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OMANI VETERAN TAKES UP KILIMANJARO CHALLENGE



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SAMSUNG'S LEE RECEIVES 30-MONTH PRISON TERM IN BRIBERY TRIAL



P18

A TERRACE GARDEN BECOMES A GARDEN OF HOPE



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S KYRGYZ PRESIDENT-ELECT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic on the occasion of him being elected as a new president of his country. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of success to President Japarov in leading the friendly Kyrgyz people towards further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished friendship relations between the two countries further development and growth. — **ONA**

MAJLIS TO HOST HEALTH MINISTER

Majlis AshShura will host the Minister of Health during its two regular sessions which will be held on January 24 and 25. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis AshShura. He added that the Minister of Health's statement will focus on the ministry's achievements over the past four years, the efforts to implement the future visions of the health system as well as the ministry's efforts to combat COVID-19. **DETAILS ON P5**

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Royal Decrees announce military appointments

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 10/2021 appoints a Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence.

Article (1) appoints Dr Mohammed bin Nasser bin Ali al Zaabi as Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence with the rank of minister.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 11/2021 on Military Promotions and Appointments.

Article (1) promotes Rear Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raeesi to the rank of Vice Admiral and appoints him as Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

Article (2) promotes Air Commodore Khamis bin Hammad bin Sultan al Ghafri to the rank of Air Vice Marshal and appoints him as a Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman.

Article (3) promotes Commodore Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi to the rank of Rear Admiral and appoints him as Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman.

Article (4) promotes Air Commodore Eng Saleh bin Yahya bin Masoud al Maskari to the rank of Air Vice Marshal and appoints him as Commandant of the National Defence College.

Article (5) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — **ONA**



National Scientific Research Award winners announced

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced 12 winners of the National Scientific Research Award. The announcement was made at the seventh annual researchers' forum held on Monday under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

DETAILS ON P3

Ban on use of tracking devices

KHALID AL ADAWI
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Environment Authority has issued a decision banning the possession and utilisation of equipment and devices used for wild hunt, tracking of birds and simulation of bird vocalisation except for devices used for organisational and scientific purposes authorised by the Environment Authority.

In its decision No 31/2021, the Environment Authority affirmed that a 1-year licence may be approved by the authority after evaluating the application and specifying the purpose of usage on a case-by-case basis.

The licensee may have the licence extended before its expiry but in case they are unwilling to do so they should hand over the devices to the authority or return them to the country of import.

The licence may be issued against payment of RO 5 for individuals and RO 20 for institutions and commercial companies.

The licensee should comply with the provisions of the Law on Conservation of Environment and Prevention of Pollution and the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation or any other law. A fine between RO 200 and RO 500 will be imposed for using devices without licence or with an expired licence.

Major boost for commercial fisheries

MUSCAT: Al Wusta Fisheries Industries LLC, a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (part of Oman Investment Authority), celebrated on Monday the arrival of its latest addition to its commercial fishing fleet. *Jawharat Al Wusta* was received by officials at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat.

The 99-metre-long, 16-metre wide vessel features an on board factory for processing, freezing and packing fish with a total capacity of 1,600 tonnes. It boasts all of the features and technologies of a modern fishing vessel.

With the addition of the *Jawharat Al Wusta*, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries now has a fleet of three commercial fishing vessels offering a combined capacity of 70,000 tonnes of pelagic fisheries per annum. The induction of the vessels will help spur Oman's fisheries production, drive economic diversification and enhance the competitiveness of Omani fish products in international markets.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the arrival of the new vessel will also open up new employment opportunities for young Omanis who will receive on-the-job training on board the vessels.

He also outlined initiatives adopted by the ministry to support investments in shrimp farming and aquaculture projects, some of which will come into operation this year.

Al Wusta Fisheries Industries will deploy the *Jawharat Al Wusta* on the high seas far beyond traditional fishing waters and in accordance with prescribed norms.

SEE ALSO P13



The 99-metre-long, 16-metre wide vessel features an on board factory for processing, freezing and packing fish with a total capacity of 1,600 tonnes

Mountaineer Nadhira appointed 'Goodwill Ambassador'

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Nadhira al Harthy, the first Arab woman to conquer Mount Ama Dablam (6,812 metres), one of the highest peaks in Nepal, has been appointed Goodwill Ambassador of Nepal.

"We are honoured to congratulate Nadhira al Harthy for her successful

summit to Mount Ama Dablam, one of the highest peaks in Nepal, with the unique title 'Goodwill Ambassador' as a reward to her unswerving dedication in conquering the mountain peak", Sarmila Parajuli, Nepal's Ambassador to the Sultanate, told the *Observer*.

Nadhira challenged the frozen mountain layers

and summited the peak on January 14, 2020, becoming the first Arab woman to climb Mount Ama Dablam. Nadhira had also successfully climbed Mount Everest (Sagarmatha), the highest peak in the world in 2019.

Al Harthy's appointment comes after Nepal's Embassy in the Sultanate made a

recommendation to the Government of Nepal as the Goodwill Ambassador for "Visit Nepal Year 2020."

As Goodwill Ambassador, Nadhira will be promoting tourism between the two countries besides encouraging delivering humanitarian relief, spearheading various public programmes and becoming

instrumental in enhancing mutual understanding between the two friendly nations.

This is the second time that an Omani has been bestowed with the title 'Goodwill Ambassador'. Earlier, Oman's singing sensation Haitham Mohammed Rafi had been the Goodwill Ambassador.





MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs has received a written message from Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister, Ruler of Dubai and Minister of Defence of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), inviting HH Sayyid Shihab to attend the 15th International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) and the Naval Defence and Maritime Security Exhibition (NAVDEX 2021) in February. This came when HH Sayyid Shihab received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa' on Monday Mohammed Sultan al Suwaidi, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the fraternal relations binding the two brotherly countries and discussed issues of common concern. — ONA



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa' on Monday Ayse Sozen Usluer, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Sultanate. The two sides reviewed relations between the two friendly countries and exchanged viewpoints on matters of common interest. — ONA

Sultanate’s ambassador to United Arab Emirates presents credentials

ABU DHABI: Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy, Sultanate’s Ambassador appointed to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), presented here on Monday a copy of his credentials to Khalid Abdullah Belhoul, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MoFAIC) of the UAE. The meeting discussed the distinguished bilateral relations binding the two brotherly countries and means of promoting them to achieve aspirations of the two countries’ brotherly peoples. — ONA



Patient safety top priority in Oman’s health strategy

MUSCAT: The Sultanate participated in the virtual meeting of the World Health Organization 148th session of the Executive Board on Monday with a delegation led by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, and First Deputy of WHO-EB. The nine-day session of the Executive Board focuses on main pillars including one billion more people benefitting from universal coverage, one billion more people better protected from health emergencies, one billion more people enjoying better health and well-being, and more effective and efficient WHO providing better support to countries. The meeting reviews report of the regional committees to the Executive Board and considers the recommendations and comments of the regional committees. In addition, it touches upon the report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board as well as reports relevant to the progress achieved in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and the promotion of mental health. The meeting highlighted health emergencies including



preparedness and response particularly COVID-19 response where updates on activities to combat the pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19) were provided. The board also noted a report on strengthening WHO’s global emergency preparedness and response. Al Saeedi stated that in the context of COVID-19, patient safety was the focus of Oman’s health emergency preparedness and response, through different initiatives to minimise the risk of transmission. He added that having a wide-reaching network of primary healthcare facilities throughout the country proved to be an advantage in terms of preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it facilitated

more streamlined triage and testing, resulting in lower transmission rates. The health minister emphasised that patient safety is a top priority in Oman’s health strategy, since it contributes significantly to the improvement of the overall health of the population, aiming therefore to make sure that patients receive highly safe and quality health services at all healthcare facilities in Oman. The Sultanate’s delegation further included Dr Saeed al Lamki, Director-General of Primary Healthcare, Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General of Diseases Control and Surveillance, and Dr Jumana al Abdawani, Director of International Relations and Organizations. — ONA



ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE
UNDER SUPERVISION OF MINISTRY
OF ENDOWMENTS & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS





THE FIRST ENDOWMENT FOR THE ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE
DEDICATED FOR THE NEEDY AND UNDERPRIVILEGED PEOPLE
THE COLLECTED FUNDS ARE ALLOCATED FOR INSOLVENT FAMILIES AND VARIOUS CHARITIES PROJECTS

ABU HURAIRAH (MAY ALLAH BE PLEASED WITH HIM) REPORTED:
THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (ﷺ) SAID, "WHEN A MAN DIES, HIS DEEDS COME TO AN END EXCEPT FOR THREE THINGS: SADAQAH JARIYAH (CEASELESS CHARITY); A KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS BENEFICIAL, OR A VIRTUOUS DESCENDANT WHO PRAYS FOR HIM (FOR THE DECEASED)."

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Royal decrees announce military promotions, appointments



Dr Mohammed Nasser Ali al Za'abi



Abdullah Khamis al Ra'eesi



Khamis Hammad Sultan al Ghafri



Saif Nasser Mohsen al Rahbi

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Monday issued two Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 10/2021 appoints a Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence.

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Saleh Yahya Mas'oud al Maskari

Air Force of Oman.

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Winners of National Scientific Research award announced



NAWAL AL SAMSAMIYAH
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced 12 winners of the National Scientific Research Award.

The announcement was made at the seventh annual researchers' forum held on Monday under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tariq al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqi-

yah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that the seventh edition of the National Scientific Research Award saw hard competition between researchers from various academic and research institutions with a record 218 scientific papers vied for the awards, a 34.6 per cent increase over the previous edition.

The novel identity of Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid) was launched on the sidelines of the event.

Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary for

Research and Innovation at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that the national scientific research strategy targets to upgrade scientific research and development system through enhancing economy based on knowledge, innovation and research and supporting intellectual capital.

Al Haddabi counted the achievements made by scientific research sector in 2020 including funding 248 research projects as part of a programme for supporting efficiency-based research projects, supporting

and incubating three students' projects as part of a programme that aims to convert graduation projects in the field of the fourth industrial revolution to emerging companies and funding 28 researches as part of a programme allocated to supporting coronavirus researches.

The National Scientific Research and Development Strategy seeks to reinforce the role of scientific research and transformation to the knowledge economy and society with the aim of achieving sustainable development goals in the Sultanate.

Khasab Port receives world's largest wooden dhow

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Khasab Port received on Monday the world's largest wooden dhow, *Obaid*.

The dhow measures 91.47m long and 20.41m wide, which is the length and almost half the width of a standard American football field floating over the Indian Ocean, according to Guinness World Records.

Balancing this huge structure on either its bow or stern vertically would make this dhow stand almost as tall as the Big Ben in London, says GWR. The dhow, which stands at a height of 11.229 metres, and weighs 2,500 tonnes, is built by Obaid

bin Jumaa bin Majid al Falasi.

It has been constructed from material sourced both locally and abroad and will have an estimated load capacity of up to 6,000 tonnes.

HORSEPOWER ENGINES

The ship is built from approximately 1,700 tonnes of wood and 800 tonnes of steel.

The dhow is powered by two 1,850 horsepower engines and will be used to transport cargo from the UAE.

"At a speed of 14 knots, it will be enough for this dhow to operate and achieve its desired ROI. Who knows, you might see this dhow docking at different ports all across the world."





LIFE LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE PANDEMIC

During the lockdowns people remained indoors and developed their hidden skills of cooking, reading, drawing, or even keeping their houses clean

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

[@patkaushal](#)

The world is not going to be the same again even after the COVID-19 subsides. People have to live with digital technologies, which have transformed people's way of life. Businesses have remodelled their functioning, schools and colleges have new concepts of e-learning and the common man is left with no option but to upgrade.

The pandemic brought many difficulties, at the same time forced people to learn important life lessons.

Not only in terms of technology, but the pandemic had a huge impact on social interaction as well. During the peak of the pandemic when people were forced to remain indoors, staying at home emerged as an opportunity for families and friends to connect and re-connect, as COVID-19 set new standards of working, living, eating and even meeting.

While being confined in four walls of houses to maintain the best of social distancing, people explored ways to re-connect globally with their near and dear ones through various Internet platforms.

It taught people to be content with resources while being alone. "In difficult times of social distancing people realised their values and understood themselves in a better way. They realised their strengths and limitations," said Rahima al Balushi, a researcher on social issues.

"People who were fond of randomly moving here and there started loving their homes and many among them developed their hidden skills of cooking, reading, drawing, or even keeping their houses clean. Ultimately it was a forced learning period for everyone," she said.

Rejin Thomas, a senior hotel

executive, had almost forgotten that he belongs to a large family and a larger extended family, in the pre-pandemic humdrum of life.

"Since office had got shifted in my living room and I was trying my level best to maintain social distancing, a thought came in to connect to family and friends who were spread in many parts of the world. I made a list of my extended family with whom I grew up, played, and finally settled in different professions. They eagerly accepted my request to connect as everyone was sailing in the same boat."

The moments of chatting with family and friends with whom he was not in touch even for decades were very fulfilling for him emotionally. "It was a sense of joy as well as the flow of emotions as I managed to talk to many 'lost friends and relatives'. Circumstances like office, time difference, and most importantly our selfish way of living didn't allow us to connect earlier. I take COVID-19 restrictions as an opportunity as learned many new skills this time."

The pandemic restrictions which did not allow Dr Akram Ali to go out of his house and domestic help were not allowed in the house, gave him a realisation that everyone should know how to cook. He knew basic cooking, but during the pandemic, he learned many dishes and now he is fully comfortable when it comes to cooking. "It is a basic skill, everyone should know," he said.

Many others like Pradeep Dash and Shahabuddin learned yoga and some other basic fitness exercises to keep fit during the restriction period and are happy to continue with the regime now, as they are following the social distancing norms and trying not to interact with many people.





Stingrays washed ashore at Al Hail beach

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Numerous stingrays and mackerels were found dead by morning walkers on Monday.

Out for an early morning walk, Maryam Khalfan was in for a shock as she and her family kept coming across stingrays and another fish one after the other.

"Interesting was the fact that they were far away from the water, so maybe it happened during the high tide," said Maryam and added, "The more I walked, the more fish I saw."

The majority of the fish were spotted opposite Masjid Fatma on Al Hail beach.

"I found them across from

the beach near Al Mouj towards Al Hail. The entire beach was covered by the stingrays and other fish varieties," she noted.

Stingrays are known to swim in shallow waters feeding on smaller fishes.

Captain Saheem Salem, a fisherman who has now moved into the tourism industry, said from his professional perspective, "Water is very cold now. However, stingrays like to hunt near shallow waters but the danger is also that they run out of oxygen. On some occasions, they get trapped in fishermen's nets which could have been close to the shore and they might have dumped them.

This, however, is for a long-distance and fishermen have

been exchanging videos of the seagulls feeding on the dead mackerels. I am seeing this for the first time."

