuroscience, Science Documents, Frontiers in Bioscience, Academic Editor for Bio Med Research International and Associate Editor for BMC complementary and alternative medicine, etc.

The programme will start with an introduction by the editors from Springer Nature followed by a welcome



address by Prof Abdullah al Sadi, Dean of CAMS, SQU; and Dr Mohammed al Khusaibi, HOD, FSN, SQU. Then there will be a series of small scientific talks on this new emerging field by Dr Mohammed Akbar, NIH, USA; Dr Meena Shakarkar, University of Saskatchewan, Canada;

Prof Samir al Adawi from SQU; Dr Walid Qoronfleh, WISH, Qatar; Dr Mohammed Salama from Mansoura University, Egypt; and Dr Wael Mohamed from Islamic International University, Malaysia.

More information about this book series is available on this link <https://www.springer.com/series/16639>.

وزارة التجارة والصناعة

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تاريخ تقديم الطلب : ٢٠٢٠/٢/١٢



Ministry of Oil and Gas

Auction Announcement

Ministry of Oil and Gas would like to announce an open invitation to the public to participate in a sealed auction described in the table below.

Auction No	Material Type (Description)	Location	Visit Date	Bid Closing Date	Bank Guarantee amount
1/2020	Used movables and furniture	General Office building of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Ministries District AL Khuwair	From 26/7/2020 To 27/7/2020	28/7/2020 at 10:00 am	OMR 200

In accordance with the following terms & conditions:

1- Bidders shall be required to submit the Bank Guarantee prior to have the access for online bidding, where the date of online auction will be on 27/7/2020 to 28/7/2020 10:00 am. This is a refundable amount and shall be returned to the non-successful bidders after bid evaluation.

2- Items offered for sale can be viewed as stated in the above table from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and "As it is-where it is" basis.

3- Interested Bidders shall be required to register and submit their offer on this link <https://mazad.om/owner/32>

4- Items descriptions / quantity will be shown in the E-auction platform.

5- The successful bidder shall pay 3% of the awarded amount to Mazad.om as an "Auction Fees".

6- The successful bidder shall pay full bid amount within three (3) working days from the date of notification of award. In the event that awarded bidder fails to pay the outstanding amounts within the specified period, the bidder shall be disqualified and the guarantee provided as part of the bid will be forfeited

7- The successful bidder is responsible to follow the Ministry of Oil and Gas instruction & HSE procedure and to provide all the necessary arrangement for loading and transporting Vehicles.

8- The successful bidder shall collect the vehicles within a maximum period of five (5) days working days Failing to do so will result in paying penalty charges of 50 OMR for each day of delay beyond the above period.

9- The Ministry of Oil and Gas with Mazad Oman Company reserves the right to take any action it seems appropriate without giving any reason.

For more information regards to the online bidding registration, please contact info@mazad.om or Mobile number +968 91900950



Ministry of Tourism

Advertisement of Public Tender

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Document Fee	Last Date for Collecting Tender Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Grade
3/2020 Re-tender	Consultancy Services for Designing and Supervising the Development of Kahf Hayoor area in Jabal Samhan, Dhofar Governorate.	RO 25	9/8/2020	1/9/2020	First

- Companies and consultancy firms specialized in the aforementioned works, registered with the Board of Tender in the aforesaid grade and interested in subscribing to said tender may collect tender-related documents through the digital portal of the Tender Board via the following link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

- Bids are submitted in line with the technical specifications and requirements and attached thereto a temporary bank bond issued by a local bank or a Sultanate-based in international bank's branch at a sum not less than 1% of the bid's amount and valid for 90 days from the date of submitting it electronically. The original receipt of the temporary bond is to be submitted one day before the submission date at the Ministry's Tenders and Contracts Department, 2nd floor.

- The bid's price is to be inked in Omani currency both in letters and digits and the price list has to be dated, stamped and signed by the tenderer.

- The period for submitting the bids begins after the inquiry periods mentioned in the e-tendering system ends immediately and lasts till the last date for bid submission before 10:00 am.

Help and inquiries:

1. For inquiries related to the tender, kindly communicate electronically through the e-tendering system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

2. For inquiries related to the technical support of the etendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or call 24166670.

The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

www.omantourism.gov.om

For further details, kindly communicate through otic@omantourism.gov.om or telephone nos. 22088085- 22088348

SULTANATE CHAIRS REGIONAL MEET

MUSCAT: In its capacity as Head of the 35th session of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, on Monday chaired a regional technical consultation meeting via videoconferencing on ways to address the impacts of coronavirus

(Covid-19) on agriculture and food security in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The meeting was aimed at developing a uniform, appropriate approach to manage zoonotic diseases and the impact of coronavirus on the sector of livestock. It also discussed ways to devise a unified, healthy plan of work,

enhance lab monitoring capabilities, prevention, detection, response and alleviation of risks posed by infectious diseases and resistance to anti-microbes. In particular, the meeting aimed to draft a programme for the development of capacities and the application of Target One Health partners' programme.

Other issues raised during the meeting included investment in biological safety and security, food safety, quarantine methods, veterinary education, reinforcement of workforce and monitoring and response to communicable diseases, besides national plans on resistance of anti-microbes. — ONA

Students lap up e-learning

LIJU CHERIAN

MUSCAT: With the coronavirus pandemic showing no signs of slowing down, several international higher education institutions (HEIs) have announced plans to resume online classes for the fall semester.

A report titled 'Lessons Learned: Higher Education's Response to COVID-19', by Dr Shoba Zachariah, CEO, Catalyst Solutions, examined the responses of nine HEIs including 5 universities and 4 colleges in the Sultanate to the pandemic.

According to Dr Zachariah, all HEIs in the survey were able to switch to online teaching quickly; some within a week and a few immediately.

The benefits as revealed by the survey included more opportunities for online student collaboration, more interaction by the more shy or reserved students, increased flexibility in scheduling classes and more teaching time to explore the curriculum in-depth.

A key worry for decision makers in education is whether students will remain engaged in the learning process.

The survey reveals that contrary to expectations, within 3 months, online learning has improved student autonomy and independent learning skills.

When it comes to student engagement, online learn-



ing can level the playing field for introverted or shy students who prefer to be quiet in face-to-face classrooms. Faculty members at Majan University College (MUC), Muscat, noticed that many of these students were more interactive in the online environment, adding comments and questions during online classes.

Students also reported that they had more time to study due to time saved from not commuting to or socialising on campus.

