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BAYERN START CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TITLE DEFENCE AGAINST ATLETICO MADRID



P14

DEEP DIVING THE SEAS OF OMAN WITH DEE



P20

OMAN'S FIRST UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SCHEME TO HELP STABILISE LABOUR MARKET



Postal stamp on Oman-China ties



A new postal stamp commemorating the establishment of modern time Oman-China relations was launched at the Foreign Ministry here on Tuesday under the auspices of Mohammed bin Nassir al Wahaibi, Administrative and Financial Affairs Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry. The stamp, issued by Oman Post highlights images of a typical Omani fort, besides documenting the epic journey of Sindbad from the Port of Sohar to the Port of Guangzhou in China. **DETAILS ON P3**

Top UN official hails Sultanate's foreign policy

NEW YORK: Volkan Bozkir, President of the UN General-Assembly, affirmed that the Sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is distinguished by wisdom and realism and is based on a deep-rooted civilizational legacy.

Speaking at a meeting with Dr Mohamed al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, at the headquarters of the Sultanate's mission in New York, Volkan Bozkir commended the Sultanate's foreign policy noting that its political notion is based on respecting the principles of the UN Charter and the international



law which earned it international respect.

The president of the UN General assembly added that the world needs countries like Oman that seek to solve the difference among countries and build confidence between the states and peoples.

The meeting was attended by ambassadors of the GCC countries and a number of Arab ambassadors.

— ONA

OMAN

Trade with India grew 8.5 per cent

MUSCAT: The 9th session of the Oman-India Joint Commission meeting was held on October 19, 2020 through the virtual platform. It was co-chaired by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry. For Oman, India was the third-largest source for its imports and the third-largest market for its non-oil exports. Bilateral trade between Oman and India grew at 8.5 per cent in 2019-20 over the previous year to reach \$5.93 billion. While India's exports to Oman were valued at \$2.26 billion, India's imports from Oman amounted to \$3.67 billion in 2019-2020.

INSIDE


SUDAN EYES DEBT RELIEF AFTER LIFTING FROM US LIST **P6**


DROUGHT AND HUNGER DRIVE NEPAL FARMERS TO INDIA **P9**

MASK UP TO FIGHT COVID

Unicef campaign calls for proper use of mask

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

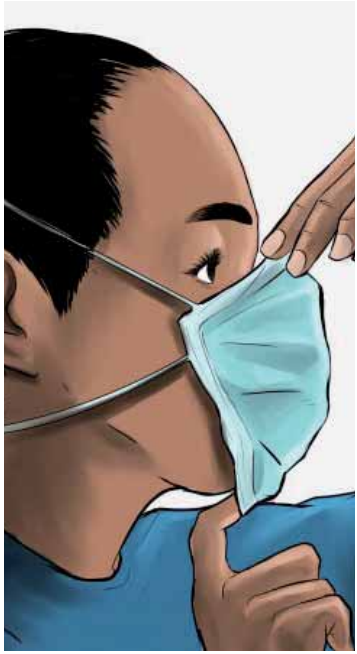
The authorities have been conveying to the public the importance of taking measures to bring break the COVID-19 curve as the recovery rate has come down to 87.3 per cent as of Tuesday. At this point, it has been clear that it is a self-discipline which is most effective in addition to night lockdowns which are in force since last week from 8:00 pm to 5 am.

Wearing a mask is not just for self-protection, but also for the protection of others. It has currently become part of the etiquette.

Unicef has an awareness campaign on the importance of wearing a mask called #MaskUp as there has been a spike in COVID-19 cases in the Middle East and North Africa. The campaign features children and influencers to engage the public to wear masks and highlight how to properly use and dispose them safely.

The campaign is even more important now as the number of COVID-19 cases in the region has now touched 2.7 million.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Juliette



Touma, Regional Chief of Communications, Unicef Middle East and North Africa, Regional Office, said: "This is a campaign we have launched in the middle of the August across the Middle East and North Africa, and the purpose is to encourage people to wear a mask and wear it the right way. Also when they dispose masks, dispose it, let them dispose it safely."

The #MaskUp campaign touches upon three areas. The campaign is interactive in the sense as they did not want top-down approach but rather be among

the communities.

"We wanted the message to be liked and wanted it to reach as many people as possible. It is not just about reaching out to millions, which we are, but it is also about changing the social behaviour. We aspire to take this campaign to people and to abide by wearing the mask the right way, encouraging others to wear it and also to dispose them off safely," said Touma.

"We have celebrities and influencers around the region who have come forward to support this campaign. We have Lebanese singer who appears every three days with an important message on masks on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Athletes, artists, journalists and musicians have given their voice for this campaign. The WHO has joined hands with us and has adopted the Mask Up campaign so we can cooperate together. This morning, we have been joined by Tik Tok in MENA who have come to help us with the promotion of this campaign. We will have sessions with young people to talk about masks and the importance of wearing masks," explained Touma.

