



HM’S DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH HAILED

MUSCAT: The US think tank Atlantic Council commended the developmental approach of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, as well as Oman’s permanent keenness to enhance regional and international relations. This came in a recent report published by Atlantic Council on His Majesty the Sultan’s foreign policy and economic initiatives said that “HM Haitham’s... leadership of Oman’s latest economic reforms indicate a similar penchant for pragmatic evolution and regional peace”.

The report hailed Oman’s commitment to steady progress and political neutrality, “underpinned by generous domestic infrastructure and human capital investments which drove growth and maintained stability”.

Oman has been deftly cultivating important relationships outside the GCC - particularly with China, India and Europe, covering cooperation in the fields of energy supplies and technological investments, which helped advance economic rejuvenation in the Sultanate.

TURN TO P3

ROP TO IMPOSE FINES FOR DELAY IN VISA RENEWAL

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has started imposing fines for the delay in renewal of visas and resident cards from July 15.

The fines will be, however, not applicable to driving licences, the ROP replied to a query by the Observer.

The ROP has added that the renewal of resident card can be done only by visiting the police service centres and not online.

Expatriate employees and their family members, however, are not required to visit the Directorate-General of Passport and Civil Status to renew their resident card.

As the fingerprints are already stored in the system, the PRO of the organisations can finalise the documentation of resident cards for expatriates, ROP said earlier.

At the same time, the ROP has opened service centres in Muscat in Al Khoud, Al Amerat, Mabela and Qurayat police stations, apart from new ones at Athaiba, Al Hamra Police Station in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah and Marmul in Dhofar Governorate.

AVOID FAMILY VISITS TO CURB COVID-19

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: In addition to gatherings that have taken the lion's share in COVID-19 infections and deaths in the Sultanate, family visits have also been blamed for the spike in the number of cases.

According to epidemiological investigation, people continue to make visits to each other paving for increase in the cases.

“There has been noticeable increase in the number of deaths and infections as a result of increasing close contacts with infected cases and visits to each other,” the Supreme Committee said quoting the epidemiological investigation.

While expressing concern over the spike in the number of cases, the committee, which is

89

PEOPLE WERE ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL ON WEDNESDAY, TAKING THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN HOSPITALS TO 530

dealing with the pandemic, said that over 70 per cent of infected cases in the country are Omanis compared to expatriates.

The cases have doubled in the recent weeks due to many reasons including social gatherings, family visits to infected persons and holding of events.

A total of 89 people were admitted to the hospital on Wednesday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 530, including 139 in the Intensive Care Unit.

At the same time, the Ministry of Health announced that the total number of COVID-19 cases reached 61,247 with 1,679 people, including 1,313 Omanis and 366 residents, reporting positive on Wednesday.

A total of 281 people succumbed to the virus with deaths of eight more during the last 24 hours.

After initially limiting the spread of the virus with lockdowns in many parts of the country, the Supreme Committee allowed reopening of almost all businesses with the exception to a few like barber shops, hairdressing salons etc.

Oman’s envoy to Netherlands presents credentials to King

THE HAGUE: King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands received at the Royal Noordeinde Palace in The Hague Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his wishes of good health, happiness and long life to the king and the friendly people of the Netherlands further progress and prosperity.

King Willem-Alexander asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and appreciation to His Majesty, wishing the ambassador success in his duty. The King expressed his admiration for the Sultanate for its role in supporting dialogue and



rapprochement between disputing parties.

The ambassador expressed his happiness for being honoured to present his credentials to

the king thanking him for his noble feelings towards the Sultanate and affirming the keenness of His Majesty’s government to enhance the distinctive

relations between the two friendly nations and boost constructive cooperation in all fields to serve the joint interests of both nations. — **ONA**

1,679 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 8 DEATHS

SALALAH: The Ministry of Health (MoH) has announced that eight people died of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking the total death toll in Oman to 281.

The MoH also announced 1,679 new cases of COVID-19 in the Sultanate, including 1,313 Omanis and 366 residents, which brought the total number of positive cases to 61, 247.

According to the ministry, a total of 4, 613 people were tested in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of tests in Oman to 253, 444. The MoH also reported that

1,051 new patients recovered from COVID-19 during the past 24 hours, taking the total recoveries from the disease to 39, 038.

A total of 89 people were admitted to the hospital on Wednesday, taking the number of people in hospitals to 530, including 139 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

The ministry has called upon everyone to take individual and social responsibility and comply with precautionary measures, especially wearing masks following social distance.

Advertisement for Sale of Movable by E-Auction 2020

The Ministry of Social Development expresses its desire to sell workshop’s equipment, iron & aluminum scrapes, various electronics, computers and used furniture by electronic auction. Take note that the bidding will be online through www.safqa.om from 21 to 23 July 2020 for a period of 3 consecutive days as per the following:

- Those interested in the auction has to register and subscribe in www.safqa.om.
- The subscriber has to pay an insurance fee amounted to RO 300/- to be paid via the website which will be confiscated if the successful bidder has won the auction and would not pay the value of the purchased items within the period specified for payment.
- The successful bidder is committed to pay the value of the commodity by electronic transfer within a period of days in maximum after the auction ends. A -3%-brokerage fee is added to the commodity’s amount.
- The successful bidder is committed to move the items placed upon them and pay their amount in full within 3 working days after the auction ends. Else, the Ministry will not be held responsible for lose, damage or defect incurred to them.

The items offered for sale can be inspected on 19 & 20 July 2020 at the Store’s yard affiliated to the Ministry of Social Development at the Directorate General of People with Disability Affairs in Al Khoud from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.

For further details and co-ordination, you may call the Stores Department during working hours on 24542360 or communicate through www.safqa.om.

Note:

- The items are sold as is where is.
- The Ministry of Social Development retains the right to cancel or postpone the sale without expressing justifications.

www.mosd.gov.om

Malaysia repatriates 113

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Malaysia in Muscat facilitated the repatriation of 113 Malaysians from the Sultanate on Wednesday.

The Malindo Air flight carried Malaysians with the end of the employment contract, urgent medical cases, family members, pregnant women, and those faced with urgent family matters. The flight is scheduled to arrive on Thursday morning.

"We are thankful to the authorities of the Sultanate of Oman for their support in sending the second Malaysian repatriation flight from the Sultanate of Oman.



The first flight left on May 17," said Muhammad Azmi Abdullah Sukiang, Charge d'affaires at the Embassy of Malaysia in Oman.

He expressed gratitude to the Omani Government for extending all possible support for the repatriation flight.

There are almost 600 Malaysians registered with the Embassy in the Sultanate.

HM's developmental approach hailed

FROM PAGE 1

The report pointed out that "Oman's strategic position as a logistics hub is both a cornerstone of Vision 2040 and an attractive asset for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure mega-plan."

It referred to Oman-China cooperation towards the signing of a \$10.7-billion deal to construct an industrial park in the Duqm Special Economic Zone designated by the Omani government. It said that the project is an indication of China's commitment to the Sultanate as a gateway to the Arabia Peninsula.

The report said that United States has noticed Oman's role as a regional facilitator, its strategic location is a valuable background for military cooperation.

— ONA

23 foreign students with Oman visa return

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: As many as 23 expatriate students holding Oman residency who got stuck in other countries where they study came back to Oman in the past few days.

Their return was secured through approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) with details of residence status, and letter from the sponsor, according to Time Travel Agencies that brought the students, mainly from the US, Canada and Europe.

"We brought in 23 expatriate

students who were studying abroad through a close liaison with the MoFA Oman and the Sultanate's Embassy in Washington," Ejaz Kazi, General Manager, Easy Travels, Muscat, said, adding that the next flight carrying students would be from the UK.

Individuals, along with tour operators, are securing approvals from the MoFA, showing the case details and necessary document copies.

"My daughter is currently studying medicine in Georgia. Due to the COVID-19 situation, her classes were suspended

for three months, and she had been stranded in her hostel. We managed to bring her back to Oman after necessary procedures," said an expatriate mother.

Her daughter's visa was due for renewal in May, and she was supposed to travel to Oman for renewal.

"This was her first year of study, and she is very new to Georgia. Under the pandemic situation, we were worried about our daughter being alone there. I thank the Omani authorities, the MoFA," she said.

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FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020
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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS



Be Careful, Be Responsible
BLINDING, COVID-19

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#Living_with_COVID19

OMAN

COVID-19 impact debated at VNR Lab

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT: At the UN webinar Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) LAB: High-Level Political Forum 2020 held on Wednesday had the theme ‘Developing a child-sensitive and child-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) VNR’.

The VNR was attended by 200 participants, and Oman was represented by HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Chair of Children First Association, Ambassador Dr Mohammed al Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations, and Maitha al Issai, Head of Childhood Programmes, Ministry of Social Development.