Dr Maka Kobeil, Dean of MUC, says it is very important for institutions to develop their own guiding principles and processes for online teaching which are informed by international best practice.

MANY OF THE STUDENTS WERE MORE INTERACTIVE IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT, ADDING COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS DURING ONLINE CLASSES. STUDENTS ALSO REPORTED THAT THEY HAD MORE TIME TO STUDY DUE TO TIME SAVED FROM NOT COMMUTING TO OR SOCIALISING ON CAMPUS.

There is no doubt that faculty development is vital for engaging students effectively in online and blended

environments. This is a priority for all institutions, but in the current situation, faculty development has also to be carried out online. Dr Abood al Sawafi, Vice-Chancellor, University of Buraimi, is ensuring that his teaching staff has access to professional development webinars on online and blended learning. First year students may lack the interpersonal and self-management skills required for effective learning. These skills are largely developed through face-to-face interaction and support and are difficult to manage virtually without experience and tailored strategies in place.

Migrants return to ‘Balkan route’ to chase European dream

IDOMENI, Greece: The first rays of the morning sun reveal entire families lying on the railway line or in abandoned wagons but when Greek police patrols appear, they evaporate into nearby fields.

Among them is Abdullah, a 20-year-old Syrian, waiting for a train to take him to a better life.

In the buffer zone of Idomeni, on the border between Greece and Northern Macedonia, Abdullah watches for the right moment to sneak on to a train, in the hope of following the “Balkan route” taken by hundreds of thousands of migrants in 2015.

For the last few days he has been camping in a dilapidated building near the train station.

“I will do everything to cross the border,” Abdullah said.

The young Syrian has been living for several months in Greece, without work, and “sees no future” there.

“My brother lives in Italy and I want to find him,” he says.

During the great migration crisis of 2015, hundreds of



Migrants wait for a train to take them from Idomeni to a new life. — AFP

thousands of people crossed this “no man’s land” on foot to Europe.

But the European dream quickly fell apart. In March 2016, EU countries locked their borders and Greece built a wall along its northern border.

Tens of thousands of exiles

fleeing wars, persecution or poverty were stranded in Idomeni, which effectively became a refugee camp, before being forcibly evacuated by the Greek authorities.

Since then, camps on the Greek mainland, and even more so on Aegean islands,

have been overflowing with migrants, with new arrivals turning up every day.

And with a surge of 120,000 asylum seekers in Greece today, as many migrants find themselves homeless in Athens as they do on the border with North Macedonia. — AFP

IN BRIEF

PUTIN SACKS ARRESTED GOVERNOR DESPITE PROTESTS

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on Monday to sack the governor of the far-eastern Khabarovsk region, Sergei Furgal, despite a series of mass protests backing him. Furgal, elected two years ago in an upset of the Kremlin-supported incumbent, was arrested this month on charges of having organised multiple murders of rival businessmen about 15 years ago. Tens of thousands of people have rallied in support of Furgal in recent weeks in the region’s largest protests in decades. Putin’s decree said that he was removing Furgal because of a “loss of confidence” in the regional leader.

SUDAN TO TRY OUSTED BASHIR OVER 1989 COUP

KHARTOUM: Sudan’s former president Omar al Bashir, ousted amid a popular pro-democracy uprising last year, faces trial from Tuesday over the military coup that brought him to power more than three decades ago. Bashir, 76, who is already behind bars for corruption, could face the death penalty if convicted over his 1989 coup against the democratically elected government of prime minister Sadek al Mahdi. The Khartoum trial starting at 08:00 GMT against him and 16 co-accused comes as Sudan’s post-revolution transitional government has launched a series of reforms in hopes of fully re-joining the international community.

AFGHAN ALL-GIRLS TEAM DESIGNS CHEAP VENTILATOR

HERAT: In the eastern Afghan city of Herat, 18-year-old high school student Somaya Faruqi adjusts a suction cap as she puts the finishing touches before unveiling a low-cost, lightweight ventilator created by her and six other young women. The all-female Afghan Robotics Team, which has won international awards for its robots, started work in March on an open-source, low-cost ventilator as the coronavirus pandemic hit the war-torn nation. It took the team almost four months to finalise the ventilator, which is partly based on a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) design, and they received guidance from experts at Harvard University. — Agencies

WORLD

EU leaders push to break virus package deadlock



BRUSSELS: Signs emerged that leaders of northern European Union countries were willing to compromise on a 1.8 billion euro (\$2 billion) coronavirus stimulus plan on Monday as talks in Brussels extended to a fourth day.

Divided and slow to respond at the start of the coronavirus outbreak in Europe, EU leaders believe they now have a chance to redeem themselves with an aid plan that would show Europeans the bloc can react to a crisis.

But old grievances between countries less affected by the pandemic and the indebted countries of Italy and Greece, whose economies are in freefall, have resurfaced, pitting Rome against The Hague and its allies in Stockholm, Copenhagen and Vienna.

With leaders not expected to restart until 14:00 GMT, much rested on European Council President Charles Michel's efforts to present a new basis for a deal, taking into account the competing demands of north and southern Europe.

"An agreement is a necessity", French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told French BFM TV on Monday as weary diplomats slept or prepared for another day in what could be the longest-ever EU summit.

In the small hours of Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron lost patience with the "sterile blockages" of the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Austria, later joined by Finland, banging his fist on the table, one diplomat said.

A second diplomat confirmed the outburst, saying tensions rose until Belgium's Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes called for calm.

Michel had earlier urged the 27 leaders to achieve "mission impossible", reminding them that more than 600,000 people had now died from COVID-19 around the world. The EU must stand together, he said.

That appeared to edge towards a potential breakthrough.

Within the 750 billion euro recovery fund, 390 billion euros could be considered as non-repayable grants, diplomats said, a compromise between the 350 billion level of the five "frugals" and the 400 billion euros demanded by France and Germany.

There was no immediate clarity on whether a deal was in the making, but Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told ORF radio he was satisfied with the negotiations. He also praised the blocking minority tactics.

— Reuters

IN BRIEF

Bangladesh allows late-stage trial of China's vaccine

DHAKA: Bangladesh has approved the third-phase trial of a potential COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd, officials said on Monday, as infections continue to rise in the densely-populated South Asian country. Sinovac has been looking for volunteers outside of China as the number of coronavirus cases there has dwindled, said a member of Bangladesh's national technical advisory committee to tackle COVID-19. The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), will conduct the trial that could begin next month. "We have given ethical permission for the trial after reviewing the research protocol," Mahmood Uz Jahan, director of the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC), said.