TURN TO P2

WITH HM'S BLESSINGS, TOURIST REST HOUSE OPENS IN SAMAYIL



With the Royal blessing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Al Faihaa Tourist Rest House was opened in the Wilayat of Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The rest house was established in response to the Royal orders of late Sultan Qaboos, May Allah the Almighty have Mercy on him, with the aim of encouraging domestic tourism and providing tourist facilities on the roadside to serve as a stop station and a relaxation point for tourists and visitors. **DETAILS ON P2**

Sultanate and Pakistan sign MoU on military cooperation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) at the Ministry of Defence headquarters in Al Murtafa'a Camp in the field of military cooperation between the two friendly countries.

The MoU was signed by Mohammed bin Nasser al Rasbi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, and K K Ahsan Wagan, Ambassador of

the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Sultanate.

The MoU aims to frame aspects of military cooperation between the Sultanate and Pakistan in a way that enhances the existing cooperation relations and serves the common interest of the two friendly countries.

The signing ceremony was attended by the Military Attaché at the Pakistani Embassy in Muscat. — ONA



WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 21°C

SALALAH
MAX: 34°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 35°C
MIN: 19°C

SUNRISE 06.07 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:51
DHUHR: 11:57
ASR: 15:14
MAGHRIB: 17:41
ISHA: 19:52



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■ SAMAYIL GETS TOURIST REST HOUSE



With the Royal blessing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Al Faihaa Tourist Rest House was opened in the Wilayat of Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on Tuesday. The opening ceremony was presided over by Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Royal Court Affairs Secretary-General. It comprises a luxury hotel, multi-purpose hall, upscale restaurant, terraces overlooking a swimming pool and a park. — ONA

Lockdown shows results, SC to take the final call

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](https://twitter.com/vinot_nair)

The decision to extend the ban on movement or to introduce a complete lockdown will be taken by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19, said Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Tuesday.

In an interview to BBC Arabic Radio, he said, “The increasing number of new cases in the Sultanate has brought the health sector to a semi-paralyzed situation as all efforts have been taken to care for COVID-19 patients, which is similar to other countries.” He said the number of deaths compared to the cases is low.

Meanwhile, officials have indicated that the number of patients who were admitted to intensive at Royal Hospital has come down after the imposition of the night lockdown to around 40 from over 50.

The officials added that those recovering from the COVID -19 have been facing issues such as tiredness, lack of appetite and weakness of the body organs, causing new challenges to doctors and nurses.

The Sultanate reported 439 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, bringing the total number of cases registered in the



Those recovering from the COVID -19 have been facing issues such as tiredness, lack of appetite and weakness of the body organs, causing new challenges to doctors and nurses

Sultanate to 111, 033.

Eight new COVID-19 deaths took the total death toll to 1,122.

The total recovery cases reached 96, 949, while the recovery rate dropped to 87.3%.

During the past 24 hours, 50 people were hospitalized, taking the total number of in-patients to 501, of which 207 cases are in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

In his last press conference, Dr Al Saeedi said the complete closure or lockdown comes at a very high economic cost, but as per the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the main aim is to safeguard people’s lives irrespective of other sacrifices.

Working group formed to stop illicit trade

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Tuesday issued a Ministerial Decision No. 183/2020 forming a working team to study multiple commercial registers and trading in them.

Headed by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Commerce and Industry Under-Secretary, the working team will have members from other authorities concerned who will assist the ministry in its new approach to establishing a suitable investment environment that encourages firms to engage in business in the country.

The team will revise mechanisms to regulate the multiplicity of commercial registers and cancellation of lease contracts of commercial outlets by coordinating with the departments concerned. It will conduct field visits to sites and locations where expatriate workers operate. It will also lay down mechanisms to check the private businesses’ commitment to Omanisation. In addition, the team will check the existence of suitable residence for expats in accordance with regulations. The working team will devise proper mechanisms to curb illicit trade.

The team will organize meetings with representatives of private sector establishments and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to listen to their views and discuss their proposals about ways to solve the problem of multiplicity of commercial registers. — ONA

Oman takes part in mock drill

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) took part in the regional exercise known as Indian Ocean Wave Exercise (IOwave20) on Tuesday. The exercise was organized by the international governmental ocean sciences committee affiliated to the UNESCO and entrusted with the Indian Ocean tsunami’s early warning system.

The exercise was conducted this time via video-conferencing. It was a simulation of an earthquake measuring 9 degrees magnitude and

causing 13-metre high tsunami wave that reaches the Sultanate’s coast in 15 minutes.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, the Ministry of Information, the National Committee for Management of Emergency Cases and the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance took part in the exercise

Through the exercise, the participants revised and assessed their operational procedures, plans, national policies and respective tsunami response.

Natural disasters like tsunamis, cyclones and floods can happen anytime and this requires authorities to be prepared to tackle related emergencies by taking quick and accurate decisions about eviction of endangered populations.

“IOwave20” is conducted every two years with the participation of countries that are members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. The exercise management is undertaken by three regional centres in Indonesia, India and Australia. — ONA

Mask up to combat covid-19

People have been debating about the types of masks (disposable, medical or fabric). This is what she has to say, “We are advocating masks – whether it is medical, or disposable or fabric mask, we are advocating people to wear the mask not only to protect people around you, but your self. So that is very important.”