He reflected, "A couple of years ago huge shoals of tuna came into Marina Bander Al Rowdha and died.

This could have happened again and stingrays like to feed on mackerels and sardines. But they would run out of oxygen which would eventually kill them. And about 10 years ago in a village near Bander Al Rowdha called Yiti several dolphins were stranded because they were escaping from killer whales and then they did not know how to go back. But this is the first I am seeing so many rays for such a long stretch."

Shura council to host health minister

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura will host the minister of health in its two regular sessions which will be held on Sunday and Monday.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He added that the minister of health's statement will focus on the ministry's achievements over the past four years, ministry's efforts to boost Omanisation and provide medical and technical jobs for nation-

als, training programmes as well as the achievements that have taken place in boosting various levels of healthcare across the Sultanate, development of emergency sections and the ministry's efforts in establishing addiction treatment centres and rehabilitation and physiotherapy centres in different governorates.

INVESTMENT

The minister of health's statement will also include the topic of in-

vestment in the healthcare sector and the ministry's efforts to encourage private investments in the healthcare sector, the ministry's efforts to implement the future visions of the health system as well as the ministry's efforts to combat COVID-19 particularly with regard to the ministry's evaluation of the procedures taken to contain the pandemic and the mechanisms for improving health services to confront pandemics in the future.

Muscat Municipality to organise beach cleaning campaign

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Muscat Municipality will organise a beach cleanliness campaign, in cooperation with the Muscat Gas Company at Sur al Hadid beach in Seeb.

The campaign is part of the "Your Environment, Your Responsibility" initiative aimed at spreading community awareness of the importance of effective partnership in the field of preserving the environment, and taking care of natural resources and tourist sites, including beaches and public places visited by visitors.

The campaign aims to motivate the community to pay attention to the beaches and to preserve them in light of the spread of some unacceptable practices and behaviours.



Most activities resume

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Supreme Committee on COVID-19 has so far opened eight packages of activities that were shut down at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The eighth package of activities that was announced on Thursday included the opening of Shisha cafes, prayer halls in commercial centres provided that group prayers are not held, increase in capacity by 50 per cent for wedding halls with a maximum of 250 people for large halls are allowed to open.

Some of the activities that are still excluded include the opening of smaller mosques, the opening of traditional schools and educational institutions, and restriction-free travel.

"Opening of mosques are still under discussion with relevant authorities," said the Minister of Health on Thursday.

The Supreme Committee has also warned of an increasing number of citizens and residents in adhering to the precautionary measures, especially not wearing a mask and holding gatherings with large numbers of people for social occasions.

After nearly a month of complete lockdown, the first package was announced in late April, which included covered vehicle repair workshops, car rental offices, and Sanad offices among others.

The committee decided to al-



low the opening of the following activities in the condition that only two customers at a time are allowed to be inside the outlet.

The second package saw the opening of money exchange companies while the third packages included perfume shops, car wash, and ready-made garments.

The fourth packages included Malls and commercial complexes (with abidance by health guidelines), travel and tourism offices

RESTART

As part of the fifth package, newspapers, magazines, and other publications will be allowed to restart printing. The decision also included allowing the opening of fish markets, Mutrah Souq, tourist restaurants, and sports halls in tourist facilities, commercial activities in traditional souqs, and printing of newspapers, magazines, and other

publications.

The sixth package allowed to reopen camel races, meeting halls in hotel establishments, all types of public restaurants and cafes, fitness clubs, barbershops, and men's care, beauty salons, and ladies' hairdressing, including laser, jet-ski, sale, and rent of wedding supplies and traditional medical clinics.

The seventh package of activities allowed the opening of parks, beaches, cinema halls, and public places. Restaurant area in commercial complexes, retail stores in Al Mawaleh Central Market, tourist sites including museums and forts, rehabilitation and treatment centres, and amusement games halls.

Children under the age of 12 were allowed to enter malls while parking spaces at shopping malls can open at 100 per cent capacity.

Trader charged for vehicle oil fraud

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

A Court of First Instance in Muscat recently issued a court ruling against a defendant for violating the Consumer Protection Law, and imposed an indictment and a fine.

The details presented by the anti-fraud department said it

received information regarding a commercial establishment in Qurayat for mixing used oils with the new one and then selling to consumers. The establishment was seized by the authorities for concealing information from the consumers, and the case was referred to the competent court, which in turn issued the judgment under various provisions of the

Consumer Protection Law.

The court charged the establishment for failing to provide the consumer with correct data about the commodity.

A fine of RO 2,000 was imposed and provided that the two penalties are combined and the more severe of them is carried out exclusively. The accused is obligated to pay the legal expenses.



Sultanate of Oman MINISTRY OF HEALTH TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-7/2021	OUTSOURCING OF MEDICAL FITNESS SERVICES FOR EXPATRIATE RESIDENCY PROCESS	28/January/ 2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 10/February/ 2021	Specialized Companies Registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on 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.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24166670

Email id: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Near the town of Samarra, about 100 km north of Baghdad, coops have become graveyards.

Bird flu decimates chicken coops in Iraq

SAMARRA: An outbreak of bird flu has killed tens of thousands of hens in a rural province north of Iraq's capital, decimating livelihoods overnight as authorities scramble to contain its spread.

Near the town of Samarra, about 100 kilometres north of Baghdad, Haytham al Hamash's coops have become graveyards.

Masked workers step around a few live hens to pick out the dead birds lying on their sides, tossing them into the back of a truck with a loud thud.

"Right now, chickens are dying and we can't do anything for them", Hamash said.

His coops have been

surrounded by makeshift trenches to keep infected chickens from escaping, as veterinarians in white suits examine the remaining flock.

The outbreak of avian influenza in the northern province of Salahaddin began on Thursday. By Friday, at least 60,000 chickens had contracted it, the governor announced.

But Samarra's chicken farmers say their losses have been much higher.

"We lost nearly 190,000 chickens", Hamash said.

Another farmer, Fuad Barhan, claimed authorities had not been able to support all the coops.

— AFP

Yemen clashes near Hodeida kill 150 in a week: Military sources

HODEIDA: Some 150 Yemeni pro-government soldiers and Ansar Allah fighters have been killed in a week of fighting south of the strategic port city of Hodeida, military sources said on Monday.

Impoverished Yemen is mired in a devastating conflict between Ansar Allah fighters and government forces backed by Saudi Arabia that has left tens of thousands dead and sparked a dire humanitarian crisis.

The latest clashes in the Red Sea port city of Hodeida are the most violent since a truce negotiated in the area by the UN came into force in 2018.

The Ansar Allah fighters, who hold Hodeida, have attacked to the south of the city where pro-government forces maintain positions, pro-government military sources said.

"The toll for losses on the two sides has reached around 150 dead and 260 wounded", an official of the pro-government forces said.

The toll was confirmed by a local official on the fighter side.

The clashes had so far not resulted in any territorial gains for Ansar Allah, residents said.

After fierce fighting on Saturday and Sunday, the



Ansar Allah supporters hold up their weapons during a demonstration outside the US Embassy against the United States over its decision to designate Ansar Allah a foreign terrorist organisation, in Sanaa on Monday. — Reuters

intensity of clashes cooled early on Monday.

Pro-government forces have suffered 27 fatalities and killed 44 fighters in countering "several assaults" by the fighters, two other pro-government sources said.

Medics and rescue workers said that military fatalities on the

THE LATEST CLASHES IN THE RED SEA PORT CITY OF HODEIDA ARE THE MOST VIOLENT SINCE A TRUCE NEGOTIATED IN THE AREA BY THE UN CAME INTO FORCE IN 2018

two sides had reached a total of 70 between Saturday and Sunday.

Aid group Doctors Without Borders said on Twitter that its team in the Mocha Trauma Hospital was engaging a "mass casualty plan" to respond to an influx of wounded.

— AFP

Darfur clashes leave 130 dead in days

KHARTOUM: The latest inter-ethnic violence to rock Sudan's restive Darfur left 47 dead on Monday, after 83 died in separate weekend clashes — and following shortly after a peacekeeping mission ended operations.

With at least 130 people killed in total, the recent violence is some of the worst reported since the signing of a peace agreement in October, which observers hoped would end years of war.

The bloodshed comes just over two weeks since the hybrid United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) ended operations in their long-running peacekeeping mission.

While former rebel forces have committed to lay down their weapons in the recent political peace deal, decades of conflict have left the vast western region awash with weapons and divided by bitter rivalries.

Key issues include land ownership and access to water.



Sudanese civilians protest against United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) exit in Zalenjei, West Darfur, on December 29, 2020. — Reuters file photo

In South Darfur, fighting broke out early on Monday between the powerful Arab Rizeigat tribe and the Fallata, a cattle and camel herding people who trace their roots to the Fulani of western Africa. "The clashes between the Rizeigat tribe and the Fallata tribe have stopped, and we have now counted 47 deaths", local

Fallata leader Mohamed Saleh said. Saleh said that several homes were torched in the attack.

'UGLY FACE OF WAR'

The fighting in South Darfur comes after at least 83 people were killed in clashes between rival ethnic groups on Saturday and Sunday in El Geneina, the

capital of West Darfur state.

Sudanese authorities in Khartoum said they had sent a "high-profile" delegation to help contain the situation.

The United Nations — a long-running presence in the nation — expressed deep concerns on Sunday over the violence.

Sudan has been undergoing a fragile transition since the April 2019 ouster of president Omar al Bashir following mass protests against his rule.

The Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella group which spearheaded protests against Bashir, said on Sunday that the violence showed the "deficiencies" of the peace agreement, which they said did not address the roots of the crisis in the region.

Darfur endured a bitter conflict that erupted in 2003, leaving roughly 300,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN. — AFP

Tunisia arrests over 600, deploys troops after riots

TUNIS: More than 600 people have been arrested and troops have been deployed after a third consecutive night of riots in several Tunisian cities, officials said on Monday. The unrest came after Tunisia imposed a nationwide lockdown to stem a rise in coronavirus infections on Thursday — the same day as it marked the 10th anniversary of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fall from power.

Interior Ministry spokesman Khaled Hayouni said a total of 632 people were arrested, notably "groups of people between the ages of 15, 20 and 25 who burned tyres and bins in order to block movements by the security forces".

Defence ministry spokesman Mohamed Zikri meanwhile, said the army has deployed reinforcements in several areas of the country.

Hayouni said that some of those arrested lobbed stones at

police and clashed with security forces. "This has nothing to do with protest movements that are guaranteed by the law and the constitution", said Hayouni.

"Protests take place in broad daylight normally... without any criminal acts involved", he added. Hayouni said two policemen were wounded in the unrest. It was not immediately clear if there were injuries among the youths and Hayouni did not say what charges those arrested faced.

The clashes took place in several cities across Tunisia, mostly in working-class neighbourhoods, with the exact reasons for the disturbances not immediately known.

But it came as many Tunisians are increasingly angered by poor public services and a political class that has repeatedly proved unable to govern coherently a decade on from the 2011 revolution. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KUWAIT

Kuwait emir accepts cabinet resignation

Kuwait's emir has accepted the resignation of the cabinet, state news agency KUNA said on Monday, after a standoff between the government and parliament over questioning the prime minister.

The political confrontation, which erupted less than a month after the cabinet was appointed, has posed the first big challenge to Emir Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed al Sabah, who assumed power in September.

It also complicates the



government's efforts to tackle the worse economic crisis in the Gulf state, which is facing a large budget deficit in the absence of a debt law that has long-caused political deadlocks. — Reuters

DOHA

Egypt, UAE resume first Qatar flights since 2017

The first direct flights since 2017 between Qatar and Egypt and the UAE took to the skies on Monday, following the end of a regional crisis. Egypt and the UAE joined Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in cutting ties with Qatar in June 2017. The quartet agreed to heal the rift at a Gulf summit on January 5 in Saudi Arabia, after a flurry of diplomatic activity by outgoing US President Donald Trump's administration.

The first commercial flight from Qatar to Egypt in three



and a half years, an EgyptAir service to Cairo, took off from windswept Doha airport.

It was followed shortly after by the arrival of an Air Arabia flight from Sharjah in the UAE. — AFP

TELAVIV

Israel releases data-sharing deal with Pfizer

Israel has secured a significant stock of coronavirus vaccines partly by pledging to share product impact data quickly, an agreement between the country and Pfizer seen by AFP on Monday indicates.

The state has given one jab of the two required Pfizer-BioNTech injections to more than two million people, a pace widely described as the world's fastest, while several wealthier nations continue to struggle with vaccine supply.



Israel has not concealed the fact that it agreed to share data with US-German pharma alliance Pfizer-BioNTech during its vaccination campaign.

— AFP

In brief

NEW DELHI



DEATH OF HOSPITAL EMPLOYEE NOT DUE TO VACCINE: OFFICIALS

Indian officials on Monday were at pains to stress that the death of a government hospital employee was unrelated to the COVID-19 vaccine he had received 24 hours earlier. Mahipal Singh, 46, a ward attendant in the Moradabad district of Uttar Pradesh died on Sunday after complaining of chest pain and breathlessness.

Relatives said he had been unwell before receiving the shot on Saturday but that his condition subsequently deteriorated. District chief medical officer MC Garg said a post-mortem examination report released on Monday found Singh had died of a heart attack. — dpa

TOKYO



SUGA VOWS TO TACKLE VIRUS AS PUBLIC SUPPORT PLUNGES

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged on Monday to tackle surging coronavirus cases and restore normal life "as soon as possible" as polls showed plunging support for his government. Suga, who was speaking at the opening of a new parliament session.

The latest wave in Japan and abroad has also cast doubt on whether the pandemic-postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics can go ahead this year, but Suga repeated he was still committed to holding the Games. On Monday, the country detected a virus variant which first emerged in the UK in three people who had never travelled there — a first in Japan. — AFP

KABUL



AFGHANISTAN LAUNCHES POLIO VACCINATION DRIVE

Afghanistan launched a nationwide campaign on Monday to give polio vaccination doses to 9.9 million children under the age of five, the Public Health Ministry announced. Around 65,000 health workers are assigned to implement the campaign during a period of five days, a public relations officer for the anti-polio campaign, Mir Jan Rasikh said.

Last year, 3.4 million children were deprived of the jab across the war-torn country and as a result, at least 56 children were detected with the crippling disease in the country. — dpa

China reports over 100 new virus cases as New Year exodus looms

Sixth consecutive day of more than 100 daily cases; More than 29m people in lockdown

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: China reported more than 100 new COVID-19 cases for the sixth consecutive day, with rising infections in the northeast fuelling concern of another wave when hundreds of millions of people travel for the Lunar New Year holiday.

Tough new controls in the city of Gongzhuling in Jilin province, which has a population of about 1 million people, brings the total number of people under lockdown to more than 29 million.