Australia warns outbreak will take weeks to tame

SYDNEY: A surge in COVID-19 cases in Australia's second-biggest city could take weeks to subside despite a lockdown and orders to wear masks, Australia's acting chief medical officer said on Monday as the country braces for a second wave of infection. Authorities in the state of Victoria, whose capital Melbourne is in partial lockdown amid a new outbreak, reported 275 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, down from a daily record of 438 three days earlier. Australia's Acting Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly said it would take "weeks" to slow the outbreak to levels seen as recently as June, when Victoria and the rest of Australia reported single or double-digit daily infections.

Britain finds six distinct types of COVID-19 infection

LONDON: British scientists analysing data from a widely-used COVID-19 symptom-tracking app have found there are six distinct types of the disease, each distinguished by a cluster of symptoms. A King's College London team found that the six types also correlated with levels of severity of infection, and with the likelihood of a patient needing help with breathing — such as oxygen or ventilator treatment — if they are hospitalised. The findings could help doctors to predict which COVID-19 patients are most at risk and likely to need hospital care in future waves of the epidemic. "If you can predict who these people are at Day Five, you have time to give them support and early interventions such as monitoring blood oxygen and sugar levels, and ensuring they are properly hydrated," said Claire Steves, a doctor who co-led the study. — **Agencies**

ANALYSIS



Let us focus on the present



Lakshmi Kothaneth

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How long would it take for us to get back to our normal lifestyle? Those were the days we would take off to wherever we wanted to at the drop of a hat, whether it was a three-day tourism package, off road weekend or just a walk on the beach or coffee with friends.

We would not have ever felt guilty of visiting friends. Shall we meet up in the garden and catch up? Don't forget it is summer, most importantly do not forget your mask, not because it can cost RO 100 for violating the COVID-19 law for being out in a public place without a mask, but because it protects you and the others.

It is not the office going, young families, the youth or children who have been affected the most. All of these groups found their way out of this situation in one way or the other thanks to technology. It is the elderly who feel the brunt of isolation. 'Visit them if you love them,' really does not apply anymore as the tag line has now become, 'stay

away if you care for them.' They may not be too keen on typing out a message but they still do while others prefer sending out voice messages. "I am imprisoned in my home," said an uncle who lives alone and added, "But I know it is for my own good." Few days later, he was busy working from his phone.

Loneliness is part of this pandemic for our elders for whom the best form of entertainment and comfort would have been being with the family members. In the midst of all these changes we are going through such as ways of working (from home), fitness regime (walking with mask), celebrating festivals (no gathering), shopping (without touching or trying) and eating out (just take away).

So before we say we are bored, let us ensure the seniors are also entertained. They are precious listeners to Oman Observer's podcast, "Dear Oman" as they are ready with their feedback and questions. Once again technology bridged a gap.

So to the question, 'How long?' The answers vary, but let us focus on the present.

Our faith in determinism



AHMED AL HARTHY

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We live in a world filled with universal uncertainties. Were we created by a willing creator? Or were we a product of chance? More importantly, why is there something instead of nothing? Such questions have been entertained and exhausted by philosophers, theologians and scientists as well as others from many different schools of life. The matter of determinism versus free will is one such troubling topic as well.

Are our actions ultimate benefactors of our own free will and choice, or are they fully governed by laws and effects that aren't fully comprehended. It would be unrealistic to attempt to compare, contrast and fully analyse determinism vs free will. Hence, this article will mainly attempt to familiarise the concept of determinism.

Determinism is the belief that all events that have ever taken place or will take place in future determined by natural forces such as the laws of nature. To determinists, there can only be one physically possible future outcome to an event. Some determinists see varying sizes of a room for free will in the order of events. On the other hand, there are those who believe in a very radical form of determinism; that determinism and free will are fundamentally incompatible and that determinism exists while free will is only a fiction of imagination — this is what is known as hard determinism. Hard determinists mainly base their arguments on the premise that free will is at odds with determinism; they contradict one another and therefore the existence of both can never be reconciled. Such radical determinists tend to be agnostic towards a god, as the idea of free will is central to the major world religions. On the other hand, there are the compatibilists who, as the name suggests, believe determinism and free will are compatible and that they complement one another. Compatibilists have also suggested that determinism could be a pre-condition for free will to be made possible.

However, it would be fair to assume that determinism is widely accepted in its different forms. In other words, everyone believes in some sort of determinism; it is highly unlikely that one can believe that only free will exists as that would mean the world and every caused event is random at best. Therefore, the real debate is not centred around determinism versus free will; rather, it is about how big a stake determinism can claim in the natural order of events. This is mainly because there are hardly, if any, arguments refuting determinism entirely.

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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making life easy

MUSCAT: CC Energy Development (CCED) have marked their 100 millionth barrel milestone as they continue with their strategic, long-term operations in the Sultanate.

Adopting a ‘think global, act local’ mindset, the value-driven energy company has organically grown production to exceed 45,000 bbl/day. Amid the ambiguity of COVID-19 and a challenging economy, CCED have remained steadfast towards their upstream energy targets and are set on an ambitious path to further boost production and exploration activities.

CCED Managing Director, Walter Simpson, said “It gives me great pride to have achieved this milestone and it’s a well-deserved recognition for our team who have been unwaveringly committed since we began operations in Oman. We have a fundamental commitment to drive local communities and national development through the power of sustainable hydrocarbon production and it’s encouraging to see that, despite a challenging and uncertain environment, our company is resilient and our capacity for growth is strong.”

The milestone achievement comes after more than a decade of consistent growth and a responsibility to build sustainable output for Oman and its people.

Since acquiring Blocks 3 and 4 in 2007, CCED and its partners — Tethys Oil and Mitsui E&P Middle East — have built a valuable oil production operation from the large concession. Despite the economic restraints of production restrictions, the energy producer has remained buoyant, setting an exem-

ADOPTING A ‘THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL’ MINDSET, THE VALUE-DRIVEN ENERGY COMPANY HAS ORGANICALLY GROWN PRODUCTION TO EXCEED 45,000 BBL/DAY.

plary standard of safety while embracing technology and innovation for business continuity during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

“The company has shown incredible resilience in the face of the unprecedented challenges that we’ve experienced recently and I’m positive that we’ll emerge from this pandemic stronger than before,” added Simpson.

“Through it all, we’ve built a workforce that is skilled, adaptable and connected to our long-term ambitions in Oman which, in itself, is a major goal for CCED. While the current global challenges have slowed our growth plans, this is temporary, and we still have ambitious exploration and production targets, including an extensive five-year exploration program and expanding production to 50,000 barrels per day that will see us investing more than \$300 million annually.”