“What we are encouraging in the maskup campaign is not just to wear a mask but also to dispose it the right way. Dispose it in a closed bin and if it is a reusable mask then wash it as often



Juliette S Touma

as possible.”

According to Touma the message is simple, “Encourage others to mask up and do not shy away from telling people if they are not wearing a mask because it is a responsibility that all of us have, and the situation is very critical in the region. We have 2.7 million people with COVID-19 in the region. Sadly the numbers are going up instead of going down. It is impacting every one. If we want to continue with our lives then we must take all precautions and mask is an important one.”

Awareness campaign needed before launch of COVID-19 vaccine

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The National Bioethics Committee urged the need for an awareness campaign on COVID-19 vaccine. The committee is necessary to win over some people who may oppose the vaccine.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Zahid al Mandhari (pictured), an oncologist at Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Center, and a member of the National Bioethics Committee, said that vaccines not only protect the individuals but also the community.

"Everyone should be vaccinated if this is available and do not follow movements against vaccination. There must be guidelines in each country on how to administer the vaccine, with clear standards and guidelines for giving priority to vaccination. An all-round awareness campaign is the need of the hour in order to educate the citizens and residents of the



Sultanate of Oman and trust is the key to convincing the sceptics," said Dr Mandhari.

"Transparency and the need to educate the public and to continue to share data before, during and after vaccination campaigns in order to build trust are equally crucial in the days we expect the virus to hit the market soon.

"Prioritisation in vaccinations starts with frontline workers and those at highest risk and continuing

in phases based on exposure and risk while not forgetting minorities and vulnerable groups," Dr Mandhari said.

He said that no vaccine will be administered until proven safe in the Sultanate. "We have assurances from the Minister of Health that no vaccine will be given unless it is proven to be safe and effective," said Dr Mandhari.

Under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahd bin al Julanda al Said, President of Sultan Qaboos University and Chairman of the Bioethics Committee, the National Bioethics Committee has recently organised the ninth international virtual forum, "COVID-19 Vaccine: A Problem or a Solution: Ethical Issues Associated with the Development and Distribution of the Vaccine - Local and International" in cooperation with the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Unesco and the Ministry of Health. More than 380 participants from different parts of the world took part in the conference.



Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary for Administration and Financial Affairs of MoFA; Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Information; Li Lingbing, Ambassador of China to Oman; and Abdulmalik al Balushi, CEO of Oman Post, at the launch ceremony in Muscat on Tuesday.

Stamp celebrates 40 years of Oman, China friendship

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

In recognition of the Sultanate's special relationship with China, Oman Post, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, launched a new stamp on Tuesday. Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary for Administration and Financial Affairs of MoFA; Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Information; Li Lingbing, Ambassador of China to Oman; and Abdulmalik al Balushi, CEO of Oman Post took part in the launch ceremony commemorating 40 years of official diplomatic relations between the two countries, the unique stamp depicts one of China's most famous historical landmarks, the Great Wall of China, as well as an Omani fort and the historical Sindbad voyage from Suhar to Guangzhou. Culture and history buffs can purchase the special issue, which also includes 500 First Day Covers and 3,000 Souvenir Sheets.

Abdulmalik al Balushi, CEO of Oman Post, said, "We're proud to celebrate the unique friendship Oman and China share. At Oman Post we always seek to create stamps that represent topics of historical, political and cultural significance and



immortalize them for all to enjoy. Our latest issue is a great reminder of the positive connections Oman has made throughout history, as it continues to build strong ties around the world." Oman and China have enjoyed a friendly relationship since official diplomatic ties were established in 1978, although traditional ties date back 1,200 years. Due to its strategic location on the trade route between the East and the West, Oman's port of Suhar was once known as the 'Gateway to China'. Reaffirming its cultural ties, in 1980 a replica of a ninth-century Arab dhow named 'The Sohar', was sailed from Oman to China, tracing the journey that was said to have been undertaken by the legendary

Omani voyager, Sindbad. In 2018 the two countries signed a 'Belt and Road' cooperation document, which has established a new platform for economic cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

In addition to Oman Post's aspirations for global expansion of operations in postal and logistics' services, as well as eCommerce, the company is committed to delivering stamps that reflect on key domestic and international topics. Philatelic enthusiasts and stamp collectors can reserve the new stamp to add to their collection by subscribing to the Philatelic Department at Oman Post through the e-mail: philatelic@omanpost.om.

Birth spacing essential for health of mothers, children

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

Birth spacing is essential to ensure justice and equity among newborns, which will result in social, economic and health benefits for the individual, family and community.

Birth spacing is different than birth control. Birth spacing is means at least three years of more between each pregnancy but not determining a specific number of children.

Several benefits will result from birth spacing such as reducing

maternal mortality, protecting the mother physical and mental health so that she recovers her health and fitness rapidly after delivery. Birth spacing gives the parents the adequate time to give their child the necessary attention.