According to the *Global Times* newspaper, at least 11 regions in the provinces of Hebei, Heilongjiang and Jilin have imposed lockdowns and introduced extensive testing programmes.

The National Health Commission reported 109 new COVID-19 cases for Sunday, unchanged from the day earlier. Of the 93 local infections, 54 were in Hebei, which surrounds Beijing.

Hebei authorities vowed to punish lockdown violations,



People wearing face masks are seen at a subway station following COVID-19 outbreak, in Shanghai, on Monday. — Reuters

including the illegal staging of weddings or funerals, the Xinhua news agency said.

Northeastern Jilin province also reported a record 30 new cases, underscoring the risk of new clusters emerging.

China has two domestically produced COVID-19 vaccines and more in trials. Its vaccination programme started in July for emergency use and more than 10 million doses have been given.

Daily increases in infections remain a fraction of what China saw at the height of the outbreak in early 2020, but officials are concerned infections could spread rapidly during the Lunar New Year holiday in less than a month.

Despite travel restrictions, the China Railway Corporation expects about 296 million passenger trips during the Lunar New Year break, compared with

410 million in 2019.

'MOVE LESS'

Shanghai is one of many cities providing financial incentives for migrant workers not to travel home.

The manufacturing hub of Yiwu on the east coast, is also introducing subsidies, including rent reductions, to encourage workers to stay put during the holiday. Tianjin, home to 15 million people, said employees would get a one-off payment of 300 yuan (\$46.20) if they stay in the city.

Cainiao, the delivery arm of Alibaba, also said it would provide more than 200 million yuan in subsidies to ensure that "people move less, goods move more" during the holiday.

Statistics bureau chief Ning Jizhe said the overall economic impact of the COVID-19 resurgence remained controllable.

But though Xinhua warned local governments not to "cry wolf", many have been introducing new curbs.

— Reuters

UP IN ARMS AGAINST REFORMS



Activists of various organisations take part in a demonstration held in support of farmers who are continuing their protest against the Indian government's recent agricultural reforms in Amritsar on Monday. — AFP

Indian opposition seeks inquiry into security leak

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI:

Indian opposition parties called on Monday for an investigation into chat messages from a top TV anchor that they said showed prior knowledge of airstrikes carried out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government against Pakistan in 2019.

Arnab Goswami, editor-in-chief of Republic TV network, told the head of a TV rating agency that India would launch a "bigger than a normal strike" on its arch-rival - three days before Indian combat jets struck alleged militant targets on Pakistani soil.

The raid brought the two nations to the brink of war.

"On Pakistan, the government is confident of striking in a way that people will be elated," a transcript of the messages sent by Goswami said. "Exact words used."

The messages, reported by Indian media and seen by Reuters, are part of a charge-sheet filed by police in Mumbai investigating alleged fixing of ratings by Republic - charges the network denies.

Goswami denied prior knowledge of the airstrikes, that were carried out weeks after Pulwama attack. — Reuters

Indonesian medics overwhelmed by quake casualties

MAMUJU: Medics battled exhaustion and the risk of COVID-19 as they raced on Monday to treat scores of people injured by a devastating earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi island.

At least 84 were killed and thousands left homeless by the 6.2-magnitude quake that struck early on Friday.

Doctors in hazard suits treated patients with broken limbs and other injuries at a makeshift medical centre set up outside the only one of the city's hospitals that survived relatively intact -- one was flattened by the violent tremor.

A handful of doctors and nurses worked "non-stop" in the first couple of days after the quake until reinforcements arrived, but it was still barely enough amid shortages of medicine and other supplies.

— AFP

Handwritten note seeds hope for trapped gold miners

BEIJING: At least 12 gold miners trapped hundreds of metres underground in China for more than a week have sent up a note warning that they are injured, surrounded by water and urgently need medicine.

Twenty-two workers were trapped more than 600 metres from the mine's entrance after a blast eight days ago near Qixia city in eastern Shandong province.

After days without any signs of life, rescuers heard knocking sounds on Sunday afternoon as they drilled through the mine's shaft.

A note was sent up on a line from the depths below saying that



This photo taken on January 13 shows rescuers working at the site of gold mine explosion where 22 miners were trapped underground in Qixia, in eastern China's Shandong province. — AFP

at least a dozen of the miners are still alive, but that they urgently needed help as their health deteriorates.

"We are in urgent need of medicine, painkillers, medical tape, external anti-inflammatory drugs, and three people have high blood pressure," the note read.

The condition of the other ten workers is unknown. Four people were injured, according to the note, which was crumpled, water-stained and scrawled in pencil on pages ripped out of a notebook.

"We wish the rescuers won't stop so that we can still have hope. Thank you," the note read.

The writer of the note asked

rescuers to send down some medication from his car, and warned that there was a large amount of underground water where the miners are trapped.

Rescuers were later able to speak with some of the trapped workers after lowering a phone line into the mine, local officials said at a press conference Monday, without giving details of what was said.

Footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed rescue workers cheering as the knocking sound was detected and later hurrying to read the note which was taped to a line sunk below using a pneumatic drill. — AFP

US Capitol shut down temporarily out of caution over fire nearby

WASHINGTON: The US Capitol was shut down temporarily on Monday out of an abundance of caution after a fire broke out near the complex, the Capitol Police said, underscoring security jitters days before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration.

"There is no threat to the public," the US Secret Service said in a tweet.

The US Capitol Police said in a statement that members and staff were advised to shelter in place while the incident was being investigated.

This follows the January 6 attack on the US Capitol in Washington by Trump supporters, some of whom called for the death of Vice President Mike Pence as he presided over the certification of Biden's November election victory.

All participants in the rehearsal for Biden's inauguration, were evacuated into the building and participants were being held in the Capitol rotunda and other indoor areas, according to a Reuters witness. Biden will be sworn in on Wednesday.

The city's fire department said on Twitter that firefighters put out an outside fire near the Capitol complex.

"There were no injuries," the department said. "This accounts for smoke that many have seen."

PRO-TRUMP PROTESTS

Law enforcement officers far outnumbered protesters at state capitol grounds on Sunday, as few Trump supporters who believe the president's false claim that he won the 2020 election turned out for what authorities feared could be violent demonstrations.

More than a dozen states activated National Guard troops to



Thousands of US flags are seen at the National Mall, as part of a memorial paying tribute to the more than 200,000 people nationwide who have died from COVID-19, near the US Capitol ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, on Monday. — Reuters

help secure their capitol buildings following an FBI warning of armed demonstrations, with right-wing extremists emboldened by the deadly attack on the US Capitol.

Security officials had eyed on Sunday as the first major flashpoint, as the anti-government

"boogaloo" movement made plans weeks ago to hold rallies in all 50 states.

But by Sunday evening, only small gatherings of demonstrators had taken to the streets alongside much larger crowds of law-enforcement officers and media

personnel.

"It was a non-event today and we are glad it was," said Troy Thompson, spokesman for the Department of General Services, the agency that protects the Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg. — Reuters

France, UK boost vaccine campaigns; Britain shuts travel corridors

PARIS: France and Britain on Monday joined a growing list of nations starting mass vaccinations for all elderly citizens as the UK began demanding all arrivals quarantine to try and halt the spread of a new COVID-19 variant.

The French drive aims to cover all people over 75 and comes after Brazil and India, which figure among the worst-affected countries, administered their first jabs over the weekend.

Health Minister Olivier Veran said more than one million vaccinations are being targeted by January and between 2.4 and 4 million by February.

France had earlier offered vaccinations to residents of retirement homes and health workers on the frontline.

Britain on Monday extended its own vaccination campaign to people over the age of 70, after first attending to over-80s, and frontline health workers and care givers.

Since the inoculation campaign began on December 8, more than 3.8 million people have received a first dose of vaccine in the UK.

Growing concerns over different strains of the virus have prompted governments to tighten curbs and stem a global death toll that has already crossed two million since the pandemic first emerged in China just over a year ago.

Russia is also due to start mass immunisations on Monday using its homegrown Sputnik V vaccine while Britain imposed a 10-day isolation and negative Covid tests on all

WHO chief decries 'me-first' approach

GENEVA: The world is on the brink of "catastrophic moral failure" in sharing COVID-19 vaccines, the head of the World Health Organization said on Monday, urging countries and manufacturers to spread doses more fairly around the world.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the prospects for equitable distribution were at "serious risk" just as its COVAX vaccine-sharing scheme aimed to start distributing inoculations next month.

— Reuters

travellers.

Arrivals will have to provide a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours of travel or be banned from entering the UK.

New strains believed to be more contagious have emerged in Britain, South Africa and Brazil and have set off alarm bells.

Across the European Union there have been concerns that delays in the delivery of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could further slow a campaign which critics have condemned as less agile than in the United States or Britain, a recently-departed EU member.

— AFP

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny: from poisoning to prison

Main developments



Photo: Navalny walks to his plane seat ahead of a flight to Moscow, Jan 17 (AFP Photo/Kirill Kudryavtsev)

* Born on June 4, 1976 in Moscow region

* Organised major demonstrations against Vladimir Putin

* Regularly jailed for short periods



Navalny urges Russians to 'take to the streets'

MOSCOW: Russia's most prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny called on Monday for his supporters to take to the streets after a hastily organised court ordered him jailed for 30 days.

The makeshift court — set up in police station on the outskirts of Moscow where Navalny was being held — agreed to a request from prosecutors for Navalny to be kept in custody until February 15.

Navalny, President

Vladimir Putin's best-known domestic critic, was taken to the station after a dramatic airport arrest on Sunday that prompted condemnation from the West and calls for his immediate release.

In a video released by his team shortly after the ruling, the 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner urged his supporters to protest.

"Do not be silent. Resist. Take to the streets — not for me, but for you," Navalny said. The head of Navalny's

regional network Leonid Volkov said preparations were underway for protests to be organised across the country on Saturday.

Navalny was arrested as he returned to Russia from Germany for the first time since he was poisoned with a nerve agent in August and flown to Berlin in an induced coma.

Russia's FSIN prison service said that it had detained him for violating the terms of a suspended

sentence he was given in 2014, on fraud charges he says were politically motivated.

In another video posted by his team from the courtroom before the ruling, Navalny said he did not understand how the session could be taking place.

"I've seen a lot of mockery of justice, but the old man in the bunker (Putin) is so afraid that they have blatantly torn up and thrown away" Russia's criminal code, Navalny said.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Shellfish trucks protest over export chaos

More than 20 shellfish trucks parked on roads near the British parliament and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Downing Street residence on Monday to protest against post-Brexit bureaucracy that has throttled exports to the European Union. Many fishermen have been unable to export to the EU since catch certificates, health checks and customs declarations were introduced at the start of this year, delaying their deliveries and prompting European buyers to reject them.



Trucks with slogans such as "Brexit carnage" and "incompetent government destroying shellfish industry" parked metres from Johnson's 10 Downing Street office. — Reuters

ROME

Conte appeals to parliament for backing

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte appealed on Monday for parliamentarians from outside his government to rally to coalition ranks, saying he needed broad-based support to forge ahead with a pro-European agenda. "Help us to heal this wound," Conte told the lower house of parliament in a debate called after a junior partner quit his coalition, depriving him of an absolute majority and throwing Italy into political turmoil in the midst of the COVID crisis.



Looking to entice centrist and liberal lawmakers, Conte promised to revamp his policy agenda and shake up his cabinet, saying he wanted to modernise Italy. — Reuters

LONDON

Trump baby blimp lands at London museum

A blimp depicting US President Donald Trump as a snarling, nappy-wearing orange baby has found a home in one of London's most popular museums. The helium-filled balloon, originally paid for through crowdfunding, first took to the skies over London during protests against Trump's visit in 2018 and has flown in other locations including France, Argentina, Ireland and Denmark.

Gladly accepting the donation, the Museum of London said the blimp would join its protest



collection, which includes artefacts from the Suffragette movement as well as climate change and peace rallies.

— Reuters

Embracing changes while cherishing history

It is the first month of 2021, we are just midway through it and have we not learnt a lot? We have been in a dilemma over social media platforms, should we move out of WhatsApp and adapt ourselves to new applications. It was the thought of sharing personal data that made everyone around the globe think about the best options.

While the majority worried over the amount of data shared and the after effect that is expected, there were quite a few who have been asking, “What is the big deal? The data is already out there.”

It is our changing world. Life with Artificial Intelligence has already begun to create the transformation. The instant gratification has its impact after all. We wanted the fast food, quick Internet connection and immediate results and in 2020 we wanted a quick solution for COVID-19 and the vaccine had to be rolled out as fast as possible.

We wanted to get back to normalcy, but that ought not to be at the cost of safety or health.

But even in the suffering of the pandemic there was something positive — savings in the bank accounts increased. The banks have noted that we have been able to save more probably because we did not have many options to spend. The travelling had almost come to a standstill adding on to the savings.

Abdulnadir al Raisi, DGM at one of the leading banks in Oman, explained



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IT IS OUR CHANGING WORLD. LIFE WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO CREATE THE TRANSFORMATION

that while savings were on people who did manage to spend online. E-trade picked up with online shopping and online ordering of food. But most importantly according to him, people learnt the importance of saving for tomorrow and for the future of their children.

“The pandemic taught us that anything can happen tomorrow. The behavioural change shows us that people have become more aware about saving. People have realised that things could change overnight. We planned and something else happens. None of us could have predicted that 2020 or going into 2021 will end up this way with a worldwide pandemic,” he reflected.

The pandemic has taught us that we have to plan ahead or else we would be caught off guard. The pandemic also taught us that we could be there for each other, like the gardener we met — John P Y who loves his vegetable garden but realised he could help others with vegetables from his garden when the going got tough during the lockdown with job loss for many who were stranded waiting for flights to take them home.

We still have the opportunity to prepare for 2021 and get ready to shape it. There will be incidents, but instead of being shocked and remaining there we can always embrace the change. It won't be busy but as long as we have health, each day is an opportunity.

With the pandemic we have also

learnt that it is not enough to be cautious for our safety alone, but for others too. So it is important to maintain the safety protocol even if one has been vaccinated.

It is 2021 and I am holding a new Omani currency note. The colours are nostalgic, reminding one of the early years of Omani currency. The notes have been made smart and safe as they are almost impossible to be forged. They are not just about denominations but carry separate stories. They celebrate Oman's popular features but they also look ahead at the future of the nation — 2040.

History is the future said Shabib al Shabibi, Manager of the Currency Management Department. Interesting thought because sometimes people overlook history. The complete conversation is @omanobserver's podcast, FRONTPAGE. Not knowing the roots leave us almost baseless. The history of currency is what we get to see at the Currency Museum of the Central Bank of Oman.