Today, the performance-driven company has successfully applied innovative solutions to optimize activities, including using drone technology to maximise efficiencies during plant inspection and adapting AI and Machine Learning solutions for data analysis. The

company also continues to explore methods for monetizing gas by establishing small-scale power generation plants that reduce environmental impact.

With long-term plans to build its hydrocarbon resources and increase production, CCED is facilitating local capacity-building to deliver sustainable benefits for future generations.

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company LLC (NSS), 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)
NSS/2020/4	DATA BACKUP SOLUTION	29-July-2020	10-August-2020	100/-

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the «Chairman of the NSS Internal Tender Committee» and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer company name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at the NSS reception area before 12.00pm, time of the Sultanate, on Monday 10 August 2020.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified with 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, addressed to the «Chairman of the NSS Internal Tender Committee». Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00pm
- 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 persons name and the company details.

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INTEGRATED INVESTMENT AUTHORITY TO PUT OMAN ON BETTER FISCAL FOOTING

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: The Omani government's recent decision to restructure and consolidate all of its sovereign wealth funds and investments in public sector enterprises under one all-encompassing umbrella – Oman Investment Authority – bodes well for efforts to stabilise the nation's fiscal situation amid the current global economic downturn, according to a key official representing the state-owned investment behemoth.

Muneer al Muneeri (**pictured**), CEO – Rakiza, an infrastructure-focused fund operating under the auspices of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said the establishment of a unified body ensures robust alignment of strategic direction and vision across all of the different businesses and enterprises brought under the authority's fold.

"The creation of OIA has come at a critical time for the country, which has a new economic vision, Vision 2040, and a new leadership," said Al Muneeri. "At the same time, the country is moving rapidly to adapt to changes and developments happening around the world. The creation of OIA is critical from several angles – we have all of the infrastructure, the different companies and projects that the government developed over the past 40 – 50 years. The new entity has only one basic vision: to harness all of these investments to accelerate the country's economic diversification and to put the economy in a better shape going forward, and in line with the Vision 2040 objectives."

The official made the observations during a



KEY OBJECTIVE:

The establishment of a unified body ensures alignment of strategic direction and vision across all of the different businesses and enterprises brought under the authority's fold.

webinar hosted recently by The Business Year (TBY) on the theme, 'Oman: Investment Landscape'.

Fellow panelists during the hour-long online discussion Included Ghassan al Hashar, Investment Director – Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), and Hanaa al Kharusi, General Manager and Head of Corporate Banking – Ahli Bank.

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.

Significantly, the establishment of OIA will have have beneficial implica-



tions for Rakiza's strategic goals, according to the official. "For Rakiza, the creation of OIA is very helpful as we will now be able to work closely with other entities within the government and within OIA's umbrella. This umbrella now has different companies operating across different sectors which we can tap into and work together in achieving their goals and targets as a financial investor in the infrastructure space."

Additionally, a unified investment entity will have a positive bearing on Oman's image in international debt markets, he pointed out. Alongside efforts to support further consolidation within its umbrella, OIA will also be developing a fiscal plan to place the country on a better footing fiscally and economically, he said.

"I assume certain actions

will be taken that will give credit (ratings) agencies the confidence that the country is taking certain measures to make it financially better going forward," he noted, adding that a better rating would ease Oman's access to liquidity and debt markets.

Also auguring well for Rakiza's strategic goals is recent legislation by the government promoting Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and privatisation. "At Rakiza, we are tapping into opportunities available through privatisation. After all, the government sees privatisation as part of economic diversification, especially in terms of accessing alternative sources of funding – something that is happening across the region as well.

Privatisation of government assets not only helps tap into new financing, but at the same time, brings efficiency into the operation of these assets."

He further added: "Rakiza is a platform for international financial investors to tap into these opportunities, and with the expertise we have within our team, investors will see the returns they expect when they consider emerging countries like Oman."

BUSINESS

Reductions in power system losses generate RO 794m in savings since 2004

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Longstanding efforts by Oman's power distribution companies to cut 'system losses' across the country's main grid have resulted in savings aggregating RO 794 million since 2004, when the sector was the subject of a landmark restructuring programme.

System losses refer to, among other factors, transmission and distribution losses – the dissipation of energy as heat when electricity travels long distances from their point of generation to the point of consumption. Other technical and non-technical factors are also to blame. If unaddressed, they hike up the cost of electricity supply and distribution, besides contributing to economic losses to the country.

In 2004 – a key milestone in Oman's transition from a predominantly state-financed industry to one with a 100 per cent privately-owned generational component – system losses accounted for a staggering 24.6 per cent of total elec-



KEY BENEFITS:

Reductions in system losses result in savings of approximately RO 9 per MWh of electricity.

tricity supply in the Main Interconnected System (MIS). The MIS covers much of the northern half of the Sultanate and accounts for 90 per cent of total electricity consumption.

Following incremental efforts to reduce system losses, mandated by the Authority for Electricity Regulation (AER), this percentage has been pared over the years. System losses were maintained at 8.4 per cent in the MIS in 2019, tracking the previous year's level.

In the Dhofar Power System, which covers

Salalah and adjoining areas, the losses were pegged at 10.6 per cent (up from 9.3 per cent in 2018), while the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), which supplies remote parts of the country, reported losses of 15.1 per cent last year (versus 11.7 per cent in 2018).

According to the Authority, reductions in system losses result in savings of approximately RO 9 per megawatt-hour (MWh) of electricity. In 2019 alone, the benefit accruing to the sector as a result was RO 47.7 million.

"In cumulative terms, the

value of MIS' reduced losses since 2004 is RO 344.2 million which, in present value terms and using a discount rate of 6 per cent, amounts to a total of RO 794 million. Note that these figures do not take into account any investment savings in generation and network infrastructure, which would significantly increase the value of the reported losses reductions," the regulator explained in its 2019 Annual Report published here last week.

Reductions in system losses contribute to considerable cost savings, the Authority explained.

"Reductions in losses are a reflection of the restructuring done across the sector in 2005, the application of a clear incentive-based price control mechanism and the constructive responses received from licensees. As losses approach long-term loss targets, the rate of improvement is expected to reduce, though the Authority assures further improvements can still be enacted," it stated.

GCC ministers discuss measures against malicious software

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) participated in the GCC eGovernment Ministerial Committee Meeting and the GCC Ministerial Committee Meeting for Post and Telecommunications, which were held virtually. Eng Azza bint Sulaiman al Esmaili, Minister of Technology and Communications, headed the Omani delegations at the meetings.