Birth spacing services can be obtained from the nearest health institutions. The female doctor is providing the required consultation for the mother based on her age and health conditions.

It is worth mentioning that

choosing the appropriate birth spacing method subjects to several considerations varying from one woman to another. In addition, the positive attitude of the father showed the full partnership between the two parents, which encourage the mother and provide family stability.

The Ministry of Health seeks that birth-spacing methods would be an integral part of healthy lifestyle for all families for community health and development. It is essential for raising a powerful generation.

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In brief

Man held over attempt to smuggle drugs

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances arrested an Asian infiltrator after arriving in the Sultanate via the sea, and recovered 15 kg of crystal meth and 5,800 gm of heroin from him.

The anti-drug police disclosed that the drugs were intended for trafficking in association with an international ring. Legal procedures are underway against the defendant.

Infiltrators arrested in North Al Batinah

MUSCAT: Coast Guard Police boats of North Al Batinah Governorate Police Command in cooperation with the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) foiled an attempt to smuggle 18 infiltrators into the Sultanate.

The Coast Guard Police seized two boats during the operation, one of them was coming from an Asian country and the other was an Omani fishing boat which was planned to transport the infiltrators to the Omani shores.

Liquor smugglers held in Musandam

MUSCAT: Coast Guard Police boats of Musandam Governorate arrested 2 people of an Asian nationality for attempting to smuggle a large amount of alcoholic beverages. Legal procedures against the defendants are underway.

KARWA MOTORS

The Tenders Committee announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Subject	Document Fees	Closing Date
MJN-KWM-PM-TED-00009	DESIGN, SUPPLY, INSTALLATION & COMMISSIONING OF PORTACABINS TEMPORARY STAFF ACCOMMODATION FOR KARWA MOTORS PROJECT	OMR 10/-	27 th October 2020

Conditions:

- The tender documents package can be obtained from the Finance Department of the company on 21st, 22nd and 25th October 2020 from 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM, upon payment of a non-refundable document fees and signed authorization letter to collect tender document with company stamp.
- KEY DATES:
 - Issue Tender Package – 21st October 2020, 22nd October 2020 and 25th October 2020
 - Last Date for Submission – 27th October 2020
- Tender should be submitted not later than 12.00 noon on the closing date and must be deposited. Karwa Motors Tendering Office, located Office No 5-25, 02nd Floor, Finaa Al Fardan Building No.254, Way 4204, Plot No 836, North Al Ghubra, Postal Code: 1115, Muscat, and should be in sealed envelopes addressed to: Tender Committee, Karwa Motors quoting the Tender No. and subject.
- Offers arriving after the closing date & time shall not be accepted.

E-Mail: tendercommittee@karwamotors.com



SAS BOOST FOR START-UPS IN OMAN

RAY PETERSEN
MUSCAT, OCT 20

The Sas Accelerator’s second cohort, organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), through Sas Center for Entrepreneurship in partnership with Google for Start-ups, concluded on Monday.

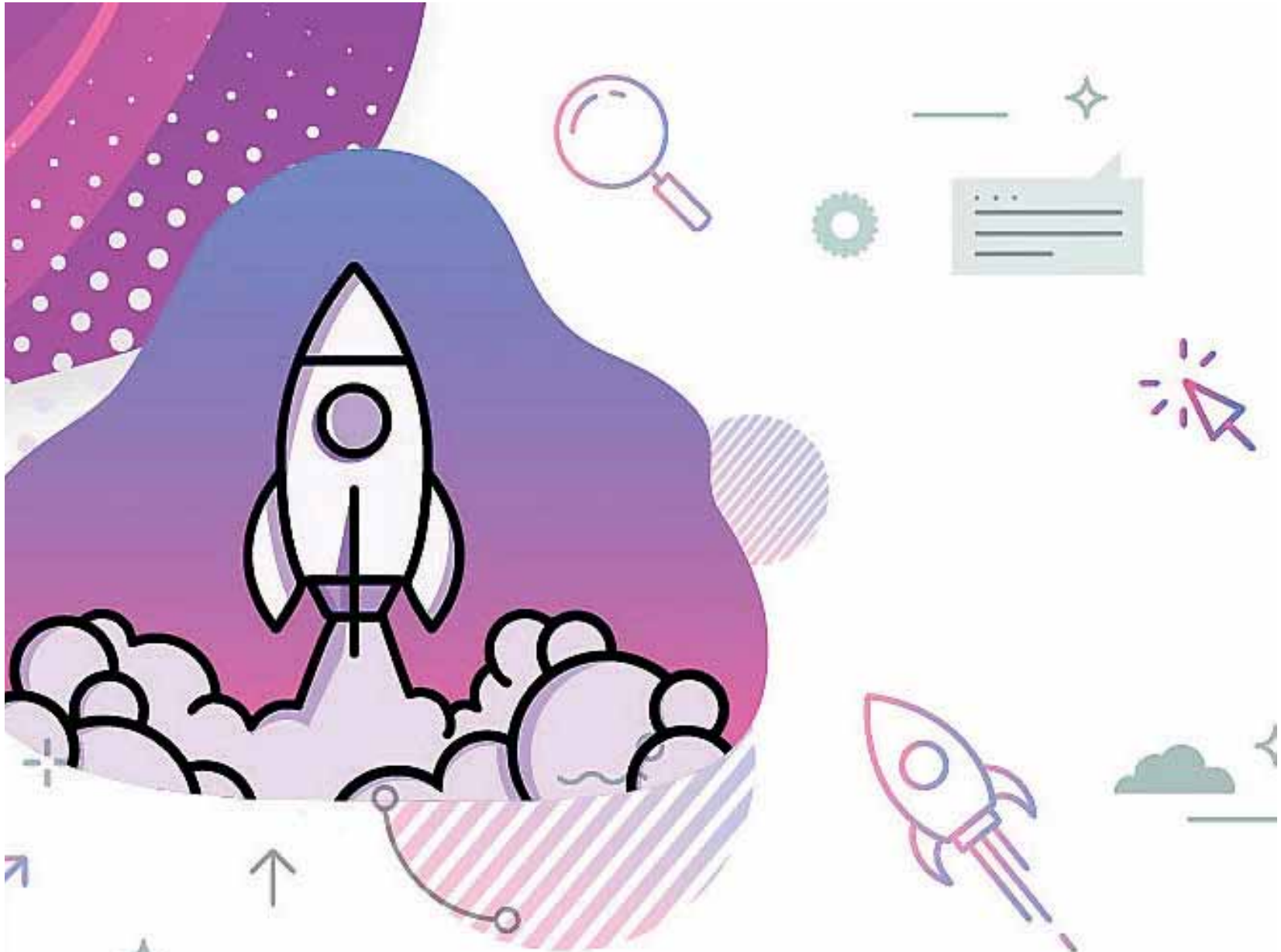
Twenty-one international and 17 local mentors worked to support the participating start-ups to further develop their products, increase overall market share, and raise investment readiness through 43 sessions and 53 hours of one-to-one consultations.