The coins exchanged from one hand to another, travelled coast to coast made of different metals. The value might have differed according to eras, but their inscription tells about the rulers and their lands. Reminds us that once upon a time people lived rich at the same time challenging conditions. But they were not in a hurry; they depended on horses and sailing boats for transport with patience. Wonder if they ever experienced a lockdown.

RENEW OCEANS

Big Oil's flagship plastic waste project sinks

JOE BROCK, JOHN GEDDIE AND SAURABH SHARMA

A wheelbarrow and a handful of metal grids for capturing litter, emblazoned with the words “Renew Oceans,” sit rusting outside an empty, padlocked office in the Indian city of Varanasi, a short walk from the Ganges.

It is all that is left of a programme, funded by some of the world's biggest oil and chemical companies, that they said could solve a runaway ocean plastic waste crisis which is killing marine life — from plankton to whales — and clogging tropical beaches and coral reefs.

The closure of Renew Oceans, which has not previously been reported, is a sign that an industry whose financial future is tied to the growth of plastic production is falling short of its targets to curb the resulting increase in waste, according to two environmental groups.

The Alliance to End Plastic Waste, a Singapore-based nonprofit group set up two years ago by big oil and chemical companies, said on its website in November 2019 that its partnership with Renew Oceans would be expanded to the world's most-polluted rivers and “ultimately could stop the flow of plastic into the planet's ocean.”

Exxon Mobil Corp, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Dow Inc, Chevron Phillips Chemical Co and about 50 other companies committed to spend \$1.5 billion over five years on the Alliance and its projects. The Alliance has not said publicly how much money it has raised from its members or what it has spent overall.

The Alliance confirmed to Reuters that

Without any foreseeable time frame for restarting, combined with other implementation challenges

JESSICA LEE
Alliance spokeswoman

Renew Oceans had stopped operating, partly due to the new coronavirus, which had halted some work.

“Without any foreseeable time frame for restarting, combined with other implementation challenges, the Alliance and Renew Oceans jointly decided to a mutual termination agreement in October 2020,” Alliance spokeswoman Jessica Lee said.

Anne Rosenthal, counsel at US law firm Hurwit & Associates, representing Renew Oceans, also said it expects the project to fold. “While it has made important progress in tackling the problem of plastic waste, the organisation has come to the conclusion that it simply does not have the capacity to work at the scale this problem deserves,” she said.

The Alliance, with a staff of about 50, mostly based in Singapore, has other projects in the pipeline, but they are small, community-based endeavours or have not yet come to fruition. “It is important to note that the full impact of projects will be realised when their operations are at full scale,” said Lee.

Renew Oceans published targets on its website to collect 45 tonnes of plastic trash from the Ganges in 2019 and 450 tonnes in 2020. Neither the Alliance nor Renew Oceans has published any information on their progress in reaching those targets. Four people involved in the project said it collected less than one tonne of waste from the Ganges before it closed in March last year after less than six months in operation.

The Alliance and Renew Oceans declined comment on the amount of waste the project collected. Scientists estimate more than half a million tonnes of plastic trash enters the Ganges every year. — Reuters

EMISSIONS RACE

As floods hit Borneo, Indonesia urged to boost climate action

MICHAEL TAYLOR

Deadly floods across parts of Indonesia are a stark reminder of the climate change risks facing the Southeast Asian nation, environmentalists said on Monday, urging the government to be more ambitious in its efforts to cut planet-heating emissions.

South Kalimantan on Borneo island declared a state of emergency last week, after heavy rainfall and flooding since the start of the year displaced tens of thousands of people. Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited the worst-hit areas on Monday.

Yuyun Harmono, climate justice campaign manager at the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI), said the floods are “an indication that the government should have more ambition in their climate policies.”

The archipelago is already suffering the impacts of rising global temperatures, with its cities and coastal areas hit by regular flooding and rising sea levels.

“Indonesia is one of the countries that is very vulnerable to the climate crisis,” said Adila Isfandiari, climate and energy researcher at Greenpeace Indonesia.

“It is rooted in the position of the government that prioritises economic growth over the environment,” she



Rescuers are disinfected as they remove the body of a landslide victim in Sumedang, West Java province, on Sunday. — AFP

THE FLOODS ARE AN INDICATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE MORE AMBITION IN THEIR CLIMATE POLICIES

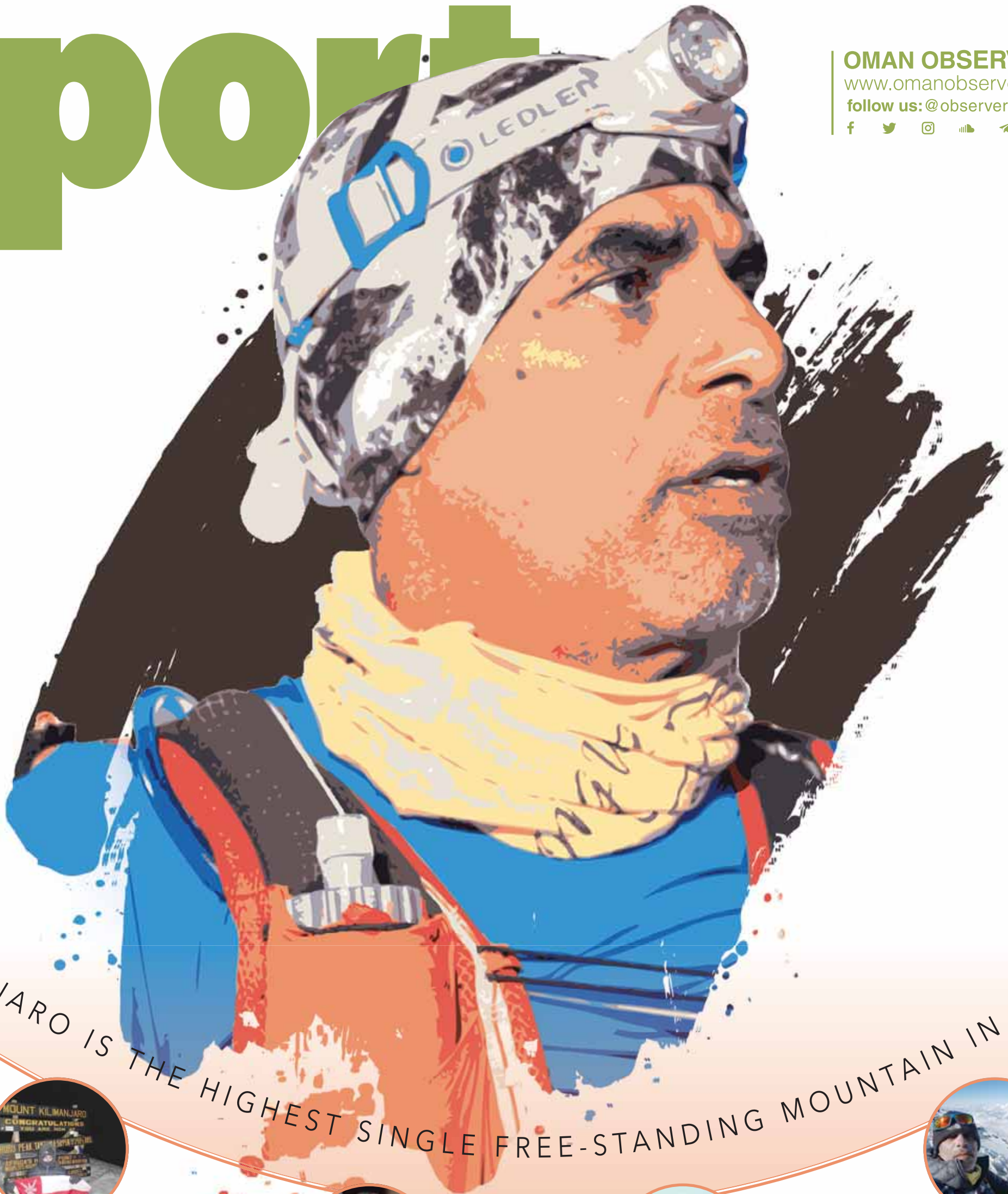
said. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement to curb global warming, Indonesia — among the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitters — committed to cut its emissions by 29 per cent by 2030 versus business-as-usual levels, a target it said could rise to 41 per cent with international support.

Earlier this month, a climate official

at Indonesia's environment and forestry ministry told Antara news agency the country would not increase its emissions reduction goals further in an updated climate action plan due to be submitted ahead of a UN climate summit in November, as nations are expected to do.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

SPORT



KILIMANJARO IS THE HIGHEST SINGLE FREE-STANDING MOUNTAIN IN THE WORLD



OMAN BY UTMB 2019
130km
Distance/elevation
128.70km/7,480m
Time
32:26:09
Status
Finisher



Cm6 Thailand 2019
150km
Distance/elevation
145.70 km/9,000m
Time
42:13:56
Status
Finisher



Argentina
Ushuaia
By UTMB 2019
130km
Distance/elevation
133.40km/8,170m
Status
DNF



UAE, Urban Ultra Hajar 50
and 100 - 2019
100km
Distance/elevation:
94.80km/3,250m
Time
21:25:30
Status
Finisher

OMANI VETERAN TAKES UP
KILIMANJARO CHALLENGE

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ

At an age when most people are cooling their legs at home post their work life, Hamed al Harthi has been a man on the pursuit of a unique mission. The 62-year-old professional trail and long-distance runner is preparing an ambitious plan to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania under 12 hours. Kilimanjaro is a dormant volcano

which is Africa's highest mountain and the highest single free-standing mountain in the world at a height of 5,895 metres above sea level. The Omani veteran has some noble reasons to go on this challenging mission. Al Harthi has taken upon the climb as a self-challenge and also to create awareness about people suffering from autism. He also wishes to inspire the younger generation in Oman to take up long distance running.

IT HAS NEVER BEEN ATTEMPTED BEFORE BY A 60-YEAR-OLD. IT ALWAYS SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE UNTIL IT IS DONE. AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

The senior runner will be taking upon the challenge on January 29th at 6 am. Hamed has been busy with the preparations for the mission for more than six months. He was actively training for UTMB Thailand as well but unfortunately could not make it due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The sexagenarian will be having a focused training session for 7-10 days before the day of the challenge. Hamed will be traversing a distance of 50-55 km and the route and distance will

depend on the weather conditions. The Omani man stated he was looking at the mission as something that would allow him to push the envelope and raise the bar. "I always aim to challenge myself by trying something new outside my comfort zone. Long-distance running has provided me a platform to explore my abilities and push them beyond normal limit and I look forward to completing my goal in Kilimanjaro," he added.

In brief

■ LOS ANGELES



BULLS OVERCOME DONCIC'S HISTORIC TRIPLE-DOUBLE

Lauri Markkanen scored a team-high 29 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as the Chicago Bulls overcame a historic triple-double from Luka Doncic to beat the Dallas Mavericks 117-101 on Sunday.

Garrett Temple scored 17 of his 21 points in the first half as the Bulls snapped a four-game losing streak.

Results: LA Clippers 129 bt Indiana 96; Sacramento 123 lt to New Orleans 128; Denver 105 lt to Utah 109; Dallas 101 lt to Chicago 117; Boston 75 lt to New York 105

■ PARIS



SABALENKA REACHES CAREER-HIGH NO 7

Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka climbed to a career-high WTA ranking of seventh on Monday after winning her third straight title at the weekend.

The 22-year-old won the Australian Open warm-up event in Abu Dhabi, beating Veronika Kudermetova 6-2, 6-2 in Wednesday's final.

Sabalenka finished her 2020 campaign with triumphs in Ostrava and Linz and will be one of the favourites for the delayed Australian Open next month.

NADAL IN ATP TOP 10 FOR 800TH STRAIGHT WEEK

Rafael Nadal on Monday became the first player to be ranked in the ATP top 10 for 800 consecutive weeks, a run spanning more than 15 years. The world number two broke Jimmy Connors' previous record of 789 straight weeks in the top 10 in November.

Seeb on right track to defend league title



ADIL AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, JAN 18

Defending champions Seeb strengthened their lead at the top of the Omantel League as they emerged a 1-0 victor over Al Rustaq at Seeb Stadium on Monday in the sixth week of the league.

The only goal in the match by the league leaders was netted through national team player, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, in the 26th minute as he received a golden ball from Mazin al Saadi and he slotted the ball to the net.

The triumph helped the league leaders to reach 16 points at the top of the league. The guests, Al Rustaq remained in their previous tally of nine points. Al

Rustaq showed top display in the last two rounds as they registered two victories against Sohar and Al Ittihad.

After suffering losses in the last two rounds, North Al Batinah team, Sohar, bounced back to the winning track as they defeated the capital city team Muscat 2-1 at the former's home at Sohar Sports Complex.

Former national team player Said al Ruzaiqi put the hosts team ahead as he struck the opening goal. Wajdi al Lamki increased the margin of Sohar team as he netted the second goal in the second half while the consolation goal for Muscat team came from Vinsus.

The winning points

assisted Sohar to move into comfort zone. They added three points to reach seven points at eighth place, while Muscat are struggling at the danger zone and possess two points at 12th position.

In Sunday's late fixtures, Al Suwaiq delivered top performance as they registered narrow 1-0 win over neighbours Saham at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The all-important goal in the game was scored by Al Abd al Noufli in the first half.

The triumph assisted the team to jump to the top zone teams with 13 points while Saham are still suffering at the bottom with -3 points.

Al Ittihad trounced Al Nasr 2-1 at Al Saada Sports Complex.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah in action with Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes. – Reuters

Stalemate in top of the table clash in EPL

ANDY JALIL LIVERPOOL, JAN 18

A match which should have been a classic, ended goalless, between the champions and the current leaders of the Premier League.

The game failed to live up to the pre-match expectations. It was a story of missed chances to score by both Liverpool and Manchester United, in a season which, even at this early stage, looks likely to see a close finish.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, the United manager, who has not won away at Liverpool since January 2016 said: "I don't think we played well enough. We know we have players who can win you a game in the blink of a second and Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba almost did. With the injuries Liverpool have, I thought we could get a result but we didn't capitalise. Towards the end it was there for us to win and we created two massive chances."

He added: "Next time maybe we can impose ourselves more, get on the ball more, keep trying to be positive, and do the right things. I know we can play better but we're coming away from here with a point and the players disappointed, is a good feeling. It shows how far we've come in a year."

United came into this game with the momentum and stability. Eleven unbeaten games in the league including three straight wins. They were however, largely defensive and looked disjointed with Liverpool enjoying more of the possession particularly in the first half and forcing errors,

dominating without creating a serious opening.

United lifted themselves later in the game and missed excellent chances but also saw the Liverpool keeper Alisson in fine form. After 75 minutes, Marcus Rashford set up Luke Shaw whose cut-back cross found Bruno Fernandes but Alisson saved his shot from close range with his feet.