The eGov Ministerial Committee meeting discussed the scheduled date for the launch of a platform for analyzing malicious software. Initiatives proposed by the general secretariat were also studied.

The committee also reviewed the report of the General Secretariat on



the future direction of the committee's work and the ICT initiatives of the GCC countries in facing the spread of coronavirus.

In addition, the committee went through the general secretariat report on the progress of implemented initiatives of the GCC Guidelines Strategy as well as the report of developing specific curricula on cybersecurity in the GCC countries.

As for the 26th GCC Ministerial Committee meeting for Post and Telecommunications, the agenda included a number of topics related to telecommunications, IT and post services, among which, the unified draft law regulating the activities of private companies and institutions working in the field of international urgent post and parcels and the importance of updating it in accordance with the current developments, as well as restructuring the working teams and committees in postal services at the GCC countries.

In addition, the committee emphasized the importance of studying the interconnectivity between the GCC countries.

UK facing severe unemployment crisis

Despite fewer redundancies in the UK last month, economists warn unemployment is on course to rise. Around 650,000 people lost their jobs between March and June but the pace of decline slowed in June, with the bulk of job losses occurring around the onset of lockdown restrictions.

June's drop of just over 74,000 was markedly smaller than April's 450,000 according to figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). However, Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG said the data represented the "calm before the storm". The unemployment rate unexpectedly beat expectations to stay at 3.9 per cent in the three months to May.

Selfin said: "As the Job Retention Scheme unwinds in coming months, the full impact of the recession on unemployment is likely to be revealed." Chancellor Rishi Sunak has said the scheme, which sees the government pay 80 per cent of furloughed employees' wages, will wind down in October. A number of firms have already announced job cuts.



ANDY JALIL

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British Chambers of Commerce reported 29 per cent of companies expect to lay off staff in the third quarter.

"It's clear that we're in the middle of a severe economic downturn, but we will never accept unemployment as an unavoidable outcome," the Chancellor said. Last week Sunak unveiled further measures to stem an anticipated surge in employment, including the introduction of the Kickstart Scheme. The £2bn scheme will see hundreds of thousands of

state-funded jobs for 16 to 24-year olds who are at risk of unemployment.

The ONS data released also shows that the furlough scheme led to a record low in hours worked between March and May. Similarly, there was a related fall in demand for workers.

"The jobs market appears resilient on the surface, owing largely to a modest rise in redundancies," said Gerwyn Davies, senior labour market adviser at CIPD. "However, the sting in the tail is the record fall in

demand for workers — especially in the worst-affected sectors such as accommodation and food services — and the sharp drop in the number of hours worked."

Adding: "The situation can only deteriorate rapidly over the rest of the summer and into the autumn as young people enter the labour market." Economists predict a wave of unemployment as the government's job retention scheme is gradually wound down. The scheme pays the wages of workers who may otherwise be laid off and supports more than 9 million jobs.

The Chancellor has also confirmed a £30bn stimulus plan to protect jobs in the autumn. But James Reed, chairman of recruitment firm Reed, said that even with all these support measures "the labour market is on a knife edge" and "the risk of mass unemployment remains high".

And ING economist James Smith warned there is "little doubt" that unemployment will increase in the coming months. "The gradual unwinding of the job retention scheme over the summer is being seen as a potential catalyst for firms to begin making changes," he said.

Reliance-Google smartphone deal in India threatens Chinese firms

NEW DELHI: A \$4.5 billion deal under which Alphabet's Google will collaborate with India's Reliance Industries on a new smartphone likely heralds a big shake-up for the world's second-largest mobile market, industry executives and analysts say.

Reliance boss Mukesh Ambani, announcing the partnership at his company's annual meeting last week, said Google would build an Android operating system (OS) to power a low-cost "4G or even 5G" smartphone that Reliance would design.

The new phone is set to pose a major challenge to Chinese vendors such as



A woman walks past the logo of Google during an event in New Delhi. — Reuters

Xiaomi and BBK Electronics, owner of the Realme, Oppo and Vivo brands, which currently dominate a \$2 bil-

lion market for sub-\$100 smartphones in India.

Powered by a clever mix of Bollywood, cricket-driven

marketing and product features such as powerful cameras, the Chinese firms sell roughly eight of every 10 smartphones in the country.

"If history is anything to go by, Reliance will undercut other brands and pose a real threat to the low-end smartphone market," said Rushabh Doshi of tech researcher Canalys.

Reliance executed a similar plan in 2017 with the launch of the JioPhone, a no-frills device that gave users internet access for as little as \$20. JioPhone now has more 100 million users, many of whom are internet first-timers. —Reuters



A junk boat passes the skyline as seen from the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront in Hong Kong. — Reuters

Global banks scrutinise their Hong Kong clients for pro-democracy ties

HONG KONG: Global wealth managers are examining whether their clients in Hong Kong have ties to the city's pro-democracy movement, in an attempt to avoid getting caught in the crosshairs of China's new national security law.

Bankers at Credit Suisse Group AG, HSBC Holdings Plc, Julius Baer Gruppe AG and UBS Group AG, among others, are broadening scrutiny under their programs that screen clients for political and government ties and subjecting them to additional diligence requirements, these people said.

The designation, called politically exposed persons, can make it more difficult or altogether prevent people from accessing banking services, depending on what the bank finds about the person's source of wealth or financial transactions.

The checks at some wealth managers have involved combing through comments made by clients and their associates in public and in media, and social media posts in the recent past, these people said. The new law prohibits what Beijing describes broadly as secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces, with up to life in prison for offenders.

The sources said the broadened scrutiny of clients also applied to Hong Kong and Chinese officials who had

The designation, called politically exposed persons, can make it more difficult or altogether prevent people from accessing banking services, depending on what the bank finds about the person's source of wealth or financial transactions.

implemented the law in anticipation of any US sanctions against them.

One banker at a global wealth manager that holds more than \$200 billion in assets said the audit of its clients could go back as far as 2014 in some cases to gauge a client's political stance since Hong Kong's 2014 pro-democracy "umbrella" movement. Protesters at the time used umbrellas to shield themselves from tear gas and pepper spray deployed by police.

Albert Ho, a veteran Hong Kong democrat who runs a law firm and helps organise an annual candlelight vigil to commemorate victims of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, said he feared that people like him may face "difficulties in the times to come."