The accelerator, powered by Google for Start-ups, focused on design thinking and founder development, technology oversight, marketing outlook and business growth, financial management and investment readiness, as well as communication and pitching capabilities.

Hamood al Hamadan, Director of Sas Center for Entrepreneurship at MTCIT, said, “Through our partnership with Google for Start-ups, we at Sas Center for Entrepreneurship strive to run technology specialised accelerators that can boost the start-ups ecosystem to grow and fast track their capabilities. We are delighted to witness the growth of start-ups and skills development over their exposure to wide-range of expertise and anticipate to see the 11 start-ups expand locally and regionally. We would also like to thank the UK Oman Digital Hub for their contribution to the Sas Accelerator.”

Sas is an abbreviation of ‘Asaas,’ which in Arabic means ‘foundation,’ and under this brief Al Hamadan, Specialist Consultant Emmee Haun and their teamwork with an elite group of start-ups, that must satisfy stringent standards and demonstrate significant potential to be identified as Sas companies to be mentored and supported from ideation to investment. Specifically, that support entails an initial 130 hours of an intensive blend of international and local mentoring, workshops, and labs, across an exhausting five-week period.

Supported by the programme with lean canvas efficiencies, customer identification, product and market understanding, and creating investor-ready profiles, the start-ups also worked with



software development, geographic information, artificial intelligence and data cleansing companies, to create valid pathways to potential clients, pricing strategy, client management, and potential development opportunities.

“Such programmes,” said Al Hamadan, “provide growth opportunities for the start-ups, identify partnership and investment prospects.” He lauded the effort from the start-ups, thanking them for “taking the leap with us,” the mentors, and the programme team for their contributions, and encouraged possible investors to avail themselves of the opportunities that await them at the outset of these start-ups’ journeys.

MENA Regional Lead Developer for Google, Salim Abid, was also quick to emphasise the success of this second collaboration with the MTCIT, saying that “I look forward to seeing the start-ups achieving



their goals, and their products in the marketplace.”

Hussain al Asfoor, CEO of eBinaa, which makes construction project management tool, has already created a partnership with Fahad al Ismaili of Tibiaan Property Services to produce up-to-date products. Similarly iCOMS.com

CEO Khalifa al Khalifa actually picked up a new customer during the presentation as he championed his online entrepreneurial advisor and support package which assists clients in building and managing their online service packages. FLOWS was yet another online project tracker that provides viable solutions for individuals, companies, and projects for CEO Haider Adnaan al Zaabi and CTO Abdullah Qais al Zaabi. They already have links to high profile business entities.

Totally different was the first of the foodstuffs logistics and distribution start-ups, Muscat Food Market, for CEO Najeem Salim Rawther, which focuses on quality and fresh deliveries of fruits and vegetables in a sector conservatively valued in the billions of dollars. Azooz is an online food basket app, introduced by its CEO Mohit Suri, with already

a strong customer base, and aims to create a presence within Oman for online food ordering and delivery, currently popular in Europe. Qais al Jedyani offered an entertaining introduction to BON, the e-store for ‘coffeeholics,’ who aim to provide “what you want,” in the way of coffee. It was a presentation that almost personalised the coffee experience!