Eight minutes later Alisson produced another brilliant save when he kept a powerful shot out from point-blank position. He followed that with a smothering shot by Rashford, these were three clear chances for United.

Liverpool should have taken the lead in the 17th minute when Roberto Firmino missed after an excellent move between Xherdan Shaqiri and Sadio Mane.

Most of Liverpool's chances came to Firmino who failed each time. He had a second opportunity to score just before half time when he took the ball off Mohammad Salah in the box and hit a weak shot.

In the 59th minute he should have converted a cross from Andrew Robertson and minutes later Salah had a shot deflected wide.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, said: "I know my job, I have to qualify for the Champions League and I know how difficult that is. This season will be a tough race, that's for sure. This is not the most difficult period I have been through in my life, but we have to be patient." He added: "We are in the bunch of teams who fight for this (Champions League), and that is the job."

Al Jadidi, Pispot post victories in T20 League

MUSCAT: Manikandan Rajagopal's superb 63 helped Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting to an 8-wicket victory against Safara International in a D Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 3 in Amerat on Friday.

Sandesh Pusalkar top-scored with 44 as Safara collected 154 for 6 in 20 overs. Nikesh V bowled well, taking 3 for 22.

Al Jadidi's chase was spearheaded by Manikandan (63 not out off 51) and Dhanesh Krishnan (36 not out off 24) as they scored 155 for 2 in the 19th over.

WAJID, GOPAKUMAR STAR IN PITSPOT WIN

In another D Division game, opener Wajid Ali slammed an unbeaten 105 off 66 while



Gopakumar and Wajid Ali of Pitspot.

Gopakumar Gopalakrishnan picked up 5 for 24 to steer Pitspot to a 15-run win over Al Rehwan at Muscat Municipality ground 4.

Pitspot posted 179 for 4 on the board thanks to brilliant batting

by Wajid and Fahad Hamsa (33 off 23).

Al Rehwan fought well but fell short by 15 runs, scoring 164 for 7 due largely to magnificent spell by Gopakumar. Puthen Purayil

BRIEF SCORES		
D Division Pitspot 179 for 4 in 20 overs (Wajid Ali 105 - 15x4, Fahad Hamsa 33 - 4x4) beat Al Rehwan 164 for 7 in 20 overs (Puthen Purayil 55 - 7x4, Raniz Muhammed 40 - 4x4, Gopakumar Gopalakrishnan 5-24) by 15 runs. Safara International 154 for 6 in 20 overs (Sandesh Pusalkar 44 - 5x4, Imran Khan 34 - 4x4, 1x6, Nikesh V 3-22, Gokul Gopinath 2-28) lost to Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting 155 for 2 in 18.3 overs (Manikandan Rajagopal 63 - 6x4, Dhanesh Krishnan 36 - 4x4, Syed Uzair Saman 2-35) by 8 wickets.	E Division OCT Al Hail 'B' 154 for 7 in 20 overs (Abdul Jalil Al Balushi 38 - 3x4, 2x6, Mohamed Issa al Balushi 24 - 2x4, Rajeeesh Ravindran 4-27, Waqas Sohail 2-23) lost to Danmark CT 156 for 5 in 17.4 overs (Shankar Gayathri 66 - 7x4, Doresh Devender 47 - 5x4, 1x6, Taiz Malla al Balushi 3-38) by 5 wickets. Aflag Group CT 126 all out in 17.2 overs (Thiyagu Subramanian 34 - 5x4, Nadil al Balushi 4-22, Mohamed Haneef 2-17, Abdullah al Balushi 2-21) lost to OCT Al Nahdha 127 for 2 in 17 overs (Rafeeq Mohammed 51 - 7x4, Abdullah Al Balushi 30 - 6x4) by 8 wickets.	8 wickets. F Division KCA Deutag 140 all out in 19.1 overs (Khalid Balushi 40 - 5x4, Prathiesh Hema Ramesh 3-24, Ayush Karthyic 2-32) beat Muscat Young Stars 118 for 6 in 20 overs (Roshan Kumar 31 - 1x4, Aaryan Nishit Punja 29, Ameer Hamza 2-18, Sultan Ali 2-20) by 22 runs. Mazoon Dairy Company Saoc 166 for 9 in 20 overs (Peter Shipin 54 - 7x4, Amir Munir 2-35, Muhammad Islam 2-34) lost to Israr Ghala 167 for 7 in 19.5 overs (Amir Munir 40 - 5x4, Asim Shaheen 37 - 4x4, 1x6, Ameer 3-10, Hewa Dewage 2-19) by 3 wickets.

(55) and Raniz Muhammed (40) were main scorers.

RAJEEESH, SHAKAR HELP DANMARK TO VICTORY

Rajeeesh Ravindran's 4 for 27 and Shankar Gayathri's unbeaten

66 off 48 were the highlights of Danmar's exciting 5-wicket victory against OCT Al Hail B in an E Division match at Muscat Municipality ground 4.

Danmark did well to restrict

Al Hail B to 154 for 7 due to excellent bowling by Rajeeesh and then chased down the total in the 18th over, scoring 156 for 5 thanks to brilliant knocks by Shankar and Doresh Davender (47 off 42). Taiz Malla claimed 3 for 38.

OCT AL NAHDHA BEAT AFLAG GROUP

In the day's other E Division match, Nadil al Balushi's 4 for 22 and Rafeeq Mohammed's 51 were instrumental in OCT Al Nahdha defeating Aflag Group at Muscat Municipality ground 4.

Nadil was the most successful Al Nahdha bowler as Aflag was bundled out for 126 in 17.2 overs. Al Nahdha then surpassed the total in 17 overs, scoring 127 for 2 thanks to major contributions from Rafeeq and Abdullah al Balushi (30).

India eye fairytale win

AUSTRALIA FRET OVER STARC; VISITORS TO CHASE 324 FOR VICTORY

BRISBANE: Injury-ravaged India will chase 324 runs for a fairytale victory in the fourth Test decider against Australia as an epic series that has ebbed and flowed draws to a fitting climax on the final day at the Gabba.

At the end of a rain-hit day four, India's batsmen pondered a wicket laden with ominous cracks while Australia fretted over the fitness of pace spearhead Mitchell Starc and hoped the weather would behave on day five.

Australia may also wonder whether they waited too long to unleash their bowlers, with rain bringing an end to Monday's play after only 1.5 overs of India's second innings after tea.

India, after bowling Australia out for 294, were four for no loss, with Rohit Sharma four not out and fellow opener Shubman Gill yet to score.

Australia have a maximum of 98.1 overs to beat India and seal the series 2-1, but it was only a week ago that the home side failed to knock over Ajinkya Rahane's battered team in 131 overs in the drawn Sydney Test.

The hosts must win the match to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar trophy, while holders India need only a draw to retain it two years after their breakthrough 2-1 win in the 2018/19 series in Australia.

Compounding the challenge, Australia's attack may also be undermanned, with left-arm Starc seen clutching his hamstring.

"One thing I know about Mitchell is he's tough," Australia batsman Steve Smith told reporters.

"He has played through some injuries before and got the job done so he'll be hopefully good to go tomorrow.

"The wicket is certainly different to what it is in Sydney. There's a bit more happening here. We saw a few balls shoot up today, a couple kept a bit low, a couple went off cracks which

SCOREBOARD	
Australia 1st innings	369
India 1st innings	336
Australia 2nd innings	
M Harris c Pant b Thakur	38
D Warner lbw Sundar	48
M Labuschagne c Sharma b Siraj	25
S Smith c Rahane b Siraj	55
M Wade c Pant b Siraj	0
C Green c Sharma b Thakur	37
T Paine c Pant b Thakur	27
P Cummins not out	28
M Starc c Saini b Siraj	1
N Lyon c Agarwal b Thakur	13
J Hazlewood c Thakur b Siraj	9
Extras (b5, lb2, nb4, w2)	13
Total (all out, 75.5 overs)	294
Fall of wickets: 1-89, 2-91, 3-123, 4-123, 5-196, 6-227, 7-242, 8-247, 9-274	
Bowling: Siraj 19.5-5-73-5, Natarajan 14-4-41-0, Sundar 18-1-80-1, Thakur 19-2-61-4, Saini 5-1-32-0	
India 2nd innings	
R Sharma not out	4
S Gill not out	0
Total (0 wickets, 1.5 overs)	4
To bat: C Pujara, A Rahane, M Agarwal, R Pant, W Sundar, S Thakur, M Siraj, N Saini, T Natarajan	
Bowling: Cummins 1-0-4-0, Hazlewood 0.5-0-0-0	

is always playing on the batters' mind."

FAIRYTALE FINISH?

The highest successful chase in a Gabba Test was in 1951 when Australia finished 236 for seven, but there have been big scores in recent years.

Pakistan racked up 450 in the fourth innings at the Gabba in a lost cause in 2016.

That India remain in the hunt is an achievement in itself, with not a single first-choice bowler in the team due to a horrendous injury toll.

In a series that has produced a string of unlikely Indian heroes, Mohammed Siraj, the de facto pace leader in only his third Test, finished with an innings haul of 5-73 on Monday, taking the wind out of Australia's sails as they tried to quicken their scoring.

He had some assistance from the pitch, with balls rearing out of cracks and others staying low. "We saw some cracks today and it will play on the batsmen's minds. It won't be easy tomorrow but our batsmen will be prepared," he told reporters. — Reuters



Shardul Thakur of India celebrates with team-mates after getting the wicket of Cameron Green of Australia during day four of the fourth Test at the Gabba. — Reuters

England win first Test against Sri Lanka by seven wickets



England captain Joe Root celebrates his double century in the first innings.

GALLE, SRI LANKA: England won the first Test against Sri Lanka by seven wickets at Galle International Stadium on Monday as Jonny Bairstow and debutant Dan Lawrence knocked off the 36 runs required on the last day.

Bairstow was 35 not out and Lawrence unbeaten on 21 in a 62-run partnership as England reached 76 for three in their second innings to take a 1-0 lead in the two-Test series.

They had been set a target of 74 after bowling Sri Lanka out for 359 but lost three wickets and were reeling at 14-3 before Bairstow and Lawrence took them to 38-3 when bad light stopped play on Sunday.

"It was a tricky wicket to bat on and you had to play as much off your back foot," said Bairstow after England had been subjected to a torrent of sharp spin from Laisth Embuldeniya, Dilruwan

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka 1st innings	135
England 1st innings	421
Sri Lanka 2nd innings	359
England 2nd innings	
Z Crawley c Mendis b Embuldeniya	8
D Sibley b Embuldeniya	2
J Bairstow not out	35
J Root not out	1
D Lawrence not out	21
Extras (b4, lb5)	9
Total (24.2 overs)	76
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-12, 3-14	
Bowling: Embuldeniya 12-3-29-2, D Perera 11-2-2-34-0, De Silva 1-0-4-0	

Perera and Wanindu Hasaranga. "It's absolutely fabulous, winning Tests is always what you want to do. It's difficult playing in the subcontinent, you know the challenges but to get win on board is pleasing for all the boys." Sri Lanka could have claimed the wicket of Lawrence in the third over of the morning but failed to review after Perera rapped him on the pads. Hawk-eye replays showed it would have hit the wicket.

It took 9.2 overs for England to complete the victory and will now be looking for a sixth successive Test win in Sri Lanka in the second Test, which is also being played at Galle and starts on Friday.

England had set themselves up for the win on the opening day when Sri Lanka turned in a woeful batting performance and were bowled out for 135.

England captain Joe Root then hit 228 runs as England scored 421 for a significant first innings lead. Sri Lanka's batsmen applied themselves much better in their second innings and overhauled the deficit but five wickets for Jack Leach meant they were unable to set a more competitive target for England.

"We were outplayed in the first innings by both bat and bowl and that is what cost us the game," said Sri Lanka skipper Dinesh Chandimal. — Reuters

business

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Major boost for Oman’s commercial fisheries sector

GROWING FLEET: With the addition of the ‘Jawharat Al Wusta’, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries now has a fleet of three commercial fishing vessels offering a combined capacity of 70,000 tonnes of pelagic fisheries per annum.

MUSCAT: Al Wusta Fisheries Industries LLC, a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (part of Oman Investment Authority), celebrated on Monday the arrival of its latest addition to its commercial fishing fleet. ‘Jawharat Al Wusta’ was received by officials at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat.

The 99-metre-long, 16-metre wide vessel features an on board factory for processing, freezing and packing fish with a total capacity of 1,600 tonnes. It boasts all of the features and technologies of a modern fishing vessel.

With the addition of the ‘Jawharat Al Wusta’, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries now has a fleet of three commercial fishing vessels offering a combined capacity of 70,000 tonnes of pelagic fisheries per annum. The



induction of the vessels will help spur Oman’s fisheries production, drive economic diversification and enhance the competitiveness of Omani fish products in international markets.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the arrival of the new vessel will

also open up new employment opportunities for young Omanis who will receive on-the-job training on board the vessels.

He also outlined initiatives adopted by the ministry to support investments in shrimp farming and aquaculture projects, some of which will come into operation this year and contribution to GDP

growth.

Al Wusta Fisheries Industries will deploy the ‘Jawharat Al Wusta’ on the high seas far beyond traditional fishing waters and in accordance with prescribed environmental and commercial norms.

The vessel will also contribute to the development of human

The 99-metre-long, 16-metre wide vessel features an on board factory for processing, freezing and packing fish with a total capacity of 1,600 tonnes. It boasts all of the features and technologies of a modern fishing vessel

capital in commercial fisheries and enhance the efficiency and skills of the national workforce through the establishment of Oman’s first floating training centre on board the commercial fishing vessel.

The facility will be developed and operated in cooperation with specialists of the ministry. Significantly, the arrival of the new ship comes as Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and its subsidiaries pursue the development of a number of fisheries projects, including a shrimp farming venture in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan.

Covering an area of 500 hectares, the facility will offer an annual production capacity of 4,533 tonnes, and will be operational at the end of the first quarter of 2021. Separately, a 3,300 tonne capacity shrimp farming project is also under way in the Wilayat of Jaalan

Bani Bu Ali with an investment of RO 13 million.

It is expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2022. In the Barr Al Hikman area, FDO is investing in one of the largest shrimp farming projects of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa region. Covering an area of 40,000 hectares, the project will boast a capacity of 200,000 tonnes per year.

Through its Blue Waters subsidiary, FDO is implementing a number of aquaculture projects. It includes a finfish hatchery at Al Bustan in Muscat Governorate with a production capacity of up to 8 million fingerlings.

Also under implementation is a floating cage project in Qurayat with a production capacity of 2,000 tonnes of fish per year, rising to 5,000 tonnes in 2023.

The project will also employ 44 Omanis who have been qualified and trained to lead most of the ventures Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), owned by Oman Investment Authority, has under its umbrella, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries, Blue Waters Company, Ocean Shrimp Fish Farming Company and International Marine Products Company.