"There's not much you can do, actu-

ally, unless you cease all your financial and banking activities in Hong Kong," Ho said, adding he had not faced additional scrutiny from his bank as of last week. He declined to disclose the name of his bank.

HSBC declined to comment specifically on the security law or any US move to sanction local officials. In an emailed statement, it said, "We already have a stringent set of policies and rigorous processes in place which we apply globally."

When asked about the scrutiny after it announced its half-year results on Monday, Julius Baer CEO Philipp Rickenbacher also declined to comment, adding the bank would continue to develop its business in Hong Kong.

In an e-mailed statement, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority said the financial hub implements anti-money laundering requirements "based on international standards including with regard to politically exposed persons."

"The relevant international standards and our guidance to the banking industry have not changed," the city's de facto central bank said.

China's foreign ministry, the Liaison Office in Hong Kong and the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office did not respond to requests for comment. — Reuters



ONLY BOTTAS CAN STOP HAMILTON, SAY FERRARI DRIVERS

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton leads the Formula One world championship after three races and Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas already looks like the only man who can deny the Briton a record-equalling seventh title.

That at least is the view of Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc, whose own hopes of building on last year's challenge have melted away.

Hamilton dominated Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix from pole position, with a bonus point for fastest lap, to take a five point lead over Bottas, the winner of the Austrian season-opener.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen is third overall, 30 points off the lead.

Asked whether they could see a scenario where Hamilton might not be champion at the end of the year, Vettel and Leclerc agreed it was unlikely.

"I think (only) if Valtteri



wins the championship," said the German, himself a four-times world champion.

"I think Lewis is obviously the main contender," added Leclerc. "The only one that could probably stop him doing that is Valtteri."

Mercedes, winners of the past six drivers' and constructors' championships, have started 2020 with three wins and three poles and are 66 points clear of closest rivals Red Bull.

Hamilton, fourth in the

HAMILTON DOMINATED SUNDAY'S HUNGARIAN GRAND PRIX FROM POLE POSITION, WITH A BONUS POINT FOR FASTEST LAP, TO TAKE A FIVE POINT LEAD OVER BOTTAS, THE WINNER OF THE AUSTRIAN SEASON-OPENER

opener at the Red Bull Ring, has won two in a row and the next races are at his home Silverstone circuit.

Bottas has a win, a second place and a third — in that order — and blew Sunday's race at the start. The Finn started stronger last season and still ended up far behind his team mate by the end. — Reuters

SPORTS

NICKLAUS SAYS HE WAS ILL WITH COVID-19 EARLIER THIS YEAR

NEW YORK: Jack Nicklaus, the 18-time golf major winner, said on Sunday that he was ill with COVID-19 earlier this year and his wife Barbara had also tested positive for the coronavirus.

At 80 years old, Nicklaus is in the higher risk category for being seriously ill with the disease, which has killed more than 140,000 people in the United States. He said he counted himself lucky to have come through with a relatively mild case.

Speaking during a weather delay in the final round play of the Memorial Tournament that he hosts, Nicklaus said that while he had symptoms of the illness, his wife was asymptomatic. The couple self-isolated at their home in south Florida from March 13 to April 20.

"Barbara was asymptomatic, I had a sore throat and a cough, it didn't last very long," said Nicklaus in an interview with CBS. "We were very, very fortunate, we were lucky."

"Barbara and I are both of the age, both of us 80-years-old, that it's an at risk age," he said. "Our hearts do go out to the people who did lose their lives and their families, we were just a couple of the lucky ones."

Nicklaus said that he had tested positive four times and his wife Barbara three. Both have since tested positive for the coronavirus antibody.

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have advised people not to shake

hands with others during the pandemic, Nicklaus said last week that he hoped to continue the tradition of shaking the winner's hand on the 18th green.

He said on Sunday that he was still willing to shake hands but would leave it up to the winner to decide.

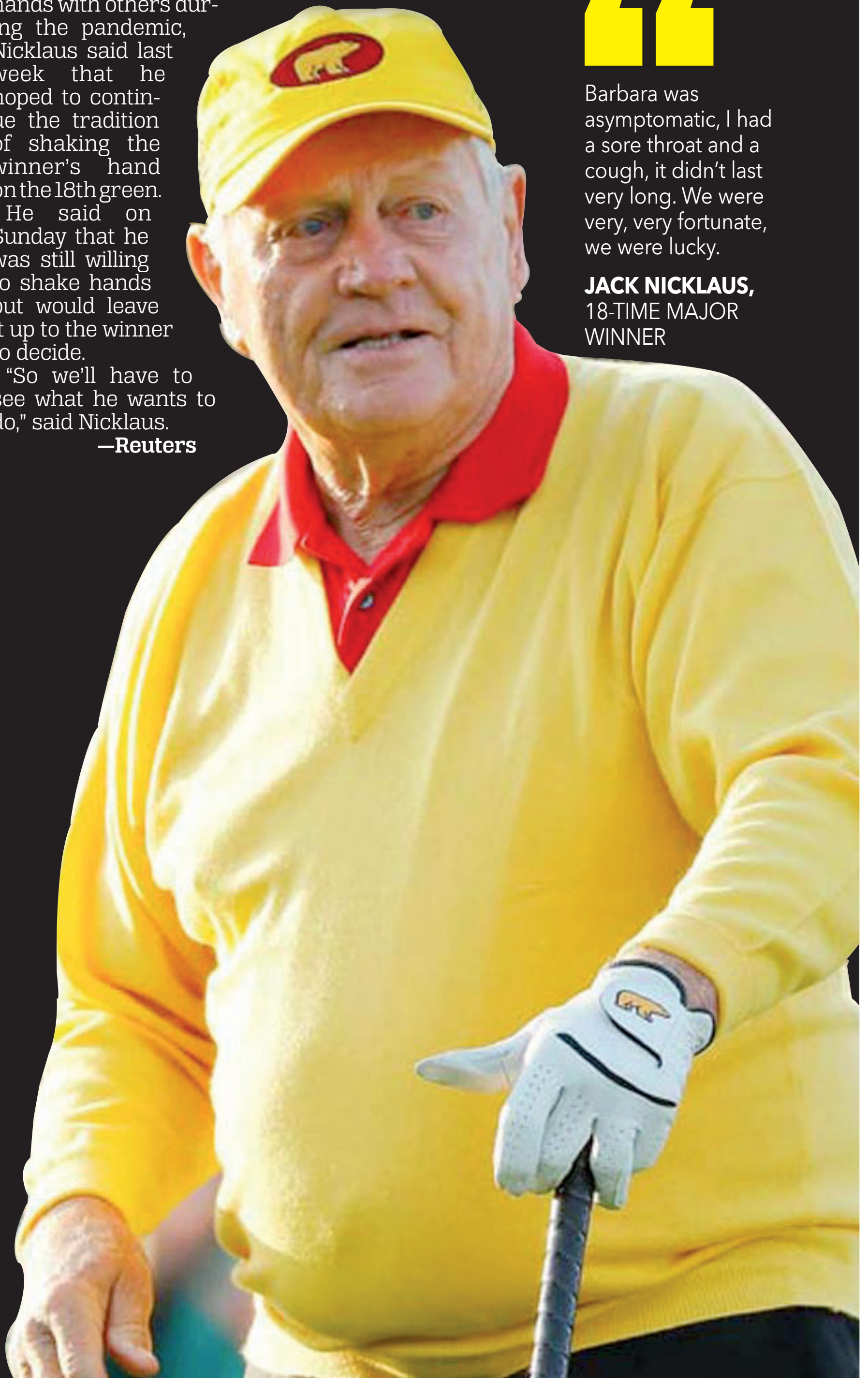
"So we'll have to see what he wants to do," said Nicklaus.