The objective of the lab was to clearly demonstrate the elements of child-sensitive and inclusive VNR, share promising practices and approaches from regionally diverse range of member states and experts, in



addition to highlight linkages between children's rights, protection from violence and effective systems of social protection and most importantly equip member states and partners with tools to bring child rights, data and voices into VNR.

The focus was on the importance of listening to children's viewpoints. For Oman, in place is the Omani Child Law and another key factor is the young population of the Sultanate. Oman discussed how important it is for countries to incorporate the voices, needs and protection of children and adolescents in the VNRs while sharing the

best practices and lessons learnt.

The key point for children in the SDG is an end of violence against children by 2030. In this lab, however, one of the most important and common topics all the countries addressed, being the year 2020, was the impact of COVID-19 on children.

Speakers highlighted the commitments and most importantly actions that need to be adopted when SDGs was introduced five years ago. Health system, access to water, sanitation and hygiene for all and education that is relevant to the needs of the 21st century and ensuring it is accessible to all children, protection of children from violence as well as addressing not just physical health but mental health needs as well are all needed to achieve the SDGs by working together — the governments, civil societies, businesses, children and young people.

They also pointed out that the COVID-19 tragedy has taught that our individual actions matter and that is why it is important to work collectively to put into place the SDGs in the next 10 years.

LOST PASSPORT

SAIDAT MUSA KAYAGA has lost UGANDAN PASSPORT No. B1623535. Finder please handover to ROP.



RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR CHEVROLET SILVERADO AND GMC SIERRA



Date of Recall: 16/07/2020

Campaign Type: Safety

Recall Segment: Brakes

Product Description: Chevrolet Silverado 2019 / GMC Sierra 2019

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2019	Chevrolet	Silverado	1GCPY9ED0KZ100198 to 1GCPY9ED7KZ413300 1GCRW9ED8KZ100593 to 1GCRW9ED4KZ399614 1GCRY9ED0KZ257917 to 1GCRY9EF7KZ266339 1GCUY9ED0KZ242991 to 1GCUY9ELXKZ401345 3GCNW9EF7KG192988 to 3GCNW9EF7KG275031 3GCNY9EF0KG100291 to 3GCNY9EF1KG283300 3GCPY9EH5KG180259 to 3GCPY9ED5KG208137 3GCUY9EL6KG192637 to 3GCUY9EL5KG202137	51
2019	GMC	Sierra	1GTP99EK6KZ100587 to 1GTP99ED4KZ406561 1GTR89EK1KZ100590 1GTR99EL9KZ100584 to 1GTR99ED8KZ365084 1GTU99ED8KZ100188 to 1GTU99EL5KZ404506 3GTN89EF3KG194960 to 3GTN89EF5KG220426 3GTN99EFXKG100313 to 3GTN99EF4KG282929 3GTP99EL1KG180258 3GTU99EL6KG180257 to 3GTU99ED8KG202610	136

DESCRIPTION:
These vehicles a software error can, in rare cases, disable the vehicle's electronic stability control (ESC) and antilock brake system (ABS) systems for a single ignition cycle. If this specific error occurs, the vehicle's diagnostics will not illuminate the vehicle's ESC and ABS telltale lamps.

PROCEDURE:
Dealers are to reprogram the electronic brake control module.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Customers of above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC for Chevrolet and may please call Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for GMC.

CONTACT DETAILS:
Toll free number for OTE 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am - 1.00pm and 2.00pm - 5.30pm.
Toll free number for MARH 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am - 1.00pm and 4.00pm - 6.30pm.

UK police make second arrest in Omani student's murder

VINOD NAIR

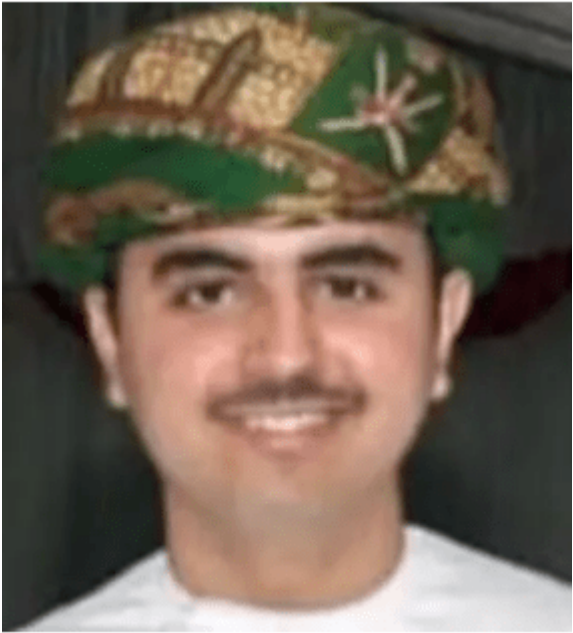
MUSCAT: A man has been charged with the murder of Omani student Mohammed al Araiimi who died after being stabbed in Knightsbridge in December 2019, the UK Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

Arseboon Dilbaro, 22, was charged on Tuesday, (July 14) with murder, GBH with intent, attempted robbery, and threatening a person with a blade/sharply pointed article in a public place, the police said.

He was to appear in custody at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Wednesday, July 15.

Dilbaro was arrested shortly after 1 pm on Tuesday after arriving at Heathrow Airport on a flight from Egypt.

A second man, Badir Rahim Alnazi, 24, of no fixed address, was charged on Thursday (January 9) with the murder of 20-year-old Mohammed,



attempted robbery, and possession of a bladed article.

He appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court and was remanded in custody to appear at the Old Bailey. The next appearance date is awaited.

Mohammed al Araiimi, 20, died following an incident on December 5, 2019.

A second man, aged 20, a friend of Mohammed's, who also had suffered injuries, was taken to hospital for treatment. He has since been discharged.

OMAN-INDIA TRADE TOUCHED RO 1 BN LAST YEAR

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT: The volume of trade between Oman and India reached RO 1 billion or (\$3.42 billion) in 2019, of which the total imports from India to the Sultanate amounted to RO 445 million, while Omani exports during the same year amounted to about RO 725 million.

The volume of Indian investments registered in the Sultanate until 2019 reached around RO 267 million, said Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), at a webinar on Wednesday.

The trade relations have also contributed to the development of cooperation, partnership and building relations between the busi-

ness sectors of the two friendly countries, said OCCI chairman.

He added, "According to statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the Sultanate's GDP increased to about RO 30.5 billion by the end of 2018. This is the highest level since the decline in oil prices in 2014, thus, the Sultanate's GDP increased by 12 per cent compared to 2017."

Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate, said that the COVID-19 pandemic has proved from the measures taken to limit its spread that there are opportunities to enhance trade exchange. India has taken measures to advance the economy by building trade partnerships and

also trying to rely on itself at the same time. "This does not mean that it does business on its own and it has been cooperating extensively with trade partners, indicating that the Indian economy will grow and continue to expand, offering opportunities for Omani businesses."

The ambassador said that there are several sectors in which India and Oman work jointly, especially in Suhar and Salalah. The key sectors are mining, healthcare and food security, among others. Pankaj Khimji, chairman of the Omani side at the Omani-Indian Joint Business Council, made a visual presentation on the changes brought about by the COVID-19 and low oil prices, as well as opportunities arising from the challenges.



ROP PARTICIPATES IN ARAB ANTI-PIRACY MEETING

MUSCAT: Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Coast Guard Police Command, took part in a meeting of the specialised committees of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers held via video conference on Wednesday.

The meeting discussed the Arab comprehensive strategy project for combating maritime piracy. — ONA





Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries
Tenders Notice

The Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries Announces the following Tenders :-

Tender no.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
328/2020-26	Supply of Dry Feed for Livestock research stations	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 2/8/2020	Thursday 20/8/2020
329/2020-27	Supply of concentrated feed for livestock research stations	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 2/8/2020	Thursday 20/8/2020
330/2020-28	Provide worker to implement the immunization	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 2/8/2020	Thursday 20/8/2020
338/2020-29	Maintenance works in Marine and Fisheries Science Center Building , Al Bustan	25/-	Second	Monday 3/8/2020	Sunday 23/8/2020
341/2020-30	Cleaning and service of fishing ports in the governorates of South and North Batinah	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 2/8/2020	Monday 24/8/2020

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

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries

To whom it may concern

Fulmar Trading & Contracting, under Commercial Registration No. 1108341 brings your attention that **Mr. Waqar Nawaz Sulehria, Pakistan National, Civil No. 97600876** is no longer representing the company as of **11/6/2020** and the company shall bear no responsibility against dealings made under its name with others and no accountability shall be held by it after the aforesaid date. Those who have claims preceding the aforementioned date shall whatsapp 92601001 within a month from publishing this advertisement after which post-date claims shall not be considered.





Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
Pre-Tenders Qualifications Announcement

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announces the following tenders:

Tender No.	Subject	Non-Refundable Fee in OMR.	Last Date of Collection the Tenders	Last Date of Submission
489/2020	Lease Contract for Arthroscopy System	50	30/08/2020	31/08/2020
492/2020	Lease Contract For Nucleic ACID Amplification Testing Machine	50	30/08/2020	31/08/2020

Tender Conditions:

- The companies who are registered in Tender Board shall collect the documents during office hours from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm from the Procurement Department/ Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- The Tenderers shall submit with the form of tender a certified cheque or tender bond from a locally registered bank in the sum of (1%) of the tender value and valid for 90 days from the date of tender submission and addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Sultan Qaboos University.
- The tender quotations shall be sealed and addressed to Procurement Director; Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate or mention the name of the company or its logo on the envelop.
- The quotations are subject to the Tender General Terms& Conditions for the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- Sultan Qaboos University Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

Procurement Directorate
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
AL Khoudh / Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24144680/ 24144688, Fax: 24413156
E-mail: supplies@squ.edu.om
www.squh.edu.om



Investment value in IoT factory amounts to RO 4m: Tanfeeth

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

MUSCAT: The investment value in the Internet of Things (IoT) Devices Factory project amounted to RO 4 million, the Implementation and Follow-up Support Unit Tanfeeth said.

It said the factory aims to manufacture indigenous smart meters for water, electricity, and gas, and expand their use in the country.

Construction work has begun on what is billed as the first plant in the Sultanate dedicated to the manufacturing of smart meters based on IoT technology. It will be located in Rusayl Industrial City, Muscat.

The project is being spearheaded by the National Energy Center (NEC), an Omani company jointly owned by public sector organisations and private investors, and well-regarded as a pioneer in the introduction of smart metering services in the Sultanate.

According to Tanfeeth, in the first phase, the plant will provide 30 job opportunities



for the Omanis by 2021.

Efforts to build domestic smart-meter manufacturing capacity in the Sultanate come against a backdrop of an intensifying drive by various stakeholder ministries and institutions in support of IoT-based connectivity. Besides enabling connected devices to communicate via the Internet, IoT is also seen important in the realisation of Smart Cities

in the Sultanate, heralding the roll-out of smart transportation and driverless mobility, and enhancing energy efficiency, among other objectives envisioned by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Moreover, the importance of such a project relies on reducing the cost of using conventional meters, providing accurate data on consumption, monitoring,

reducing and detecting leakages, and adjusting user consumption.

In the Sultanate, a fledgling effort by some water and gas distribution utilities to introduce smart meters is rapidly gaining traction. Smart meters not only provide timely and accurate meter readings, but they also generate warnings in the event of any leakages or outages. More importantly, they enable customers to monitor their consumption patterns and thereby keep a tab on their monthly bills.

IoT technologies have evolved dramatically over the past few years, and the number of connected IoT devices has increased from smart kitchen appliances, virtual home aids, security systems, facility management platforms, to wearable devices and others.

In this regard, Gartner, a market research firm, expects that the number of devices connected via the Internet of Things have reached 14.2 billion devices in 2019 and will reach 25 billion devices by 2021.

Rafo pilots complete aviation medicine training courses



MUSCAT: The Aviation Medicine Training Centre at the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) completed two basic aviation medicine courses for pilots. The graduation was held under the auspices of Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Obaidani, Commander of (Rafo), on Wednesday. The graduation

programme included a briefing about the courses and distribution of certificates to the graduating pilots. Rafo Aviation Medicine Training Centre is the first training institution of its kind in the Sultanate specialising in aerospace medicine training and enhancing aviation safety through preparing the

trainees for optimal handling of various types of medical emergencies that might be experienced by pilots and aircrew during flights. With sophisticated equipment and modern facilities operated by national cadres, the centre offers advanced aviation medicine training for air crew.

Workshop for TRC programme members

MUSCAT: The Omani Cultural Heritage Strategic Research Programme of The Research Council (TRC) conducted a virtual two-day training workshop for members of the research teams and their directors, and members of the administrative teams of the numerous projects that the programme is currently working on from various agencies and institutions.

The workshop, presented by Dr Aisha al Darmkiya, director of the research programme, and Dr Nasser al Saqri, Assistant Director of the programme, aimed to clarify the importance of collecting Omani cultural heritage materials in the field, the environment for collecting cultural heritage materials, methods of collecting materials in the field, as well as demonstrating how to prepare a suitable research plan for the collected materials, in addition to managing and organising the work.

— ONA

Virus-hit North Macedonia votes as EU talks loom

SKOPJE: North Macedonia went to the polls on Wednesday in a tight parliamentary election whose winners will face a surging coronavirus outbreak and the start of talks to join the European Union.

It is the first parliamentary election since the Balkan country added “North” to its name early last year, ending a decades-old dispute with Greece.

The accord ushered the country into Nato and opened the door to the EU. But critics are still bitter about conceding a part of their national identity to appease Greece, which claims exclusive rights to the name Macedonia for its own neighbouring region.

The election pits an architect of the accord, Social Democrats leader and former prime minister Zoran Zaev, against the right-wing critics of VMRO-DPMNE.

Neither is forecast to win an outright majority, setting the stage for complex coalition talks after the results, which are not expected until early Thursday.

The coronavirus pandemic has added another layer of uncertainty as authorities try to slow an infection spike



North Macedonians voted in an election that will decide the party to take on country's coronavirus outbreak and EU accession talks. — AFP

without inflicting further damage on an economy already heading into recession.

With more than 380 deaths among a population of around two million, the country has the highest per capita fatality rate in the Western Balkans, according to official data.

In the capital Skopje, voters wore mandatory masks as they lined up at polling stations, which opened at 05:00 GMT and closed at 1900 GMT.

The country has been run by caretaker cabinet since Zaev stepped down six months ago in embarrassment following the EU's initial failure to start accession talks in exchange for the name-change and other reforms.

The bloc's members later gave the greenlight in March, though Skopje is still waiting for a start date.

The snap poll was scheduled for April until the pandemic

forced a postponement, extending the term of the shared technical government which struggled to manage the coronavirus crisis.

“There should be a government that will take responsibility. Whoever wins should work on stabilisation, to provide good conditions to young people,” Zoran Lazarevski, a retired 66-year-old said after casting his vote.

— AFP

IN BRIEF

Security scare as Macron accosted by protesters

PARIS: The security arrangements of French President Emmanuel Macron were brought into question on Wednesday after he was confronted by protesters during a walk in a public garden in Paris. A group of anti-government “gilets jaunes” (yellow vests) demonstrators hurled abuse as he and his wife Brigitte walked with bodyguards in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris on Tuesday. In a video posted on the Gilets Jaunes Info page on Facebook, what appears to be a few dozen protesters boo and shout “Macron demission!” (Macron resign) as they surround the presidential party, many filming on their phones.

Senegal resumes international flights after 4 months

DAKAR: Senegal resumed international flights on Wednesday, four months after severing air links because of the coronavirus pandemic. An Air Algérie flight arrived at Dakar's international airport at midnight Tuesday and six other flights were scheduled to depart and arrive throughout the day, according to the Ministry of Air Transport. Passengers departing for the West African country are required to present proof from an approved laboratory that they have tested negative for coronavirus within the previous seven days. The certificate has to come from a lab in the country where the trip originated.

Queen to knight 100-year-old health fundraiser

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II plans to knight a 100-year-old former soldier who raised millions of pounds to help Britain's health service through the novel coronavirus pandemic, Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday. The Queen will honour ex-army captain Tom Moore, affectionately known as Captain Tom, in a ceremony on Friday. “Her Majesty the Queen will confer the Honour of Knighthood on Captain Sir Thomas Moore,” the palace said. The ceremony is scheduled to take place at Windsor Castle outside London, where the 94-year-old queen has stayed since April amid the pandemic. — Agencies



Medical staff man a coronavirus testing station in Picton, some 80 km south-west of Sydney on Wednesday. — AFP

Millions face new virus curbs, but hope rises for vaccine

HONG KONG: Millions of people faced new coronavirus restrictions on Wednesday as infections surge, but in one sign of hope, an American firm said it would soon start final-stage human trials for a possible vaccine.

Countries around the world re-imposed lockdowns and curbs to contain new outbreaks, as global cases surged past 13.2 million with more than 576,000 deaths.

Parts of the Asia-Pacific region, which had been somewhat successful in fighting the pandemic, provided fresh evidence of the deadly threat still posed by the virus.