— ONA

Trump admin slams China’s Huawei, halting shipments from Intel, others



A Huawei logo is seen at a shop at Vina del Mar, Chile. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration notified Huawei suppliers, including chipmaker Intel, that it is revoking certain licenses to sell to the Chinese company and intends to reject dozens of other applications to supply the telecommunications firm, people familiar with the matter said.

The action — likely the last against Huawei Technologies under Republican President Donald Trump — is the latest in a long-running effort to weaken the world’s largest telecommunications equipment maker, which Washington sees as a national security threat.

The notices came amid a flurry of US efforts against China in the final days of Trump’s administration. Democrat Joe Biden will take the oath of office as president on Wednesday. — Reuters

Regulator prepares to licence Oman’s biggest solar photovoltaic project

LANDMARK SCHEME: The announcement comes as Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company (SAGC) gears up to commission the 500 MW capacity scheme ahead of full commercial operation targeted around the middle of this year.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) is preparing to grant a generation licence to Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company SAOC (SAGC), which is implementing the Sultanate’s biggest solar photovoltaic (PV) based power plant in the Wilayat of Ibri in the northwest of the country.

The announcement comes as SAGC, backed by Saudi-based global power and water sector developer ACWA Power, prepares to commission the 500 MW capacity scheme ahead of full commercial operation targeted around the middle of this year.

The proposed Generation Licence (Renewable Energy), once approved, will be effective for a period of 25 years, with the Oman Power and Water Procurement



The proposed Generation Licence (Renewable Energy), once approved, will be effective for a period of 25 years, with the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company offtaking the plant’s electricity output during this period.

Company (OPWP) offtaking the plant’s electricity output during this period.

Generation licences for renewable energy-based projects have previously been awarded to, among others, the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) for its 50 MW wind farm in Harweel and Amin Renewable Energy Company for its 125 MW solar PV scheme with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as the offtaker.

Also known as Ibri-2 PV Independent Power Project (IPP), the giant scheme is nearing completion on a 1300-hectare site near Ibri.

When fully operational, it will feature an estimated 1.4 million bifacial-type solar panels, which generate energy from both top and rear sides.

With cutting-edge, N-type panels supplied by leading Chinese manufacturers, the Ibri venture will be the largest bifacial-

based solar PV project to date in the Middle East, according to experts.

Equity partners in Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company also include Gulf Investment Corporation of Kuwait and Alternative Energy Projects Company.

The consortium of PowerChina, one of the world’s largest power construction contractors and PowerChina Huadong, is building the Ibri-2 IPP as Engineering-Procurement-Construction (EPC) contractors.

The First National Operation and Maintenance Company (NOMAC) has been named the Operations & Maintenance contractor. According to a construction timeline provided by Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company, a start-up test is scheduled later next month with the Commercial Operation Date scheduled for June 1, 2021.

While Ibri-2 IPP will be the largest of its kind to date, it will be surpassed in capacity when Oman’s next solar PV-based Independent Power Project — a 1,000 MW capacity scheme envisioned in two individual schemes of 500 MW apiece — is implemented in the Wilayat of Manah.

India’s budget seen raising import duties by 5 per cent

NEW DELHI: India is considering hiking import duties by 5 per cent to 10 per cent on more than 50 items including smartphones, electronic components and appliances in the upcoming budget, three government sources said.

The move to increase import duties is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s self-reliant India campaign that aims to promote and support domestic manufacturing.

One of the sources said the government was seeking to target additional revenue of about 200 billion to 210 billion rupees (\$2.7 billion to \$2.8 billion) from the moves, as it looks to shore up revenue amidst the pandemic-driven slowdown that has stung the economy.

Two sources also said the duty hikes could impact furniture and electric vehicles, potentially hurting the likes of Swedish furniture maker Ikea and Tesla, which is planning to launch its cars in India this year. — Reuters

Association of
Certified Fraud
Examiners
nominates new
office bearers

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Association of Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Oman Chapter announced that Jose Chacko, Partner - Forensic Technology Services of Crowe Oman, has taken over as President of the Chapter. Jose previously served as Vice President of ACFE Oman for five years.

Meanwhile, a new board of elected officers has assumed charge from January 1, 2021.

Fathiya al Maskari of EY has been elected as the Training Director for the Chapter. The other board members are Khalil al Rawahi (Vice-President, Somya Sreedharan (Secretary), Kevin D'souza (Treasurer), Salim al Mushrafi (Membership Director) and Murad al Balushi (Director at Large).

Davis Kallukaran, outgoing president, will continue on the board as advisor and past president.

"The ACFE is the world's largest anti-fraud organisation and premier provider of anti-fraud training and education. Together, with more than 85,000 members, the ACFE is reducing business fraud worldwide and inspiring public confidence in the integrity and objectivity within the profession," said Jose Chacko.

According to a new report from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), a single case of occupational fraud costs the victim organisation an average of more than \$1.5 million, and Certified Fraud Examiners (CFEs) estimate that organisations lose 5 per cent of their revenues each year to fraud.

In the ACFE's 2020 'Report to the Nations', a study of 2,504 cases of occupational fraud investigated by CFEs in 125 countries, the typical fraud lasted 14 months before it was detected and caused a median loss of \$8,300 a month.

ACFE Oman has achieved strong growth in terms of membership and certified members during the tenure of previous board under the leadership of Davis Kallukaran, said the Chapter in a statement. ACFE Oman Chapter is sponsored by the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS).

"The recent fraud cases around the world points out the need for enhanced fraud awareness and education. It is very important to note that large numbers of nationals are attracted to the profession in recent years and it will add lot of value to Oman. A series of educational events will be organised during the year towards fraud awareness," added Khalil al Rawahi, Vice-President of the Chapter.

ATM: Middle East hotels ready to capitalise on ‘workation’ trend

Novel concept: The pandemic and progressive IT companies have accelerated demand for remote working

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Hotels throughout the Middle East region are preparing to capitalise on the pent-up global demand for 'workations', driven in the main by the social restrictions imposed by governments across the world over the past ten months.

According to research conducted as well as commissioned by Reed Travel Exhibitions, the organiser of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), many travel experts are expecting a surge in workations in 2021 and beyond, a trend that was apparent in 2019, but one which now has such pent-up demand due to the coronavirus travel restrictions.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, which will take place live at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) during May, 16-19, 2021, said: "The hotel industry in the Middle East has gradually started to recover, especially in places such as Dubai.

Staycations created the initial demand after lockdown, the next step has been the continued growth of workations, which are also referred to as leisure stays, which tend to bring in more visitors from overseas."

Fueling this growth are



Longer term, the 'on the go' executive will be a far more common sight in hotels, whether it's Gen Z singletons, millennial professionals, or freelancers who can earn a living from a laptop

DANIELLE CURTIS
Exhibition Director ME,
Arabian Travel Market

companies like Facebook, Twitter and Spotify which have announced that employees can work from home indefinitely,

leading many experts to predict that these digital professionals are likely to work remotely, whilst still connecting safely and securely with their physical offices.

"Longer term, the 'on the go' executive will be a far more common sight in hotels, whether it's Gen Z singletons, millennial professionals, or freelancers who can earn a living from a laptop," added Curtis.

With over 50 per cent of the world's working population doing so from home and the rise of entrepreneurial digital nomads who prefer to work remotely, the popularity of workations will only increase.

This will alleviate the boredom of living and working from home, even after the pandemic has finally been eradicated and

obviously in the short term, it will provide much-needed revenue to not only hotels but the travel trade in general, not to mention government coffers.

"And on that point, as an example, Dubai has introduced a remote visa programme that would entitle visitors to stay for up to 12 months, with access to co-working spaces and government support services," said Curtis.

To accommodate the needs of the 'new normal' smart working traveller even further, an increasing number of hotels in the MENA region are offering pop-up co-working spaces with the aim of rethinking and making the most of the hotel space, which is no longer considered just as a place to stay, instead, it becomes a potential work environment.

PRESS RELEASE
NATIONAL BANK OF
OMAN CONTINUES
TO ENHANCE QR
CODE PAYMENTS



Helping more people go cashless, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has enhanced its QR code payments capabilities, with 6,500 Point of Sale (POS) machines enabled to date.

As the first bank in Oman and the GCC region to launch QR code payments through POS machines, NBO has tied up with many of the country's most widely-used merchants including Al Maha Petrol stations, Oman Oil, Nesto, Spar and MacDonald's, to offer customers easy payments through any local mobile wallet. Continuing to upgrade and expand the service, it's part of the bank's overarching digitalisation strategy, which sees it cater to the rapidly growing digital payments landscape while offering the best possible banking experience.

Maha al Raisi, Head of Retail Products at NBO, said, "Contactless payments are gaining prominence in Oman, offering a more convenient, more secure, and safer alternative to cash. As part of our leading position in the market, we are constantly building on our portfolio of digital and customer-friendly solutions, one of these being our pioneering mobile wallet. Allowing customers to make instant payments using the QR codes with the utmost ease, all they have to do is open their bank app, scan the POS machine screen after generating the barcode and pay."

BAIC MOTOR
PARTICIPATES IN
THE RENOWNED
SAUDI DAKAR
RALLY



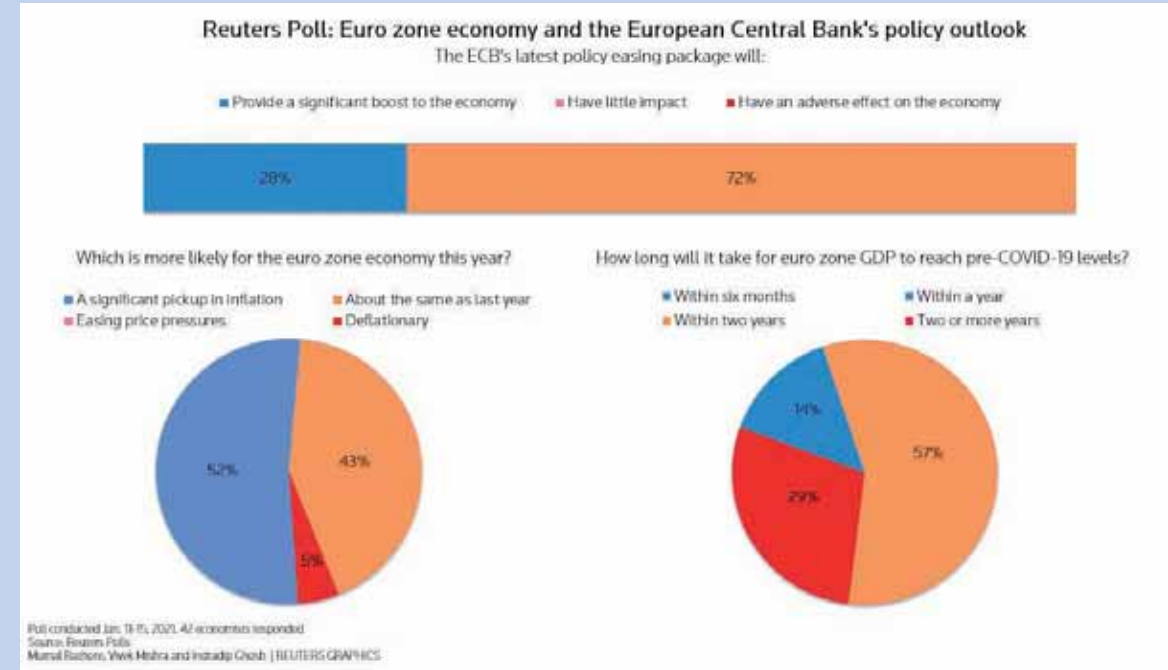
Gulf Great Sands LLC, the exclusive importer of BAIC cars and SUVs in Oman, has expressed delight in the participation of the BAIC team in the 2021 edition of the renowned and challenging Dakar Rally held in Saudi Arabia recently.

BAIC ORV, as the sole Chinese participating off-road brand, embarked on the Dakar Rally using three BJ40 racing cars. The 13 days top rally event highlighted the desert sector with a total route of 7646 km and the specials of 4767 km.

Dakar Rally 2021 ushered in an even more difficult desert sectors with totally different landscapes for competitors, including large-scale sands, dunes and bushes, which presented higher technical requirements, diversity and challenges. For 40-plus years of evolvement, this rally has stuck to its original intention but frequently changed racing rules.

For instance, e-map was not released till 10 minutes before the Rally 2021 kicked off, calling for the co-driver's excellent tempo control.

ECB's latest stimulus to have little impact on euro zone economy



BENGALURU: The European Central Bank's new policy package will have little effect on the euro zone's coronavirus-ravaged economy, according to the forecasts of a Reuters poll of economists.

Despite the ECB's decision to top up its pandemic emergency purchases by half a trillion euros to 1.85 trillion euros and extend the programme for nine months, the bloc's economic outlook remains bleak. The Reuters poll consensus of over 80 economists forecast

the euro zone economy shrank 2.5 per cent last quarter after expanding 12.5 per cent in the third quarter and was expected to grow 0.6 per cent this quarter, nearly half the 1.1 per cent predicted a month ago.

It was then expected to expand 2.3 per cent, 1.9 per cent and 1.0 per cent in the second, third and fourth quarters, largely unchanged from last month's forecasts collected just before the ECB introduced more stimulus.

Over 70 per cent of economists, or 28 of 39 who

replied to an additional question, said the ECB's latest policy moves would have little impact on the euro zone economy. The others said it would provide a significant boost.

"Interest rates are already so low and policy is ultra-loose, so for now, monetary policy cannot impact investment or consumer demand. Thus we do not think the ECB can influence the economy strongly at this time," said Christoph Weil, senior economist at Commerzbank. "We expect a bitter couple

of months. Lockdowns will dampen the economy and we expect falling GDP in the last quarter of 2020 and in the first quarter of this year. So technically a recession".

Of the participants in the Jan. 11-15 survey, over 25 per cent expected the euro zone - where growth plumbed to a historic low in the first half of 2020 - to have again entered a technical recession, defined as two consecutive quarters of contraction.

On an annualised basis, the economy was expected to have shrunk 7.3 per cent in 2020, roughly in line with the last poll, but for this year, the median was downgraded to 4.5 per cent from 5.0 per cent last month. For 2022, the growth forecast was upgraded to 3.9 per cent from 3.5 per cent.