—Reuters

“

Barbara was asymptomatic, I had a sore throat and a cough, it didn't last very long. We were very, very fortunate, we were lucky.

JACK NICKLAUS,
18-TIME MAJOR
WINNER



PENALTY TAKES SHINE OFF ONE OF RAHM'S BEST EVER SHOTS

"It just puts a little bit of an asterisk in it in the sense of I wish I could just keep that birdie because it was one of the greatest shots of my life."

Jon Rahm, Spain



NEW YORK: Jon Rahm's two-shot penalty at the 16th hole of the Memorial Tournament on Sunday had no impact on the final placings but the Spaniard says it took the shine off one of the greatest shots of his career.

Rahm's final round three-over-par 75 was enough for a three-shot victory at Muirfield Village Golf Club ahead of Ryan

Palmer in second, and also saw the Spaniard replace Rory McIlroy at the top of the world rankings.

The highlight of the round was a brilliant chip-in from 30-feet at the 16th, which restored a four-shot cushion over Palmer with two to play, but Rahm was later handed the penalty as video replays showed his

ball had moved while addressing the shot.

"All I can say is as minimal as it was, it moved; I accept it. It doesn't change the outcome of the tournament," said Rahm.

"It just puts a little bit of an asterisk in it in the sense of I wish I could just keep that birdie because it was one of the greatest shots of my life.

"Had I seen it, I would have said something or maybe questioned — not questioned, asked for a rules official and explained what happened and would have gone from there.

"... But the rules of golf are clear, and the ball did move... I accept the penalty. That goes to show that you have to fight until the end." — **Reuters**

SPORTS



He is an amazing professional and works very well. He is a fantastic striker and player and person all this together makes him a really special player for us.

JOSE MOURINHO,
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR
MANAGER



ANDY JALIL

KANE GOALS BOOST SPURS CHANCE FOR EUROPE

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho's chance for his team playing in Europe next season was given a massive lift by Harry Kane's wonderful double strike in their 3-0 win over Leicester.

A delighted Mourinho was full of praise for his striker: "He is an amazing professional and works very well. He is a fantastic striker and player and person all this together makes him a really special player for us."

Kane missed a great part of the season through injury and Mourinho went on to say: "I'm so happy that after such an incredibly difficult injury he is going in a direction where he will end the season perfect. Hopefully at the beginning of next season he is going to be even better."

The defeat may well be a blow for the Foxes chances for Champions League next season and they may have to settle for Europa League. Speaking about his coach, Kane said: "It was hard for him to come in here (joining only last November) and put his stamp on things. But we have been able to do that in the last three wins."

It took six minutes for Spurs to take the lead, with an element of luck. Son Heung-Min's firm shot on target took a deflection to wrong-foot goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel.

But there was nothing fortuitous about the second goal. Giovani Lo Celso led an attack and passed to Lucas Moura who played in Kane for a slotted left-footed shot into the bottom far corner in the 37th minute.

Meanwhile, the Foxes had missed two chances when Jamie Vardy's shot at goal was blocked first by Toby Alderweireld and then by Ben Davies. Soon after that Spurs' keeper Hugo Lloris had to dive full-stretch to deny an effort from Ayoze Perez.

Just three minutes after Spur's second goal, Kane slammed in his second of the match and his 23rd of the season. He cut inside defender Ryan Bennett to drive a curling shot that had power and finesse, beating Schmeichel, to finish inside the far post. By half-time the game seemed over there was no coming back for Leicester.

Their coach, Brendan Rodgers said: "Our target before the season started was to finish in the top six and over the course of a 38-game season we still have the opportunity to end it higher. If we don't make it, of course there will be bitter disappointment, but there will also be gratification in terms of what players have given this season." He added: "But I'm not going to be negative about the players because it felt strange to be going in 3-0 down at half-time after the way we had



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF SPORTS AFFAIRS
TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Sports Affairs, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
Re-Tender 7/2020	CONSTRUCTION	MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING SERVICES TO SEEB SPORTS STADIUM (INCLUDING SPORTS HALL AT SEEB SPORTS CLUB) FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY 2021 TO 31st DECEMBER 2022	25/-	EXCELLENT
Re-Tender 8/2020	CONSTRUCTION	MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING SERVICES TO AL AMAL SPORTS CLUB FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY 2021 TO 31st DECEMBER 2022	25/-	EXCELLENT
Re-Tender 9/2020	CONSTRUCTION	MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING SERVICES TO IBRI SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING SPORTS CENTRE AT DANK) FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY 2021 TO 31st DECEMBER 2022	25/-	EXCELLENT
Re-Tender 10/2020	CONSTRUCTION	MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING SERVICES TO KHASAB SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING SPORTS CENTRE AT LIMA) FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY 2021 TO 31st DECEMBER 2022	25/-	EXCELLENT
Re-Tender 11/2020	CONSTRUCTION	MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING SERVICES TO SALALAH SPORTS COMPLEX (INCLUDING TAAQH SPORTS CENTRE) FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY 2021 TO 31st DECEMBER 2022	25/-	EXCELLENT

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 31/07/2020.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 9:00am 24/08/2020.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF SPORTS AFFAIRS

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

FEATURES

OYSTERS: POLARIZING GIFT FROM THE SEA

Oysters are packed with high-quality protein, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants but despite the many health benefits, they are polarizing when it comes to their flavour and texture. Still, they remain to be the most soft-after among all molluscs... **page 20**

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Oysters: Polarising gift from the sea

RAY PETERSEN

Nothing polarizes the taste buds quite like seafood, and although fish is seafood, food from the sea, I am thinking today more about the hunter/gatherer type marine offerings such as oysters, cockles, abalones, and sea urchins.