Hong Kong's bars, gyms and beauty salons closed again on Wednesday and a ban on gatherings with more than four people came into force as the city battled a fresh outbreak after months of impressive success against the virus.

Most of the city's residents voluntarily adopted face masks as a barrier against the virus when it was first detected in mainland China late last year, but the Hong Kong government now requires passengers on public transport to wear

them or risk a \$650 fine.

That came after the Indian state of Bihar, with a population of around 125 million, announced a 15-day virus lockdown starting from Thursday. India's IT hub Bangalore has already started a week-long lockdown.

Authorities in Australia, meanwhile, pleaded on Wednesday with the public to heed social distancing guidelines, with roughly five million people in Melbourne in lockdown since last week in a bid to contain a new outbreak.

That request came just days after a group was fined Aus\$26,000 (\$18,200) when their house party was exposed by an unusually large order of KFC.

"A particular concern for us is the ongoing parties and gatherings — people playing poker, people holding parties," said Rick Nugent, acting assistant commissioner of Victoria state.

Such pleas from experts and authorities have been ignored and even mocked in many of the world's most populous parts, including the United States — the worst-hit nation in the world. — AFP

COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD RE-IMPOSED LOCKDOWNS AND CURBS TO CONTAIN NEW OUTBREAKS, AS GLOBAL CASES SURGED PAST 13.2 MILLION WITH MORE THAN 576,000 DEATHS

IN BRIEF

HEALTH EXPERTS PUT TOKYO ON HIGHEST VIRUS ALERT

TOKYO: Health experts put Tokyo on the highest alert for coronavirus infections on Wednesday, alarmed by a recent spike in cases to record levels, while the governor of the Japanese capital said the situation was "rather severe". The resurgence of the virus in Tokyo could add to the growing pressure on policymakers to shore up the world's No 3 economy, which analysts say is set to shrink at its fastest pace in decades this fiscal year due to the pandemic. "It is a fact that the number of patients is going up quite a bit and exceeding peaks," said Norio Ohmagari, director of the National Center for Global Health and Medicine Hospital, noting that the infection rate in Tokyo was at stage "red" — the highest of four levels in the metropolis' system.

PHILIPPINE POLICE DEPLOYED TO ENFORCE QUARANTINE

MANILA: Philippine police are being deployed to ensure people who test positive for the coronavirus and cannot self-isolate at home are taken to state-run quarantine centres, sparking warnings on Wednesday of potential rights violations. The move comes as authorities step up efforts to slow the rapid spread of the disease by increasing testing, reimposing lockdowns, and building dozens of quarantine centres to isolate patients with mild symptoms. To clamp down on local transmission, police are accompanying health workers to the homes of people who have tested positive and taking them to government facilities if their homes are considered inadequate for self-isolation or if they live with "vulnerable" people, officials said.

INDIAN COMPANY BEGINS HUMAN TRIALS FOR VACCINE

NEW DELHI: Indian pharmaceutical company Zydus said on Wednesday that it had begun clinical trials on humans for a potential COVID-19 vaccine. The first dosage of its plasmid DNA vaccine ZyCoV-D was administered to a human test subject on Wednesday, the company said in a statement. The vaccine elicited a strong immune response during trials in animal species including mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits. No safety concerns were observed. "In rabbits, up to three times the intended human dose was found to be safe, well tolerated and immunogenic," Zydus said. — Agencies



As polls shift against Trump, Biden makes play for red Texas

Democrat Joe Biden aired a 2020 campaign ad in Texas for the first time on Tuesday, capitalising on favourable polling to launch a challenge against President Donald Trump on what has long been considered conservative turf.

The 60-second spot is part of a broader ad buy across multiple states including Arizona and Florida, battlegrounds that Trump won in 2016 but are now in play as his support wavers amid frustration over how he is handling the coronavirus pandemic. An average of recent polling shows Biden and Trump in a dead heat in Texas, which has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976, and which Republicans count on in their efforts to win the White House.

A recent Dallas Morning News poll that had Biden up by five points against Trump showed that fully nine per cent of Republicans would vote for Biden if the general election were held today.

That would be a game-changer for the election; Trump losing Texas, the nation's second largest state, would almost certainly deny him a second term. Amid an overwhelming surge in new cases, Texas Governor Greg Abbott has reversed the state's reopening.

"The rise in case numbers is causing fear and apprehension," Biden says in the ad, which is clearly aimed at soothing concerns about a crisis that has left more 3.3 million infected nationwide and about 136,000 Americans dead.

"If you're sick, if you're struggling ... I will not abandon you," he says over images of masked emergency responders, parents and children, and of loved ones communicating via webcast or through glass.

"We'll fight this together, and together we'll emerge from this stronger than we were before we began."

The ad notably makes no mention or features no image of Trump, but it serves as a clear indictment of the president's handling of the crisis. — AFP

Balancing economy and the health



Ali Al Matani
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The Supreme Committee which was formed for tackling the implications of the coronavirus or COVID-19 is making extraordinary efforts at different levels to deal with the situation caused by this pandemic in Oman. It is taking all measures to protect the society, and is deciding steps essential in the current health and economic situation.

The fact is that the Supreme Committee is doing a formidable job for which it was entrusted. Whatever it is doing is the responsibility of all, and not merely of the committee. It cannot contain the situation without cooperation from all sides.

We should not look into the current situation as per the interpretation of some people who fail to take into account accurate statistical index. There is actually a wrong assessment of the statistics released by the authorities concerned.

It shows that the toll was not more than 1.2 per cent, and the ratio of recovery is 63 per cent. There are 500 cases of admission in hospitals, in addition to 130 cases in intensive care units. This is the data of July 11.

These are the indications that the situation here is far better than in many countries. The common view is that the situation is under control.

However, this is achieved because of the cooperation from all who have followed the guidelines and instructions given by the Supreme Committee.

The Supreme Committee has dealt with all in a very respectable and civilised manner. Its guidelines and instructions were very precise, clear and unambiguous.

It never used the language of intimidation and threat. It warned people not to repeat the mistakes as it was in the interest of every individual and the society. It was never meant for causing difficulties for anyone. The punishment is only for those who refuse to accept the guidelines and instructions.

Prevention of coronavirus lies in the social and physical distancing. These are the things nobody is unaware of.

These are the priorities. On these issues, proper cooperation is required to ensure protection of individuals, and the society from coronavirus.

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

BUSINESS

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Slump ends era of double-digit power demand growth in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT: Government funding support for Oman's electricity sector is estimated at RO 605.2 million in 2020, representing a marginal increase over the actual subsidy of RO 601.9 million paid to the sector in 2019.

The modest uptick bucks a trend in sharply increasing subsidy allocations to the power sector witnessed in past years. In 2018, it rose a hefty 23 per cent to reach RO 536.29 million, up from RO 456 million 2017.

It comes as demand growth for electricity, which has long averaged annual double-digit growth over the past decade, is moving into negative territory possibly for the first time in the history of the sector – the result of an economic downturn aggravated by the pandemic.

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

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



PANDEMIC IMPACTS:

Power demand subsidy for electricity sector projected at RO 605million in 2020

my," the regulator stated in its newly published Annual Report 2019. Oman's power and water sectors have long benefited from government funding support. "Subsidies are an integral factor of the electricity sector and are implemented through Article 18 of the Sector Law wherein the Ministry of Finance (MoF) provides subsidies based on annual calculations by the Authority to licensed suppliers. These calculations are divided into three subsidy categories: Main Interconnected System Subsidy (required by Muscat Electricity Distribution Company MEDC, Majan Electricity and Mazoon Electricity); Dhofar Power System Subsidy (required by

Dhofar Power), and Rural Systems Subsidy (required by Rural Areas Electricity Company RAEC). For the purposes of these calculations, a subsidy is defined as the difference between the economic cost of supply (including financing costs) and Permitted Tariff (and other) revenue," the regulator explained. Subsidy for the Main Interconnected System, covering the northern half of Oman, is estimated at RO 451 million for 2020, up from RO 431.1 actually paid out in 2019. For Dhofar Power System, catering to parts of Dhofar Governorate, subsidy is projected to climb to around RO 50 million in 2020, up from RO 43.8 million in 2019. The Rural Systems, an

important beneficiary of government subsidy, is expected to see its allocation decrease to RO 104.2 million for 2020, down from RO 117 million in 2019. The decline is mainly attributable to the pandemic, with power consumption expected to be five per cent lower than 2019. Significantly, the Main Interconnected System (MIS) witnessed no growth in supply in 2019 over 2018 trends, which was lower than anticipated when compared to recent annual average growth rates of approximately 5 per cent (3-year average for 2015-2018), according to the Authority. "The general economic slowdown in 2019 and, to some extent, the impact of Cost Reflective Tariffs for large customers in 2017, are likely causes of this stunted growth," the regulator added.