Utilities too featured, as AwanGas.com has now created an online link to domestic gas deliveries. First founded in 1991, this business offers cashless service for householders and has already developed a significant client base for Abdulrahim al Kyumi (CEO) at the head of a family business. The auto spare parts industry now has fresh blood too, with AlaParte.com providing a coordinated response to a currently fragmented, but multi-billion-dollar sector. Saleh al Hajri, CEO initially has his eyes



Through our partnership with Google for Start-ups, we at Sas Center for Entrepreneurship strive to run technology specialised accelerators that can boost the start-ups ecosystem to grow and fast track their capabilities

HAMOOD AL
HAMADAN

Director of Sas Center, MTCIT

set on a 1% bite of the regional take which is far from small change!

SHAFRA At Home Genetic Testing Services, with hundreds of practical applications for everyone, was introduced by its CEO Mariya al Hinai as having particular benefits in the diagnosis of health issues such as obesity and diabetes, and the enhancement of healthy lifestyles among its many functions, for a modest fee. The highly touted Dr Raya al Maskery offers an impressive level of medical professional acumen to this start-up.

Programme Director Haun explained that she was “proud of the talented start-ups for their innovation, effort, enthusiasm, and the quality of their online presentations.” It is clear that this is a concept that demands excellence, and gets it, with the future of Sas inspired entities on the road to good things.

SAI CHAIRMAN TAKES PART IN GCC MEETING



MUSCAT: Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Mawali, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), participated in the 17th meeting of Chairmen of GCC Audit and Accounting Bureaus, which was held via video conference on Tuesday. The meetings stressed the importance of continuing professional activities that contribute to building capacities at SAls and promoting SAls role in the march of development in the GCC countries, and through which achieving the vision of GCC Leaders along with the ambitions of their peoples. The chairmen discussed proposals for raising awareness and knowledge on the practice of auditing sustainable development goals (SDGs), views relevant to joint comprehensive audit as well as a number of matters in relation to GCC joint work in financial and administrative audit. – **ONA**

Bus service in Salalah from Nov 1

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

Mwasalat postponed the resumption of city buses service in Salalah to November 1. As per the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19,

services within Salalah were to start on October 18. The Muscat-Salalah bus service has been suspended until further notice. The company will levy an additional 100 baiza to the ticket fares of city services and 500 baiza

to the intercity services for sterilisation and cleaning procedures.

The precautionary measures to be followed for the safety of employees and passengers are the sterilisation of buses before

the start of the trip and after its completion, measuring the temperature of passengers for trips between cities, no standing passengers wearing masks all the time while using the bus, and providing hand sanitisers inside the buses.

Free consultation for accreditation

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

Health care providers from private hospitals and clinics in the Sultanate will receive free consultation for evaluation and international accreditation, thanks to the initiative of Kaizen Medical Management company.

The company, through this initiative aims to support the health care sector in order to be able to compete at the GCC level and the region as a whole.

“This is a unique step steamed from our conviction that real development in this sector requires the initiators and continuous development of services,” Dr Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, chairman of the company, said.

Dr Wahaibi added, “During our many years of work in this field, we were able to enumerate a list of the obstacles facing health service providers, at the top

of which is the issue of quality and international accreditation, which requires a great effort to implement and allocate a budget for its development. This is why our initiative was to cooperate with health facilities operating in the private sector and to reduce the financial burden by providing these services free of charge.”

Bassem al Mubarak, Chief Operating Officer of Kaizen, said, “The medical sector in the Sultanate is entering a new phase that takes health services to an advanced level. Therefore, the application of quality is the only way for the sector to advance and comply with international standards and at the same time it is a way to protect our society from infection and medical errors.”

Kaizen provides these services in the form of a field visit to the facility by a specialised team in the company’s quality assurance department.

■ UK ROYALS LAUNCH PHOTO PROJECT



Britain's Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge meet with pharmacist Joyce Duah and pharmacy technicians Amelia Chowdhury and Dipal Samuel, as they visit St Bartholomew's Hospital in London to mark the launch of the nationwide 'Hold Still' community photography project. — Reuters

Modi committed to vaccine for all citizens



A family watches Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the nation broadcast on television in Bangalore. — AFP

MUMBAI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the government was working rapidly to ensure the supply of COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens once they are available. In his address to the nation, Modi urged Indians to continue wearing masks and uphold social distancing rules to prevent further spread of the pandemic ahead of India's festive season.

"Whenever the corona vaccine comes, how it reaches to every Indian as soon as possible, the government is also working for that," Modi said in a short speech in Hindi.

Earlier on Tuesday, India reported its lowest daily coronavirus caseload in nearly three months, as new cases continued to decline from a peak in September.