"The start of the year continues to bring bad news for Europe as the health situation deteriorates. With lockdowns already being extended in several countries, short-term risks to the economic outlook are clearly skewed to the downside, especially as the vaccination roll-out is still slow," said Angel Talavera, head of Europe economics at Oxford Economics. — Reuters

**Dollar stands firm against rivals**

The US dollar held firm at a four-week high against its rivals on Monday as an undercurrent of risk aversion swept through currency markets in the backdrop of weak US data. — **Reuters**

**Oil drops ending supply-led rally**

Oil prices fell on Monday, extending losses that last week ended a rally driven by production cuts with the market's recovery outlook being called into question. — **Reuters**

**Gold prices recover**

Gold prices firmed on Monday. Spot gold rose 0.6 per cent to \$1,837.21 per ounce, after falling to their lowest since December 2, at \$1,809.90 earlier in the session. — **Reuters**

China's economy picks up speed in fourth quarter

BEIJING: China's economy picked up speed in the fourth quarter, with growth beating expectations as it ended a rough coronavirus-stricken 2020 in remarkably good shape and remained poised to expand further this year even as the global pandemic rages unabated.

Gross domestic product grew 2.3 per cent in 2020, official data showed on Monday, making China the only major economy in the world to avoid a contraction last year as many nations struggled to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. And China is expected to continue to power ahead of its peers this year, with GDP set to expand at the fastest pace in a decade at 8.4 per cent, according to a Reuters poll.

The world's second-largest economy has surprised many with the speed of its recovery from the coronavirus jolt, especially as policymakers have also had to navigate tense US-China relations on trade and other fronts.

Beijing's strict virus curbs enabled it to largely contain the COVID-19 outbreak much quicker than most countries, while government-led policy stimulus and local manufacturers stepping up production to supply goods to many countries crippled by the pandemic have also helped fire up momentum.

GDP expanded 6.5 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter,



A worker welds a bicycle steel rim at a factory manufacturing sports equipment in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. — **Reuters**

data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed, quicker than the 6.1 per cent forecast by economists in a Reuters poll, and followed the third quarter's solid 4.9 per cent growth.

"The higher-than-expected GDP number indicates that growth has stepped into the expansionary zone, although some sectors remain in recovery," said Xing Zhaopeng, an economist at ANZ in Shanghai.

"Policy exiting will pose

counter-cyclical pressures on 2021 growth." Backed by the strict virus containment measures and policy stimulus, the economy has recovered steadily from a steep 6.8 per cent slump in the first three months of 2020, when an outbreak of COVID-19 in the central city of Wuhan turned into a full-blown epidemic.

Asia's economic powerhouse has been fuelled by a surprisingly resilient export sector, but China's consumption - a key driver of

growth - has lagged expectations amid fears of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases.

Data last week showed Chinese exports grew by more than expected in December, as coronavirus disruptions around the world fuelled demand for Chinese goods even as a stronger yuan made exports more expensive for overseas buyers.

Yet, underscoring the massive COVID-19 impact worldwide, China's 2020 GDP growth marked

The world's second-largest economy has surprised many with the speed of its recovery from the coronavirus jolt, especially as policymakers have also had to navigate tense US-China relations on trade and other fronts

its weakest pace since 1976, the final year of the decade-long Cultural Revolution that wrecked the economy.

Overall, the slew of brightening economic data has reduced the need for more monetary easing this year, leading the central bank to scale back some policy support, sources said, but there would be no abrupt shift in policy direction, according to top policymakers.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, GDP rose 2.6 per cent in October-December, the bureau said, compared with expectations for a 3.2 per cent rise and an upwardly revised 3.0 gain in the previous quarter.

Highlighting the weakness in consumption, retail sales fell 3.9 per cent last year, marking the first contraction since 1968, records from NBS showed. Growth in retail sales in December missed analyst forecasts and eased to 4.6 per cent from November's 5.0 per cent, as sales of garments,

cosmetics, telecoms and autos slowed.

However, China's vast manufacturing sector continued to gain momentum, with industrial output rising at a faster-than-expected rate of 7.3 per cent last month from a year ago, hitting the highest since March 2019.

Ning Jizhe, head of China's statistics bureau, told a briefing that there would be many favourable conditions to sustain China's economic recovery in 2021, citing the country's large market and resilient supply chains.

This year marks the start of China's 14th five-year plan, which policymakers see as vital for steering the economy past the so-called "middle-income trap".

China still faces many challenges, not least the tensions between Beijing and Washington and how they would play out under the new US administration led by President-elect Joe Biden.

As well, rising labour costs, the ageing population, and a recent spike in credit defaults add to risks for an economy that is still trying to reduce a mountain of debt.

"We should be alert to the following problems in 2021: first the imbalance of economic recovery. Compared with investment and export, consumption is weak as a whole and has yet to return to normal levels," said Wang Jun, Beijing-based chief economist at Zhongyuan Bank. — **Reuters**

Frankfurt airport traffic nosedives

FRANKFURT: The operator of Frankfurt airport said on Monday that passenger numbers in 2020 plunged to their lowest since the 1980s as the coronavirus pandemic devastated the travel sector. Germany's largest airport recorded 18.8 million passengers in 2020, a decline of 73 per cent compared with the year before, Fraport said, hitting lows not seen since 1984.

Air traffic came to a complete standstill between April and June during the first coronavirus lockdown, "with weekly passenger figures plummeting by up to 98 per cent year-on-year",



A passenger is seen inside Frankfurt International Airport. — **Reuters**

Fraport said.

Traffic at the hub recovered in the third quarter of 2020, but then fell again as restrictions intensified on a resurgence of the virus late in the year, the company said.

In December alone, passenger traffic was down 82 per cent year-on-year to just over 890,000 people.

"The year 2020 brought extreme challenges to the entire aviation industry," Fraport chief executive Stefan Schulte said.

In the summer, the company said it would cut 3,000 to 4,000 jobs, or around 15 per cent of its workforce.

The Fraport boss stressed that recent vaccination rollouts will lift the company's fortunes, and he believes "Frankfurt's passenger traffic will rebound noticeably in the second half of 2021". — **AFP**

German government finalises 2020 budget

BERLIN: The German government has finalised its 2020 budget with net new debt of below 150 billion euros (\$181 billion), which is roughly a third less than the originally planned borrowing of nearly 218 billion euros, government sources said on Monday.

Berlin needed less debt because earmarked money for public investment did not flow into projects as quickly

as expected, coronavirus aid was not tapped by as many firms as anticipated and the pandemic-related hit to tax revenues was smaller than projected, two officials said on condition of anonymity.

Nonetheless, new borrowing in 2020 was the highest in German history, easily surpassing the previous record of 44 billion euros in 2010, following the financial crisis. — **Reuters**

Samsung's Lee receives 30-month prison term in bribery trial



SEOUL: A South Korean court sentenced Samsung Electronics vice chairman Jay Y Lee (pictured) to two and a half years in prison on Monday, which could delay the group's ownership restructuring following the death of Lee's father in October.

The ruling also cements a major shift in South Korea's view on wrongdoings committed by the owners of the country's powerful conglomerates, or chaebol, which led the country's economic rise after the Korean War on the back of what has been criticised as cosy relations with politicians.

Lee had served one year in prison for bribing an associate of former President Park Geun-hye when an appeals court suspended it in 2018; a year later, the Supreme Court ordered him retried.

His prison time will count against his latest sentence. Monday's sentencing by the Seoul High Court can be appealed to the Supreme Court within seven days. — **Reuters**

Biden to cancel Keystone XL pipeline permit

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden is planning to cancel the permit for the \$9 billion Keystone XL pipeline project as one of his first acts in office, and perhaps as soon as his first day, according to a source familiar with his thinking.

President Donald Trump, a Republican, had made building the pipeline a central promise of his presidential campaign. Biden, who will be inaugurated on Wednesday, was vice president in the Obama administration when it rejected the project as contrary to its efforts to combat climate change.



Opponents of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines protest, at Lafayette Park next to the White House in Washington, in this file photo. — **AFP**

The words "Rescind Keystone XL pipeline permit" appear on a list of executive actions likely scheduled for the first day of Biden's presidency.

Biden had earlier vowed to scrap the oil pipeline's presidential permit if he became president. Advertisement Canada's ambassador to the United States said she would continue to promote a project that she said fit with both countries' environmental plans.

"There is no better partner for the United States on climate action than Canada as we work together for green transition," Ambassador

Kirsten Hillman said.

The project had been slowed by legal issues in the United States. It also faced opposition from environmentalists seeking to check the expansion of Canada's oil sands by opposing new pipelines to move its crude to refineries.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney said on Twitter that cancellation would eliminate jobs, weaken US-Canada relations and undermine American national security by making the United States more dependent on Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries' oil imports. — **Reuters**

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Dar Al Aman Automotive Services Center, registered with Commercial Register Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 1206937 does hereby declare that it will change its legal form from ASSTD to LLC as per Article 30 of Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019 as amended. Hence, each interested party shall be notified of such amendment and whoever objects to such amendment shall submit its objection grounds to the Commercial Register Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within thirty days as of the date of publishing this declaration.

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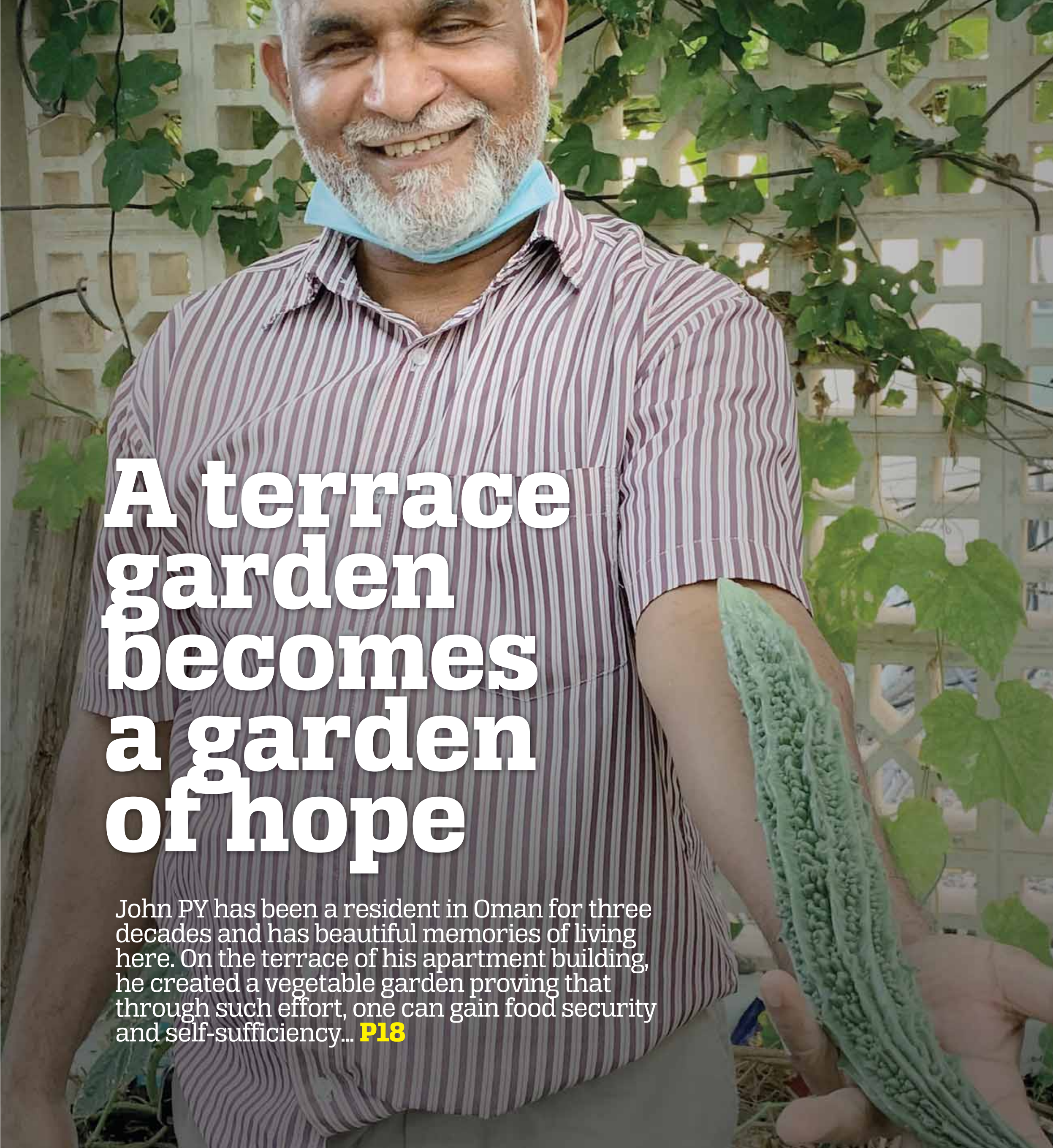
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A terrace garden becomes a garden of hope

John PY has been a resident in Oman for three decades and has beautiful memories of living here. On the terrace of his apartment building, he created a vegetable garden proving that through such effort, one can gain food security and self-sufficiency... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

DIGITAL DIVIDE



UNWANTED TECH HELPS BRIDGE 'DIGITAL DIVIDE' IN LOCKDOWN BRITAIN

When British single mother Martha sensed another COVID-19 lockdown was looming, one of her biggest worries was how her three young sons would cope with online schooling again when the family still didn't have a computer... **Story on Page 20**

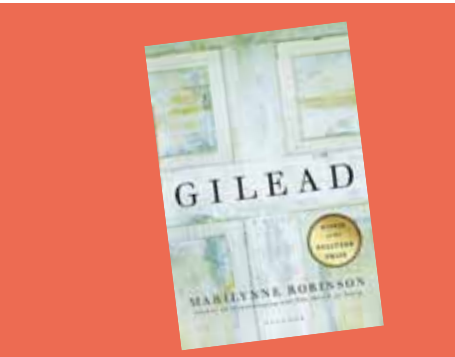
DISCOVERY



EGYPT UNVEILS 3,000-YEAR-OLD COFFINS IN LATEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY

CAIRO: Egypt has unveiled a significant new archaeological discovery at the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo, including 54 wooden coffins, many of which can be traced back 3,000 years to the New Kingdom period... **Story on Page 19**

READ



GILEAD

BY MARILYNNE ROBINSON
Ames has lived all of his life in Gilead, Iowa, and the novel delves into the history of the area through the characters of Ames's father and grandfather — also ministers, but deeply divided on ideas such as pacifism, duty, and the abolitionist movement.

GASTRONOMY



EDIBLE INSECTS MOVE CLOSER TO EUROPEAN PLATES

The EU's food watchdog on Wednesday paved the way for diners across Europe to tuck into insects as it gave safety approval for human consumption of dried yellow mealworm... **Story on Page 19**

IN BRIEF



RUSSIAN CIRCUS SPARKS OUTRAGE WITH GOATS, MONKEY IN SWASTIKA FLAG

A Russian circus performance in which a monkey and a number of goats appeared dressed in clothes bearing Nazi symbols has sparked outrage in Germany and could have legal consequences in Russia.