13,000 insurance policies issued electronically during pandemic

MUSCAT: More than 13,000 insurance policies were issued via electronic channels and portals since the start of the pandemic, according to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), underlining efforts by the industry to offer its services to the general public in line with COVID-19 safety precautions stipulated by the Supreme Committee.

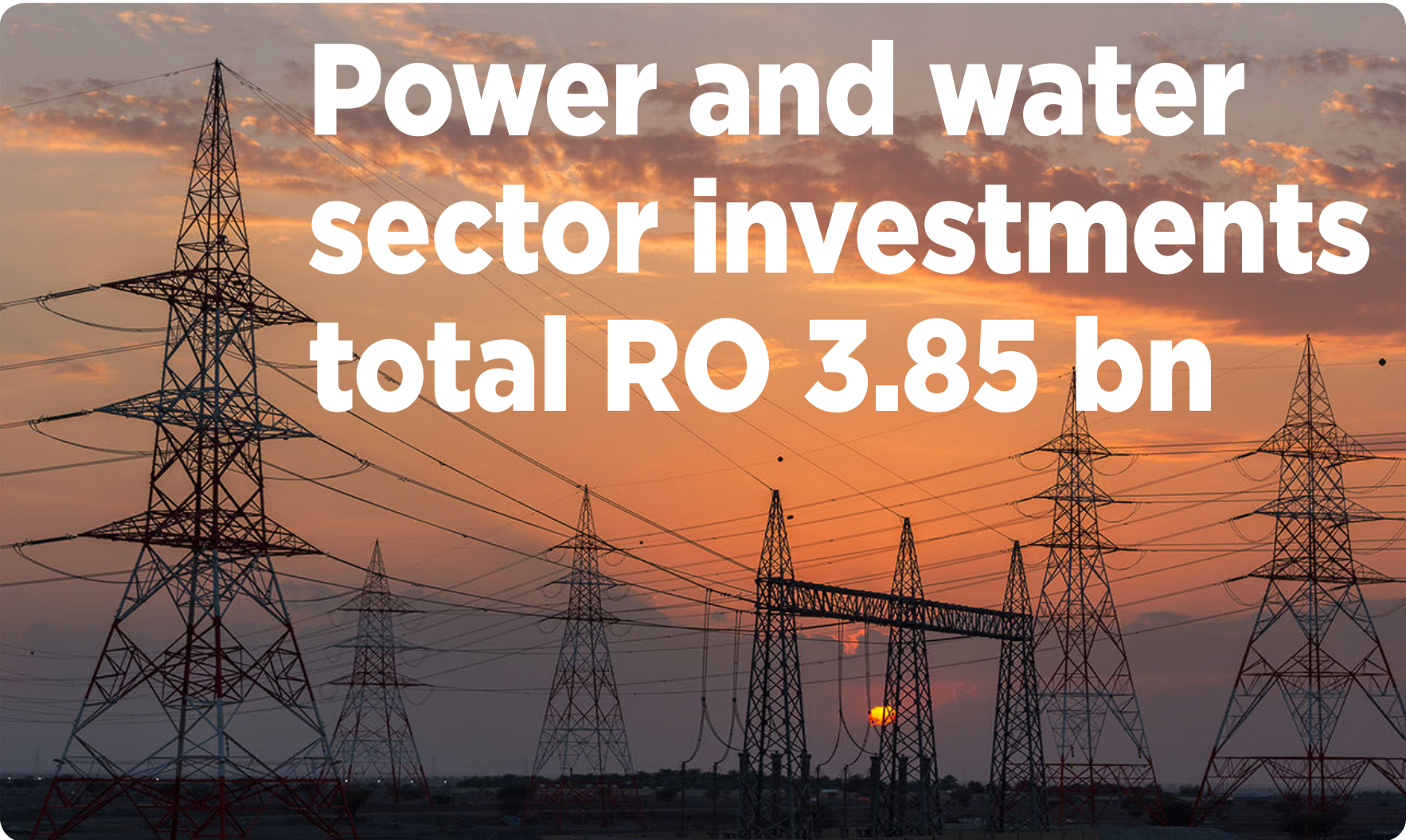
Ahmed Ali al Maamari, CMA Vice President (Insurance), expressed his appreciation to insurance companies and quickly embracing electronic platforms for the delivery of services to their customers and thereby ensuring business continuity despite the pandemic.

He welcomed efforts by insurers to adopt the required technologies to connect with their customers, enhancing their infrastructure and developing in-house systems, and supporting the training of young Omanis to provide these services electronically.

Giving details, he said that 61.9 per cent of the policies were issued through call centres, 12.9 per cent through company websites, and 1.56 per cent through the electronic applications provided by five companies. A further 23.5 per cent were issued through various electronic windows.

At the outset of the outbreak, the CMA had issued a circular instructing insurance companies and brokers to activate e-services to make it possible for their customers to avail themselves of insurance services without the need to be present physically or for paper-based documentation.

The Authority ordered the closure of all customer counters and suspension of all manual services in the premises of the companies, and called for services – including registration of claims, underwriting and so on – to be processed electronically.



MUSCAT: Nama Group organised a virtual roundtable discussion with economists focusing on its integrated strategy to increase efficiency and ensure the provision of safe and sustainable electricity to all customers across the Sultanate in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Eng Omar Khalfan al Wahaibi (**pictured**), Nama Group CEO, presented Nama Group's major achievements and operational and financial performance in 2019. Nama Group continued to invest in the expansion and development of the transmission and distributions' networks in 2019 and total Capital Expenditure reached to RO 285 million.

Total assets also increased by 56.3 per cent and reached to RO 6.9 billion in 2019. The increase in the total assets is primarily driven by increase in Right of Use of assets in Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP).

On the transmission and distribution network, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) catered to a peak load of 6540 MW in the Main Interconnected System and 594 MW in Dhofar network in 2019. A total of 35,451,889 MWh energy was delivered to the customers. The transmission losses in the year was 1.53 per cent. With achieving 99.9991 per cent in transmission network

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:
NAMA GROUP HOSTS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FOR ECONOMISTS.



reliability in 2019, interruption of supply to customers was very less and the average interruption to customers was 4.7 minutes in the year.

The Interconnection Project between the Main Interconnected System (MIS), and the Dhofar Power System (DPS) will improve the efficiency and integration of Oman's main systems, in addition to PDO network. The project will improve the dispatch economy by utilizing diverse sources of generation (such as renewables and efficient plants). The project is divided into two phases; Phase 1 until Duqm and Mahout: will include new 400kV grid stations at Suwaihat, Mahout and Duqm area with associated lines for phase 1. It is expected to be completed in 2023. Phase 2 aims to connect phase 1 to the south and will include construction of Barik grid station and the connection of it to Nahadah and

Suwaihat 400kV grid stations, expected to be completed in 2025.

Furthermore, Al Wahaibi highlighted the performance and efficiency of the generation sector. Since 2005, through the introduction of progressively more efficient generation plants, OPWP has achieved a 47 per cent reduction in the gas required per unit of electricity production, contributing to savings of more than RO 270 million. In 2020, a further improvement is expected in gas utilization and efficiency. This is primarily driven by Ibri and Sohar III IPPs coming on stream, and Sohar IV IWP starting operations in August 2019. After 2021, with the introduction of solar and wind plants, OPWP expects that the gas requirements for electricity generation will fall further.

As part of OPWP strategy to achieve 2040 vision, OPWP plans to procure around 1,600 MW of RE IPPs in the MIS by 2025. More than 13 per cent of the generation process will be provided by renewable energy sources, primarily solar energy. By 2026, the renewables share will reach 14.5 per cent. Total direct investment in power and water generation sector is estimated at RO 3.850 billion.

BUSINESS

PDO's flagship Rabab Harweel Integrated Project completed

MUSCAT: UK-based international oilfield engineering services contractor Petrofac has announced the successful completion of the Rabab Harweel Integrated Project (RHIP), one of the largest ventures of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

"Our Rabab Harweel Integrated Project (RHIP) team has received the completion certificate from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) acknowledging successful delivery of the project," said Petrofac in a statement.

Located in the Harweel cluster of fields, deep in the South Oman desert, the huge new development encompasses gathering systems, sour gas processing facilities, injection systems, and all the



associated flowlines and pipelines.

Petrofac provided engineering, procurement, construction management and commissioning support services worth around \$1.25 billion. It was the contractor's first PDO project where a new commercial contract model (EPCm) was introduced. This meant it being delivered on a reimburs-

able basis, where incentives were linked to the achievement of specific milestones and a shared benefit on procurement savings.