The country reported 46,790 new infections in the last 24 hours, taking its tally to nearly 7.6 million - the second highest behind the United States. It also reported 587 deaths, taking the total to 115,197. Experts have warned that infections could rise in India as the holiday season nears, with celebrations for the Hindu festivals of Durga Puja and Diwali due this month and in mid-November, respectively. — Reuters

Merkel pledges support to Iraq in fight against IS

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel has pledged her ongoing support to Iraq in the battle to root out the IS group during a visit by Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi to Berlin.

"IS remains a threat for the region and of course beyond," Merkel said in a statement upon Al Kadhimi's arrival on Tuesday. IS controlled large parts of northern Iraq between 2014 and 2017, but the extremists were driven out with the help of a US-led military coalition that included Germany.

Remnants of the group still carry out attacks in Iraq. "I would like to make clear that Germany stands firmly on the side of Iraq," Merkel said, stressing the importance of Berlin's continued support to achieve stability as well as economic growth in Iraq.

Germany's Bundeswehr military currently has around 270 soldiers deployed to fight IS in Iraq and neighbouring Syria. In the coming week, German lawmakers are expected to approve the extension of this mandate by 15 months, for a



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi arrive for a news conference at the Chancellery in Berlin. — Reuters

maximum of 500 service members.

The move also provides for the continued use of military tanker aircraft. Germany is also contributing airspace radar for the early detection of aircraft and missiles. Bundeswehr training assistance for Iraqi security forces is to be formally continued, but the coronavirus pandemic has led to restrictions.

Al Kadhimi on Monday met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, as part of a European tour that was also due to take him to London. Macron told Al Kadhimi that France was fully committed to the international coalition against IS and wanted to beef up bilateral military cooperation, the Elysee Palace said. — dpa

Spain considers curfews to fight new wave



Madrid Emergency Service (SUMMA) UVI-8 unit's nurse Elena Tena holds a swab sample taken from a patient amid the coronavirus disease outbreak in Madrid. — Reuters

the pandemic - and possibly beyond would require invoking a state of emergency, Illa told reporters.

Any such measure lasting more than two weeks would require

the support of some opposition parties, she added. But that could prove challenging in Spain's deeply polarised parliament.

Towards the end of Spain's first state of emergency lockdowns from March to June, the opposition opposed any further extensions and has recently been against extending a government-ordered partial lockdown in Madrid.

The Madrid region's top health official, Enrique Ruiz Escudero, told Spanish news agency Europa Press earlier authorities were evaluating whether a curfew was needed but they did not have the power to enforce it and would have to ask the central government. — Reuters

Bottle-fed babies ingest 'millions' of microplastics: study

PARIS: Bottle-fed babies may ingest more than a million pieces of microplastics each day, new research showed Monday highlighting the abundance of plastics in our food products.

There is growing evidence that humans consume huge numbers of the tiny particles, formed when larger pieces of plastic break down, but very little is known about the knock-on health consequences.

Researchers in Ireland looked at the rate of microplastic release in 10 types of baby bottles or accessories made from polypropylene, the most commonly used plastic for food containers.

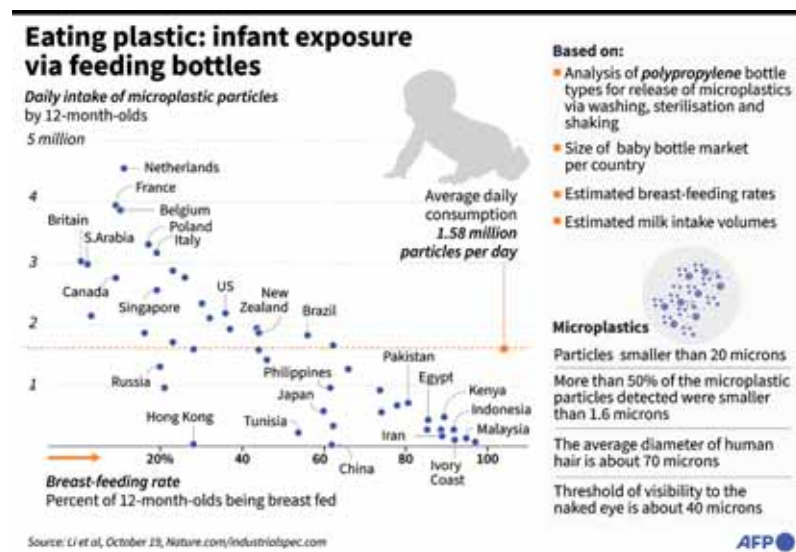
They followed official guidelines from the World Health Organization on sterilisation and formula preparation conditions.

Over a 21-day test period, the team found that the bottles released between 1.3 and 16.2 million plastic microparticles per litre.

They then used this data to model the potential global infant exposure to microplastics from bottle-feeding, based on national average rates of breastfeeding.

They estimated that the average bottle-fed baby could be ingesting 1.6 million plastic microparticles every day during the first 12 months of their lives.

The authors of the research, published in the Nature Food journal,



said that sterilisation and exposure to high water temperatures had the biggest effect on microplastic release, going from 0.6 million particles per litre on average at 25C to 55 million/litre at 95C.

The authors said that the aim of the research was "not to worry parents" about the potential health risks of bottle microplastics.