Oysters either live in the seabed or attach themselves to rocks, wharves and even buoys. They are filter feeders, which means that they draw in seawater, straining, or filtering, the plankton, algae, and nutrients. This ultra-healthy diet is probably responsible for the rich, iron influenced flavours you either adore or abhor, love, or hate.

The oyster is probably the most sought after of all molluscs, and Chesapeake Bay in the USA is the largest producer of oysters worldwide, although Chile, Japan, Australia, China, and France also have significant oyster beds. However, the 'crème-de-la-crème,' of the global oyster harvest is harvested from the port of Bluff, the Foveaux Strait at the foot of New Zealand's South Island, and one of the most unpredictable straits in the world, with wild weather, unpredictable currents, and frequent shipwrecks.

Still expensive today, during the 1970s London restaurateurs would vie for the privilege of the first to have those Bluff oysters, which have only a short season, on their menu, and charge sixty to a hundred pounds for just six oysters, raw, in the shell. Most often eaten raw, and when consumed directly from the shell they have an earthy, salty, iron taste, and are usually laid and savoured on the tongue for a time before being eaten on the back teeth to maximize the flavour experience.

The smaller Pacific, Eastern and Sydney rock oysters grow very easily and are among those that attach themselves to rocks as can be found on the Oman coast. They are small but do have a wonderful taste to them, and though there are varying Islamic interpretations as to whether those of the faith may consume oysters, this should not prevent their farming, which could prove profitable.

Finally though, in praise of the oyster it can be eaten raw, is delectable in a soup, while these are some famed dishes; Oyster Rockefeller, cooked in the shell with pernod, spinach, butter

and parmesan; Wood-smoked oysters; Broiled Pacific oysters with a garlic gratin or parsley butter; or an oyster ceviche, while the people of Bluff swear by their Beer Battered Bluff oysters!

As I remarked earlier, you either love or hate them, and Ernest Hemingway was an aficionado who famously wrote in 'A Moveable Feast,' "As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans," and that readers, says it all.



FEATURES

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Movie magic as Paris turns the Seine into open-air cinema



WHILE THE CINEMA drive-in may have gotten a boost as lockdowns gradually come to an end amid the COVID-19 outbreak, in Paris film fans can now munch on their popcorn watching a movie from a boat on the river Seine.

As part of Paris Plages, the yearly transformation of sections of the Seine

into man-made beaches, moviegoers on Saturday were able to board 38 electric boats for a free showing of the 2018 French comedy “Le Grand Bain”.

“I really enjoy open-air cinema. It marks the beginning of the summer, and even if we already are in mid-July, for me it marks the beginning of the

Parisian summer adventures,” said 25-year-old Eloise Blomme.

“I really enjoy the idea of the boats - associating the Seine with a movie on water, I didn’t want to miss this.”

Each boat can seat up to six people who know each other. Organisers hope to hold similar showings dur-

ing the six-week Paris Plages festivities. Others watch from deck chairs as the screen floats over the Seine.

Cinemas have reopened in France, but occupancy levels remain very low. While the virus has been under control with fatalities and the number of people in intensive care falling, daily cases have increased ahead of the summer holiday season

The disease has killed more than 30,000 people in France.

The artificial beaches on the banks of the Seine in central Paris and the Bassin de la Villette, a man-made lake in the northeast of the city, have been a roaring success since they were launched by Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoe in 2002.

As well as sand and views of central Paris’ architecture, Paris Plage offers sporting opportunities such as fencing, giant table-football, and open-air gyms looking out over the Seine, although this year the tighter health restrictions have limited some of the activities.—Reuters

FEATURES



Syria pistachio farmers return to orchards after years of war

PRUNING SCISSORS in hand, Syrian pistachio farmer Fadi al-Mahmoud inspected his orchard, hoping for his first harvest after years of war, as nearby army de-miners swept the ground for buried explosives.

"I will be fine as long as my orchard is fine," said the 40-year-old, who returned to his village of Maan in the north of battle-scarred Hama province only months ago, after years of displacement.

The region, long a centre of Syria's famed pistachio production, was controlled for years by jihadists and rebels, but it fell to President Bashar al-Assad's government forces early this year.

After the violence subsided,

many farmers like Mahmoud returned, hoping this season would mark the revival of what was once a leading industry, its produce beloved across the Middle East.

"The pistachio tree is the lung that allows the villages of the Hama countryside to breathe," Mahmoud told AFP during a break from pruning the trees with shears and a small saw.

Parting the green leaves, he examined the pistachios, looking for the purple hue on their greenish cream-coloured outer casing that indicates they are ready to be picked.

Syria was once a top exporter of the green nut that is widely used in sweets and sprinkled on ice cream across the Middle East.

The country produced up to 80,000 tonnes a year before the start of the conflict in 2011, mostly for export to Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Europe.

In 2013, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Syria was still the world's fourth largest pistachio producer after Iran, the United States and Turkey.

DEATH IN THE SOIL

But years of bitter fighting blocked access to Syria's best pistachio regions in Hama, Aleppo and Idlib provinces, leading production to plunge by more than half during the war, according to the agriculture ministry.

Of more than 70,000 hectares (170,000 acres) of farm land allotted for pistachio growing in the northwest, a quarter has been damaged by war, said Hassan Ibrahim, director of the ministry's pistachio department.

Mahmoud said that on his farm, "some tree branches had withered, and there were trenches and landmines scattered all around".

"I hope I can start to make up for the losses during the war," he said.

He explained that pistachio orchards "require a lot of care".

"They must be ploughed four times a year and sprayed with pesticides twice annually or more."

Although the battles have died down, danger still lurks in the soil in the form of anti-personnel mines and other unexploded ordnance left behind by rebels and jihadists.

The authorities "have sent teams to sweep the area," Ibrahim told AFP.

Outside the village, where the skeleton of a charred vehicle sits in an arid field, Syrian army de-miners swept the rust-brown earth with metal detectors for remnants of war.

A loud blast echoed across the land as they detonated a landmine.

Another local pistachio farmer, Ibrahim Ibrahim, recalled harvests before the war.—**AFP**