"In-Country Value (ICV) was a critical consideration throughout the project. We exceeded all our targets for Omanisation. Also, more than a third of the project's total procure-

ment value was sourced in the Sultanate," the company stated.

Khalid Abdul Kadar, Project Manager, has recently been leading the close out of the project, in parallel with his responsibilities on the Yibal Khuff project for PDO: "Achieving this milestone marks the successful completion of a six-year project journey. RHIP has also helped us to build on our existing long term partnership with PDO, which is now continued through Yibal Khuff and our other PDO Framework projects. This success is down to all the people involved and a One Team approach, particularly as we have had to overcome the recent COVID-19 related oil and gas industry challenges," he said.

Port of Salalah to invest in digitisation initiatives

MUSCAT: Port of Salalah hosted a webinar on digitisation in partnership with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Dhofar.

The webinar featured speakers from various leading entities in the logistics sector in Oman as well as a panel discussion including Dr Sultan al Hinai, Technology and Innovation Director of ASYAD; Lt Colonel Mansoor al Rahbi, Project Manager of Bayan system of Royal Oman Police Customs; Mark Hardiman, Chief Executive Officer of Port of Salalah; Engineer Hussain Al Bat'hari, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Dhofar; and N S Ramanathan, Acting Commercial Director of Salalah Free Zone. The webinar was attended by various customer segments including importers, exporters, logistics and supply chain companies.



Eng Hussain al Bat'hari,
OCCI Dhofar Chairman

Opening the webinar, Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah highlighted that one of the key pillars of the next phase of growth plans for Port of Salalah included facilitating growth in the gateway volume in Dhofar region thereby creating increased economic activity and adding value to the economy.

He added that this can only be achieved by unified efforts of all key stakeholders, which has already been set in motion and this conference is a testament to this.



Mark Hardiman,
CEO - Port of Salalah

Hardiman added that 'Ease of doing Business' and improved customer experience are high on the agenda for Port of Salalah in this phase of which digitisation is a part of.

"Digitisation plays an increasingly vital role in supply chain efficiency and reliability, while simplifying ways of doing business. Port of Salalah is on a journey to enhance its overall customer experience through various initiatives including development of a customer portal," he said.

Furthermore, Sunil

Joseph, Chief Commercial Officer of Port of Salalah presented the specific initiatives and plans in improving customer experience and Ease of doing business.

He outlined the digitisation project of Port of Salalah which included amongst others a customer portal enabling digital transactions like ordering of wide range of services and online payments. The customer portal is expected to launch before the end of 2020, he said.

Engineer Hussain al Bat'hari, Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and Industries Dhofar, commented on the cooperation and joint efforts by Port of Salalah as a great step in supporting the traders in Oman and particularly in the commercial development of Dhofar region. The Chamber welcomes such partnerships as it would add value to the Omani economy, he noted.



Bank Muscat posts net profit of RO 69.56m

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has announced its preliminary unaudited results for the six months ended June 30, 2020. The bank posted a net profit of RO 69.56 million for the period compared to RO 93.65 million reported during the same period in 2019, a decrease of 25.7 per cent. Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 160.53 million for the six months period ended June 30, 2020 compared to RO 159.02 million for the same period in 2019, an increase of 0.9 per cent. Non-interest income was RO 64.69 million as compared to RO 75.05 million for the same period in 2019, a decrease of 13.8 per cent mainly due to subdued business conditions due to COVID-19 related lockdowns in Q2 2020 and waiver of certain fees due to regulatory measures. Operating expenses for the six months period ended June 30, 2020 was RO 94.03 million as com-

pared to RO 97.11 million for the same period in 2019, a decrease of 3.2 per cent. Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the six months period in 2020 was RO 48.19 million as against RO 24.99 million for the same period in 2019. The increase is mainly on account of precautionary and collective provisions being made on a forward looking basis given the emerging stress in the economic and business conditions as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and the continued pressure on oil prices. Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables decreased by 1.2 per cent to RO 8,965 million as against RO 9,078 million as at June 30, 2019. The reduction in the loan book is mainly attributable to prepayment of certain large corporate exposures in the last quarter of 2019. Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 7.3 per cent to RO 8,562 million as against RO 7,978 million as at June 30, 2019.

Top award for Lulu Group chairman

MUSCAT: Abu Dhabi Sustainability Group (ADSG) announced the winners of the Abu Dhabi Sustainable BusinessLeadership Awards 2020. Organised by the ADSG, and launched in 2015, the Awards are the region's only independent annual awards for sustainability achieve-



ments. They are designed to showcase sustainability best practices and to raise awareness about the benefits of sustainable management practices for organisations. The winners this year are: Abu Dhabi Ports — Best Energy Management Initiative Award; Abu Dhabi Nation Exhibitions Company (ADNEC) — Best Sustainability Initiative Award; Yusuff Ali M A (pictured), Chairman, Lulu Group — Sustainability Leader of the Year Award; Shayma al Mazrouei, of ADNOC Gas Processing — Sustainability Manager of the Year Award; Borouge-SCI — Best Sustainability Communication Programme Award; Dolphin Energy — Best Sustainability Report Award. The winners are selected based on outstanding initiatives and examples of a strong commitment to sustainability, by embracing innovative approaches and showing a clear understanding of the strategic importance of sustainability in their organisation.

BANKDHOFAR'S CUSTOMER-CENTRIC BRANCHES

MUSCAT: Stemming from its belief that customers' satisfaction is the core of its success, BankDhofar serves customers through its wide network of branches spanning across the Sultanate. The branches, which can be accessed through prime locations, offer a host of services and products for various segments. On the branches, Talib bin Mohammed al Hajri (pictured), Acting AGM & Head of Distribution

Network noted: "At BankDhofar, we prioritise customers' convenient when it comes to their banking experience. We believe our relationship with customers should start before even a decision is made on a bank. BankDhofar's strategy and philosophy is based on the concept of "Our Guest Comes First" through practicing trans-



parency, innovation and service excellence in providing the best customer experience for our guests." With its prime locations, BankDhofar exerts its efforts to enhance the overall customer experience and journey starting from the revamp of several branches across the Sultanate. The top-notch revamped

branches are designed to provide convenient banking experience to the customers, reflecting the traditional Omani culture of hospitality. Placing customer experience as the heart of the design the BankDhofar branches affords customer with privacy, hospitality and a personalized experience. As part of these efforts, BankDhofar was the first bank in the Sultanate to launch Drive-Thru Banking Services.



Demonstrators symbolically floated a black balloon in the shape of the Apple logo in Dublin, in this file photo.

Blow for EU as Apple wins fight against \$15 billion tax order

LUXEMBOURG: Apple scored a major win on Wednesday as Europe's second-highest court rejected an EU order for the iPhone maker to pay 13 billion euros (\$15 billion) in Irish back taxes, dealing a blow to the bloc's attempts to crack down on sweetheart tax deals.

In its order four years ago, the European Commission said Apple benefited from illegal state aid via two Irish tax rulings that artificially reduced its tax burden for over two decades — to as low as 0.005 per cent in 2014.

"The General Court annuls the contested decision because the Commission did not succeed in showing to the requisite legal standard that there was an advantage for the purposes of Article 107(1) TFEU," judges said, referring to EU competition rules.

They said the EU executive was wrong to say Apple's two Irish subsidiaries — Apple Sales



A woman looks at the screen of her mobile phone in front of an Apple logo outside its store in Shanghai, China.
— Reuters

THE DEFEAT COULD WEAKEN OR DELAY PENDING CASES AGAINST IKEA'S AND NIKE'S DEALS WITH THE NETHERLANDS, AS WELL AS HUHTAMAKI'S AGREEMENT WITH LUXEMBOURG.

International (ASI) and Apple Operations Europe (AOE) — had been granted a selective economic advantage and, by extension, state aid.

Apple welcomed the ruling, saying the case was not about how much tax it pays, but where it is required to pay it.

Ireland — which had

appealed against the Commission's decision alongside Apple — said it had always been clear it had not given special treatment to the US company.

The defeat for European Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager could weaken or delay pending cases

against Ikea's and Nike's deals with the Netherlands, as well as Huhtamaki's agreement with Luxembourg.

Vestager, who has made the tax crackdown a centerpiece of her time in office, saw the same court last year overturn her demand for Starbucks to pay up to 30 million euros in Dutch back taxes. In another case, the court also threw out her ruling against a Belgian tax scheme for 39 multinationals.

Vestager said she would study the court's judgment and reflect on possible next steps. The Commission can appeal on points of law to the EU Court of Justice, Europe's top court.

The Commission, which was ordered by the court to pay Apple's and Ireland's legal costs, could still salvage its case, said Dimitrios Kyriazis, Head of Law Faculty at the New College of Humanities in London.