A terrace garden becomes a garden of hope

BY LAKHSMI KOTHANETH

In the middle of the city, on the terrace of an apartment building, is where one man is trying to prove self-sufficiency in food security.

John PY has been a resident in Oman for three decades and has beautiful memories of living here and practising his hobby – growing his own vegetable garden.

All the seeds are from the vegetables he uses regularly. He does not buy soil as he uses the fruits and vegetable leftover to make compost manure. In return, the plants provide him with a nourishing variety of vegetables. As they are organic, there is a lot of interest from his friends, but what he achieved during the lockdown probably was the best reward he received.

The lockdown brought job loss as well as a cut in salary for many. That is when he realised the true potential of his vegetable garden. He was able to provide vegetables to individuals who were going through hardship.

"I came across some families who were going through challenges and I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to support them with my vegetables," said John who looks forward to every evening after work to spend time with his plants.

"The fact that we are so high up on the terrace has the benefit of staying clear from the insects and pests. Our main visitors are the bees. And they are most welcome. Even otherwise I keep a closed bottle with two holes on the top on either side," he said pointing

out to the hanging bottle. The bottle has an organic mixture of brown sugar, banana and honey – all materials from the kitchen and once the insects fly into the bottle they cannot come out.

So for John, chemical pesticides are a big no. As we walk under the canopy of his creepers, pumpkins are waiting to be picked along with bitter and snake gourds. On the other side, there is a bunch of spinach just growing, and eggplants have sprouted flowers and growing in lengthy containers are onions as well as tomatoes and beans grow in the comfort of thrown away and recycled bathtubs and buckets.

Nothing is a waste as far as John is concerned. Dead plants at the end of the season or after harvest go back to the soil as manure. There is no carbon footprint for his collection of vegetables. The surplus moves on as gifts. The seeds of the season are saved for the next round of planting when the weather is appropriate. Extra seeds are exchanged with other gardeners.

His objective is very clear – he wants to convey the message that everyone can make their own food within whatever space one has.

He is more than happy to give tips- "Bitter gourd is excellent for health especially for individuals who suffer from diabetes, however, people shy away saying it is too bitter. All you have to do is pour room temperature cooked rice water and it will reduce the bitterness."

"A good fertilizer is powdered dry neem fruits and groundnuts mixed with banana

and water," he explained. So don't just throw away the seeds from your kitchen after cooking instead leave them on the soil to flourish.



ENTERTAINMENT

Magicians mark 100 years of sawing people in half



HE CAME, he sawed, he conquered. One hundred years ago on Sunday, illusionist P T Selbit put a woman in a box on the stage of London's Finsbury Park Empire and sawed right through the wood, creating a magical classic.

Now, 100 years on, magicians from around the world will be getting together online this weekend to celebrate the centenary of that landmark performance.

"This took off and became the most influential and the most famous illusion, in my opinion, that there's ever been," said magician and



historian Mike Caveney who is writing a book on the illusion.

"The magician wasn't doing this trick to an inanimate object. He was doing it to a human being, which raised it up to a whole new level."

In the original version, the saw went through, the box was opened and the person emerged unharmed.

Down the years, magicians developed refinements, with the two halves pulled apart. Celebrity magician David Copperfield came up with his own version "The Death Saw" where he was the one tied down to a platform as a giant rotary blade sliced him in two.

Sometimes he actually got injured, Copperfield said in an interview filmed for Sunday's online event.

"I got cut a few times by the blade because the blade was a little bit off, you know, stages are different every theatre you have," Copperfield said.

The London-based Magic Circle organisation will host the celebrations with a live streamed-event on Facebook from 1800 GMT on Sunday.

Guests will include Debbie McGee, the wife of the late British TV magician Paul Daniels, who will describe the many times she survived the procedure. — Reuters



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TUESDAY | JANUARY 19 | 2021

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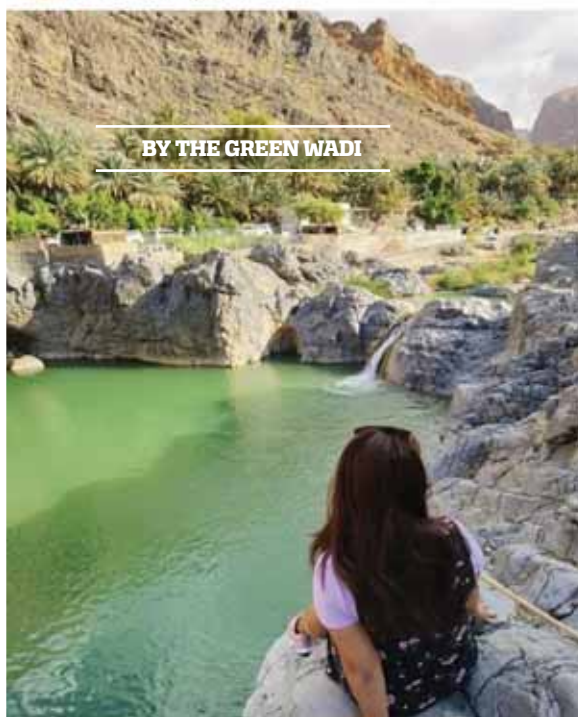


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DISCOVERY

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Egypt unveils 3,000-year-old coffins in latest archaeological discovery

Egypt has unveiled a significant new archaeological discovery at the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo,

including 54 wooden coffins, many of which can be traced back 3,000 years to the New Kingdom period.

The funerary temple of Queen Neit was also discovered near the pyramid of

her husband, King Teti of Egypt's 6th dynasty which dates back 4,200 years, said famed archaeologist Zahi Hawass, who headed the archaeological mission. The coffins, or sarcophagi,

include the first dating back to the New Kingdom to be found at Saqqara, a UNESCO world heritage site that is home to the Step Pyramid, the tourism and antiquities ministry said in a statement. Carved in human form and painted in bright colours, many of them are still intact.

Ancient games, statues, and masks were also found.

"All these discoveries will rewrite the history of Saqqara and the New Kingdom," said Hawass.

Officials are keen to show off newly discovered artefacts as they try to revive visitor numbers after the tourism industry received a painful blow during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of tourists visiting the country dropped to 3.5 million last year from 13.1 million in 2019. — **Reuters**

features

features

GASTRONOMY

Edible insects move closer to European plates



THE EU'S FOOD watchdog on Wednesday paved the way for diners across Europe to tuck into insects as it gave safety approval for human consumption of dried yellow mealworm.

The move by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the preliminary step needed before officials can decide whether to allow the beetle larvae to be sold to consumers across the 27-nation bloc.

The ruling is the first completed risk assessment of an insect food product application by the agency as it looks to approve a potential boom sector that could provide a sustainable source of protein.

It could "pave the way for

that more research needed to be done on possible allergic reactions to the insects.

The burgeoning insect farming industry in Europe welcomed the decision and said they hoped to see authorities give permission for yellow mealworms to be marketed to the public by the middle of this year.

"The release of this document indeed represents an important milestone towards the wider EU commercialisation of edible insects," Antoine Hubert, president of the International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed, said in a statement.

The Italy-based EFSA has more insect investigations on its plate and is also set to



the first EU-wide approval," Ermolaos Ververis, scientific officer in EFSA's NUTRI unit, said in a statement.

"Risk evaluation is a decisive and necessary step in the regulation of novel foods by supporting policy makers in the EU in making science-based decisions and ensuring the safety of consumers."

The EFSA said it had found the mealworms — or *Tenebrio molitor* larva — were safe to be eaten "either as a whole dried insect or in the form of powder" after an application from French insect-rearing firm Miconutris.

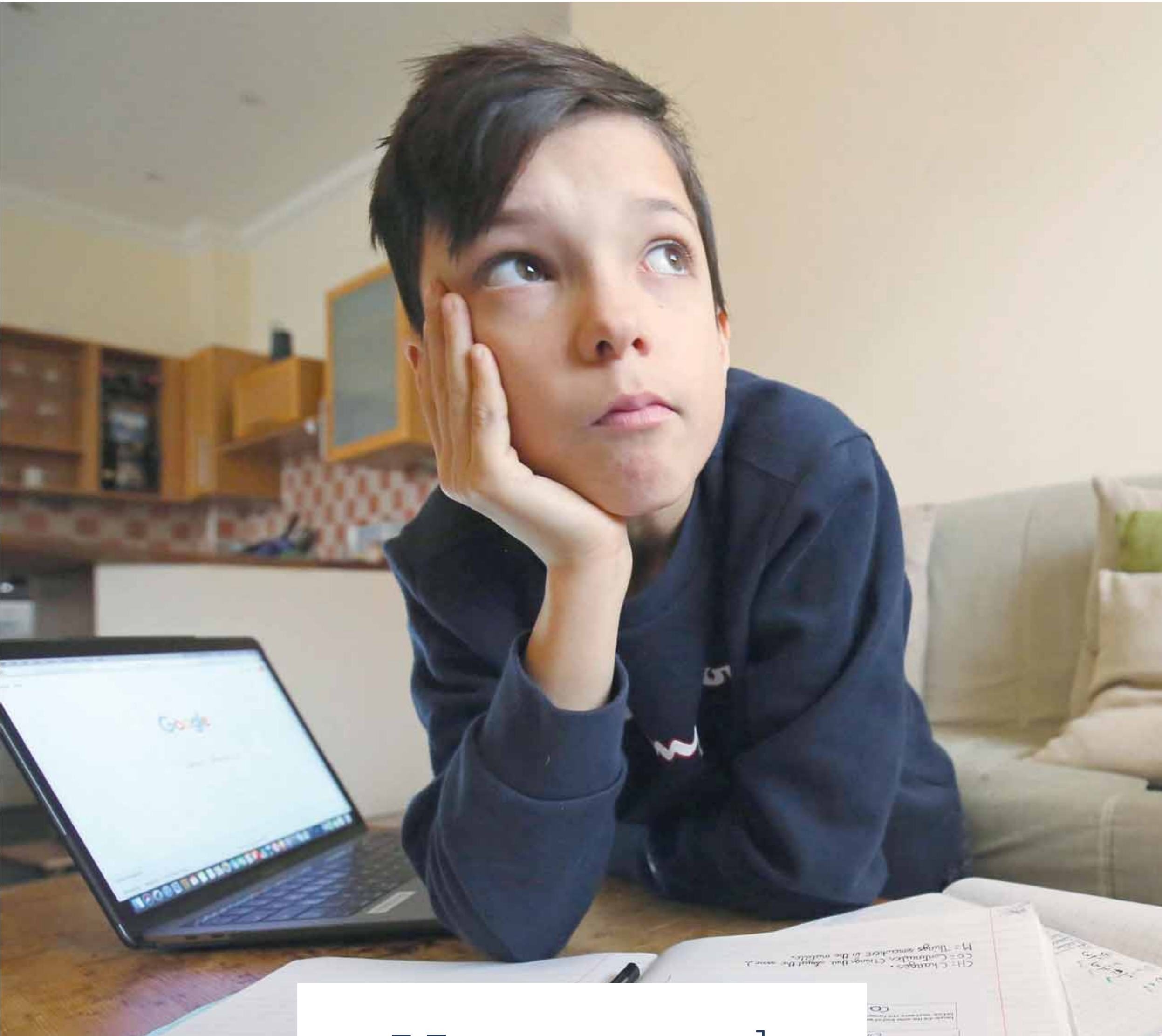
"Its main components are protein, fat and fibre," the statement said, but warned

examine if crickets and grasshoppers are fit for consumption.

Insects are widely eaten elsewhere on the globe with an estimated 1,000 species finding their way onto dinner plates of some 2 billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

They are already available for human consumption in a small number of EU countries and are more widely produced for use in animal feed.

The industry says it expects the European market for insect-based food products to grow rapidly in the coming years and for production to reach some 260,000 tonnes by 2030. — **AFP**



BY SONIA ELKS

When British single mother Martha sensed another COVID-19 lockdown was looming, one of her biggest worries was how her three young sons would cope with online schooling again when the family still didn't have a computer.

Martha's children, who are all at primary school in London, struggled during the first round of school closures last year — unable to access their school's digital lessons and cut off from their classmates.

"They missed out on the fundamentals that were supposed to be in place — and they missed out on basic things like being in contact with their friends", said Martha, who asked not to give her full name to protect the family's identity.

Unable to afford a computer, she found help from Catbytes in south London, one of a growing number of community initiatives distributing donated computers to children and other groups affected by "digital poverty" during the pandemic.

"They're happy because they can get on with their school work", said Martha, who was able to borrow a laptop from Catbytes' Tech Library and later got another from the school.

"At home is their classroom (now)", she said by phone from her south London home.

Nearly one in 10 British families — including up to 1.8 million children — had no computer or tablet at home at the start of the pandemic, according to estimates from the country's Ofcom media regulator.

Up to 900,000 children only had Internet access at home through a mobile phone

Unwanted tech helps bridge 'digital divide' in lockdown Britain

network, it found.

Many have had a hard time keeping up with classes since England's third national lockdown began on January 4, shutting schools for most pupils.

The government has pledged more than a million laptops to help children get online, and has said that those without computers at home can attend school if necessary.

But education experts and charities have warned that many poorer families are still struggling with a "digital divide" that risks widening existing education

gaps.

"We know there are still many children who are missing out", said Kate Anstey, a project lead at the charity Child Poverty Action Group, urging authorities to act on lessons from school closures in the first lockdown last year.

"We heard of secondary school pupils attempting to write essays on phones, children queueing up to use one household device and parents waking up early to copy out worksheets by hand for their children", she said.

'A BIG NEED'

Dozens of business and community-led computer donation schemes have sprung up around the country to help plug gaps, an offshoot of "mutual aid" community groups established in many neighbourhoods to help the vulnerable during the pandemic.

"The demand has always been there but it has really skyrocketed in recent weeks with the schools closing", said Cat Smith, a volunteer at London-based Lambeth Tech Aid, which was established in April 2020.

The number of calls has "exploded" in recent weeks, said Nina Porter, an organiser at the Level Up laptop donation scheme in East Surrey, with offers of equipment pouring in. Organisers said they had been taken aback by the level of need, with some schools requesting more than a hundred devices for students with no or insufficient devices at home.

By gathering unwanted computers to be refurbished and re-used, the schemes also highlight issues around tech waste.

"It shows there is a lot that can be done with the resources that are already in our community", said Ugo Vallauri from the tech repair and re-use charity The Restart Project, which runs a list of computer donation projects around the country.

While donated tech is not always in perfect condition, having access to a computer or tablet can make a massive difference for young people and their families.

"It's a big need", said Simon Howatson, Chief Executive of tech re-use firm Rebuyer, which is co-organising the Donate Digital scheme in the north east of the country.

"In the pilot we did, the headteacher came back to me and said, 'Simon, we've had families crying on the doorstep, it means that much to them.'"

— Thomson Reuters Foundation