— Reuters

SPORTS



‘Tokyo Olympics at risk if coronavirus mutates, gets stronger’

TOKYO: The Tokyo Olympics may have to be postponed again if the novel coronavirus mutates into a stronger pathogen, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a prominent Japanese government adviser, said on Wednesday.

However, a recent spike in cases in Tokyo is due to a failure to stick to guidelines to prevent contagion, he said.

A physician who served as a science adviser to the Japanese cabinet from 2006-2008, Kurokawa also headed an independent probe into the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. Currently, he is advising the government on the coronavirus pandemic.

“I think the virus is mutating all the time ... it may be a much stronger virus that triggers a second wave,” Kurokawa told Reuters. “The Olympics may be postponed again, but I can’t predict.”

“I think it’s small incidents happening in Tokyo ... new cases are because people are not abiding by recommendations,” Kurokawa said of the current spike in infections. “But if there are some mutations, that is a completely different story. That could happen anywhere in the world.”



Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike told Reuters on Monday the Olympics, originally scheduled to start this month but put off to 2021 because of the pandemic, must go ahead next year as a symbol of world unity in overcoming coronavirus.

The spike in infections in Tokyo, which accounts for more than one-third of Japan’s more than 23,000 cases, has prompted a backlash against a planned campaign to promote domestic tourism. Kurokawa said authorities were trying to balance priorities.

“I think one of the concerns of this pandemic is how to prevent the spreading out of

“I think the virus is mutating all the time ... it may be a much stronger virus that triggers a second wave. The Olympics may be postponed again, but I can’t predict.”

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Japanese government adviser

this corona infection. The other side of this issue is ... how to promote the economy. Many people are losing their jobs,” he said.

He added that he thought the government was “carefully balancing” the two priorities.

Kurokawa was appointed last month to head a new panel to examine how to use artificial intelligence to fight the spread of the virus. His appointment to the four-person group including a Nobel Prize winning geneticist came after Economics Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura abruptly announced he would dissolve a panel of scientific experts and remake it with new members.

The move came amid reports of clashes between the health experts and politicians.

Kurokawa said that whatever experts recommended based on science, political leaders had to make the final policy call.

“The scientific community’s recommendations have to be fact-based, science-based recommendations, but politicians have to make the decisions,” he said. “Scientists give advice, but decision-making is not by scientists.”

— Reuters

SPORTS

Al Rawas announces candidacy for another term of OVA chairmanship



Muscat: Shaikh Badar bin Ali al Rawas announced his candidacy for the chairmanship post of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) for another term (2020 – 2024). The existing OVA chairman affirmed that the continuity development of Oman volleyball and taking it into the top level is the top priority for him in the next term.

“Boosting the volleyball sports in the Sultanate in direct coordination with the domestic clubs and the talented training centres is another essential part to be focused further in the next period,” he said.

Al Rawas, who is completing his eighth year in the current position, stated that he is in full readiness to proceed further with all the set plans and strategies that are drawn by the current board directors towards achievement of the desired results. Indoor and beach volleyball teams developed

very well during the last period and had reached the top international level. We are very proud with the achievements of the national volleyball teams and that is a result of the hard working from all the players, technical staff and the board members' support,” OVA chairman said.

The OVA chairman pointed out that the Sultanate has secured many significant membership positions at the regional, Arabian and Asian levels during the last few years. “Obviously, this reflects on the association’s reputation among the other federations in the region and it supported the board members to add value in volleyball’s related activities and events,” he added.

The existing chairman of OVA appreciated the contributions from all the stakeholders including the Ministry of Sports Affairs, Oman Olympic Committee,



“Boosting the volleyball sports in the Sultanate in direct coordination with the domestic clubs and the talented training centers is another essential part to be focused further in the next period”

Shaikh Badar bin Ali al Rawas
Oman Volleyball Association (OVA)
Chairman

clubs and the partners from government and private sector.

“The cooperation resulted in better outcome for Oman’s volleyball as we had registered different accomplishments at indoor and beach volleyball teams at different categories. Our target was to advance the national teams into the top positions in different events and participations,” the OVA chief explained.

“Developing of the domestic volleyball personnel including the coaches, umpires and players will be another significant item to focus. We are very proud of our referees’ performance as they succeeded to manage and officiate the domestic and abroad matches with successful note. Also, the local coaches in different positions are impressed with their teams at domestic competitions and external participation,” he concluded.



Even in retirement Eaton looks to push performance boundaries

TOKYO: Two-time Olympic decathlon gold medallist Ashton Eaton has turned to science and engineering for his post-athletic career but the American former world record holder told Reuters he has found a way to straddle both worlds.

Eaton, who retired from athletics in 2017, is studying for a second degree in mechanical engineering and is also part of a project at US tech firm Intel aimed at helping athletes squeeze every last bit of performance out of their bodies.

While the company lists his job as: 'Product Development Engineer', Eaton's LinkedIn bio simply reads: "2x Olympic gold medallist, decathlon. Now pursuing engineering."

"Ultimately (I) decided I wanted to learn the fundamentals of science and engineering," Eaton said in a recent interview.

"(Intel) asked if I would like



(INTEL) ASKED IF I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE PROJECT AND I JUST SAW IT AS AN AWESOME OPPORTUNITY TO MIX WHAT I KNEW WITH MY PASSION ABOUT LEARNING ABOUT SCIENCE AND TECH."

ASHTON EATON
TWO-TIME DECATHLON
OLYMPIC GOLD-MEDALIST

to join the project and I just saw it as an awesome opportunity to mix what I knew with my passion about learning about science and tech." The 32-year-old said the project was focused on using technology to show athletes the difference between how they think their body is performing and the actual measurable data.

"If you can bridge the gap

between what it feels like... and what you actually did from a skeleton's perspective, that is a huge leap forward for how people can not only train but start out and learn how to do these things," he added.

"That is what our project is working on; to extract how the skeleton is working and hopefully use that to not only give athletes insight and improve their perform-

ance, but also help fans who are watching sports deepen their understanding of what is going on."

The technology is already being used to help athletes who are having to adjust training schedules ahead of the rearranged Tokyo Olympics, which were supposed to start this month but have been pushed back a year due to the coronavirus pandemic. — **Reuters**

SPORTS

I'VE HAD CAMERAS ON ME SINCE I TURNED PRO, SO IT'S BEEN OVER 20-SOME-ODD YEARS THAT VIRTUALLY ALMOST EVERY ONE OF MY SHOTS THAT I'VE HIT ON THE TOUR HAS BEEN DOCUMENTED. THAT IS SOMETHING THAT I'VE BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO. THAT'S SOMETHING I'VE KNOWN FOR DECADES

TIGER WOODS

15-TIME MAJOR WINNER



NO ROARS AS TIGER MAKES RETURN TO SOUNDS OF SILENCE

NEW YORK: Tiger Woods makes his long-awaited return to competitive golf at the Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio, this week and no golfer will feel the impact of the strange new spectatorless world created by COVID-19 than the 15-time major winner.

For his whole career, Woods, one of sport's most recognisable personalities, has been the focus of the golfing world. He is followed by massive galleries and battalions of reporters, photographers and television cameras wherever he plays.

But when he steps onto the first tee at Muirfield Village Golf Club on Thursday for his first competitive round in five months the only sound

is likely to be chirping birds, with the PGA Tour having banned spectators for all events this season. "I've had cameras on me since I turned pro, so it's been over 20-some-odd years that virtually almost every one of my shots that I've hit on the Tour has been documented," Woods told reporters. "That is something that I've been accustomed to. That's something I've known for decades.

"But this is a different world and one we're going to have to get used to. It's just a silent and different world." Woods last competed on the PGA Tour in mid-February when he laboured through a final-round 77 at the Genesis Invitational where he finished last among players who

made the cut. The 44-year-old reigning Masters champion then skipped a number of events with back issues prior to the PGA Tour's three-month COVID-19 hiatus that began in mid-March and opted to sit out the circuit's first five events since the break.

Woods, who is one win shy of a record 83 PGA Tour victories, did play a May 24 charity match with Phil Mickelson and Super Bowl-winning quarterbacks Tom Brady and Peyton Manning. Saying he was unwilling to risk a return to the Tour until he saw how safety protocols would work, Woods made his decision to play only when he felt comfortable enough to do so. — **Reuters**

FEATURES

ENDURANCE MAN RARING TO GO

For the first time in its history, France 2, the French national television, telecast a TV series of 5 episodes featuring the BikingMan ultra-cycling event for Oman. French TV gave an extremely positive coverage in its episodes from June 8 to 12 which had a whopping audience... **page 20**



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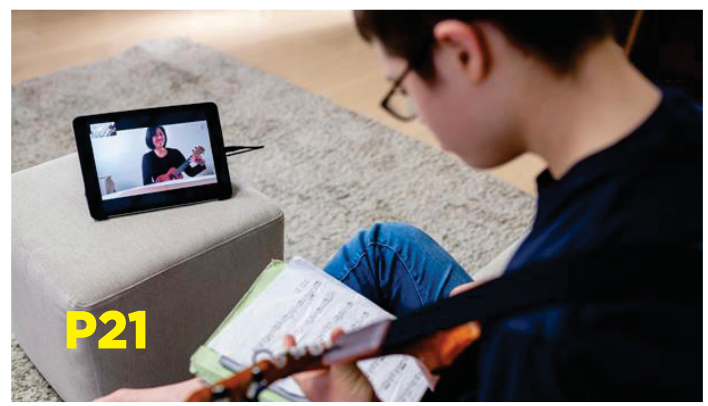
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Endurance man raring to go

LIJU CHERIAN

AXEL Carion is a record breaking French explorer. He specialises in extreme ultra distance cycling and the organisation of ultra-cycling self-supported races.

He also inspires people through talks, stories and articles about his expeditions. At 35 he is energetic and strong built. A few weeks back he was on a 1,000-km recon ride in France which left him physically smashed. Yet he is raring to go.

He is the founder of BikingMan, first unsupported ultra-cycling world championship which brings adventurous people on the most challenging cycling scene on Earth.

Yes, he is the guy behind the adventure BikingMan in Oman, one of the toughest races in the Middle East.

It was only due to his efforts that BikingMan in Oman was held in February 22-27 this year alike in 2019. Due to COVID-19 in March and the subsequent lockdown the French media took up the coverage only later after the lockdown period ended.

The French national television France 2, broadcasted for the first time in its history, a TV series of 5 episodes featuring the BikingMan ultra-cycling event.

French TV gave an extremely positive coverage for Oman and telecast a total of 5 episodes from June 8 to 12 which had a whopping audience.

With more than 22 million viewers in total, the TV series has been acclaimed as a huge success and promoted the stunning areas of the Sultanate which includes Muscat, Jebel Shams climb, Rimal Sharqiyah desert, Sur and the Arabian coast.

Focused on three French people namely the team of Clémence, Jean Jacques Raffi and Jacques Barge, the series showcased an impressive range of landscapes and the numerous challenges of the BikingMan exploration race.

For three years the BikingMan has been selecting Oman as the inaugural stage of the ultra-cycling World Series and hopes to be back again in 2021.

This year, BikingMan Oman was supported by Oman Air, Omantel, Europcar Oman, Jebel Shams resort and Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Muscat.

About the TV coverage, Axel says that it has been the first time in the French television history that BikingMan and ultra-cycling received such a huge coverage and it is an amazing sign for the sport.

Regarding plans for the year, Axel mentions that he still has two BikingMan events for the 2020 calendar. These are in Portugal in September and Corsica in October with around 300 riders signed up.

"I have also several bike expeditions in Europe to promote the BikingMan experience. I sincerely hope that BikingMan Oman 2021 will take place as we have a very high interest from the public on the event," he says confidently.

Rania Khodr, Director, Oman Tourism, France, says it was an excellent event. "The event covers something different and showcased another image of Oman which helps in eco-tourism and I am glad to have this type of coverage which will help promote the Sultanate in a different way."

She further adds it was the best environmental way of promoting tourism, and encouraged Axel to come back to Oman perhaps next year.

"The value of coverage was very high and also millions of people touched by the event made it memorable," she mentions.

All eyes are now on the next BikingMan Oman, the third edition, which will be watched for eagerly, all made possible by Axel.

The event is a 1,000-km single stage ultra-cycling race and the first event of this kind of the Middle-East.

BikingMan Oman has been featured in many international media and is now acclaimed as a top-class endurance event.



FEATURES

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Taqah Beach



Venezuelan music, dance teachers reach kids online amid pandemic



WITH VENEZUELA now three months into a coronavirus quarantine that has kept children locked indoors, music and art teachers and storytellers are for the first time moving their classes online.

The change is an uphill battle in the South American nation, where blackouts are constant and where almost half of households are not connected to the internet, one of the world's slowest.

Artists have taken on the challenge anyway, concerned children are not using their

imagination or developing their talents amid continuing uncertainty over when they will be able to visit concert halls or meet under the shade of trees again.

Though the pandemic has caused a similar shift in many countries, Venezuela's children are at unusual risk due to a dire economic crisis that has exacerbated child malnutrition and weakened access to education.

The United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, has said that as children learn by playing, parents should play with their

kids each day at home.

After preparing a youth dance program that was set to include a performance at a Caracas theater, dance troop Imagiroduanza now teaches virtual classes twice a week to girls and their mothers.

Imagiroduanza director Carmen Perez, 51, had a group of daughters and their mothers drape sheets on their backs and imitate birds as part of an online classes.

The quarantine has forced the group to reinvent itself "so that we didn't become irrele-

vant," Perez said.

Story tellers now film themselves reading children's tales from their balconies and send the videos to families and schools that hire them to keep children motivated during the extended lockdown.

"I had never done anything digital, I did everything outside," said Nury Delgado, 53, of storytelling group The Enchanted Frog that has entertained children with the support of bookstores for more than a decade.

Many now see the online world as being the reality for children in the near future.

Education Minister Aristobulo Isturiz said in a June interview classes could start in October as usual, but if the pandemic worsened, "we have the option of starting in January," leaving kids in their homes for the rest of the year.

With virtual learning, some 40% of children are at risk of missing out entirely on education because their families do not have sufficient connectivity to participate.

Luis Alfredo Sanchez, 33, a trumpet player for the prestigious Simon Bolivar National Orchestra, says the quarantine has shown online lessons are viable even for music.

To pique the interest of kids in taking classes, he filmed a video of himself playing the Star Wars movie theme using different trumpets, yielding 8,000 Instagram views.

He cannot listen to students practice in real time due to a slow internet connection. Instead, he asks them to send WhatsApp voice notes with recordings of the pieces they are practicing, and responds via another voice note with his evaluation.

"Everything stopped" with the quarantine, said Sanchez in an interview. "I decided to help the students, so that at least the music won't stop." — **Reuter**

FEATURES



Afghan women spin new careers by reviving ancient Silk Road crafts

ONCE AN IMPORTANT Silk Road trading hub, the Afghan city of Herat has long been a cultural centre, but decades of war have ravaged its ancient traditional crafts.

Now thousands of women are returning to the ancient practices, seeking to revive the traditions of a city where traders once came to haggle for silk in thick-walled houses and dome-shaped bazaars offering respite from hot summers.

On the outskirts of the ancient city, about 4,000 women work to cultivate silk, from raising silkworms, feeding them and harvesting their cocoons to spinning the yarn by hand - a month-long, labour-intensive process.

Mariam Sheikh, 30, was given a box of 20,000 silkworm eggs by a local aid group last year and has already produced about 40 kgs (88 lb) of silk, which sells at 300 Afghani (\$4) per kg.

"My great-grandfather was a silk maker, so there is pride in picking up his work again," Sheik, who lives in Herat's Zinda Jan district, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Her small village is surrounded by lush, green mulberry trees, planted years ago to feed the growing silkworms.

"Our community respects and encourages the silk trade and besides that, it has helped me gain financial independence," she added.

Once the cocoons are dried, the processing into yarn is traditionally

done by hand, although the women hope to import a machine to help speed up the process.

At the moment there is only one old spinning machine in Herat city, with not enough capacity to process them all.

On the outskirts of the ancient city, about 4,000 women work to cultivate silk, from raising silkworms, feeding them and harvesting their cocoons to spinning the yarn by hand

'PRIDE IN OUR ART'

Women have made huge strides in the conservative country since the Taliban rule of 1996 to 2001, when they were banned from attending school or work and could not even go

outside without a male relative.

Growing numbers of women now complete education and work in previously male bastions, but they still face hurdles.

Four decades of war, from occupation to internal fighting, have destroyed the economy, rendering it among the poorest in the world, with few jobs - especially for young women, who occupy a particularly precarious place.

Many face cultural barriers and hostility not just from conservative family members, but also hardline Islamist groups, for pursuing financial independence and greater equality.

According to World Bank data, just over 20% of Afghan women work, up from about 15% in 2001, when the Taliban fell.

There are fears that a final withdrawal of U.S. troops, the winding down of international engagement and the re-emergence of the Taliban may reverse gains.

"Herat is a traditional province where few women are seen - or even allowed by their families - to work outside," said Mariam Zemoni, one of about 30 women who weave the silk into scarves and fabric.

"That's another reason why weaving silk is perfect for me," said the 23-year-old, who makes at least two scarves a day, selling them for 250 Afghani each. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**