"We have communicated, as strongly as we can, that we do not know the potential health risks of infant ingestions of microplastics," said the team, from Trinity College Dublin.

"This is an area of research we are now actively pursuing."

The authors noted that it was in

developed nations that babies were likely ingesting the most plastic -- 2.3 million particles daily in North America and 2.6 million in Europe.

This was attributed to relatively low breast-feeding rates in richer countries.

They said the levels could easily be lowered by taking a few additional steps, including rinsing bottles with cold sterilised water and preparing formula milk in a non-plastic container before filling the bottle.

Fay Couceiro, Senior Research Fellow in Biogeochemistry, University of Portsmouth, said Monday's research highlighted the "urgency for studies on microplastic impacts on human health". — AFP

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) hereby announces auction as mentioned in the following table:

Auction No.	Material for Sale	Last date of buying	Preview Date	Last date of submission
03/2020	Selling Electrical Scrap Materials in Rural Areas Electricity Co. (TANWEER) Located in Al-Wusta and Dhofar Governorate	04/11/2020	- Al Wusta Region; 08-12/11/2020 - Dhofar Region; 15-19/11/2020	05/12/2020

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board and Rural Areas Electricity company may obtain the auction documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment of RO. 100/- (Rial Omani One Hundred Only) for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om , or call us on phone number : 24250824.
- Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman of Purchase Committee, Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C), marked with the auction number and subject. Other marks or reference whatsoever should be printed on the envelope. The identity of the bidder should not be revealed and should be submitted before 1:00 P.M. on the assigned date for submission of the auction.
- The buyer must pay the complete amount of his offer within **Two Week** of such notification by deposit or certified cheque.
- The buyer must transfer all the material and clean the location within **One Month** from the date of client notification for taking the materials. If the buyer does not transfer the materials purchased within the specified period, the same will be confiscated by the company. Such confiscated materials will be released to the buyer upon payment of demurrage charges to be calculated by the Seller.
- Tanweer has the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.
- Preview of the material will be during the formal working hours on the dates specified above.

For more information please call: 80077787



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Notice

Bid Cancellation

Muscat Municipality announces that bid number AB/09/2020: Promoting & Selling of the book "Cities for People", as per the Announcement No. (49) on 19/10/2020 has been cancelled.

Sudan eyes debt relief after lifting from US terror list

KHARTOUM: Sudan's removal from a US list of state sponsors of terrorism will open the door for the African country to get relief of its external debt worth \$60 billion, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said on Monday.

Hamdok spoke on state television after US President Donald Trump said the United States would remove Sudan from the list, which has been a major hurdle for Sudan to tap international institutions.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump announced on Monday the US would remove Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism as soon as Khartoum sets aside the \$335 million it has agreed to pay to American victims of militant attacks and their families.

The deal could also set in motion steps by Sudan toward establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, a US official said, following similar US-brokered moves by the UAE and Bahrain. The details were still being worked out, the source said. Although Trump made no mention of Israel in his tweet announcing the breakthrough with Sudan, rapprochement between Israel and another Arab country would give Trump a new diplomatic achievement as he seeks re-election on November 3.

Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism dates to its toppled ruler Omar al Bashir and makes it difficult for its transitional government to access urgently needed debt relief and foreign financing.



Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. – Reuters file photo

Many in Sudan say the designation, imposed in 1993 because Washington believed Bashir was supporting militant groups, has become outdated since he was removed last year and Sudan has long cooperated on counter terrorism. US-Sudanese negotiations have focused on funds that Washington wants Khartoum to deposit in escrow to be paid for victims of al Qaeda attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, US government sources said.

"Great news! New government of Sudan, which is making great progress, agreed to pay \$335 million to US terror victims and families," Trump tweeted.

Khartoum sets aside \$335 million it has agreed to pay to American victims of militant attacks and their families

"Once deposited, I will lift Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list." A Sudanese government source said Khartoum was ready to pay compensation to US Embassy bombing victims. "Thank you so much, President Trump!" Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok tweeted.

"We very much look forward to your official notification to Congress rescinding the designation of Sudan as a state-sponsor of terrorism." While Trump can act on his own to remove Sudan from the list, congressional legislation is needed to ensure the flow of payments to embassy bombing victims and their families — and immediate action on Capitol Hill is far from certain. Urging congressional action, Edith Bartley, spokeswoman for Americans killed in the Nairobi bombing, said the funds would meet a commitment by three successive presidents "to condition normalisation (with the US) on compensating survivors and the families of those who were lost to acts of terror."

A key sticking point in the negotiations was Sudan's insistence that any announcement of Khartoum's delisting not be explicitly linked to normalisation with Israel. Differences remain between Sudanese political and military officials on how far to go in the warming of relations with Israel.

Hamdok, who runs the country together with the military in a transition since the toppling of Bashir, told US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Khartoum in August that the normalisation issue should not be tied in with Sudan's removal from the terrorism list. One possibility, a US official said, would be for Washington to leave it to Sudan and Israel to go public later, possibly in coming days, with an agreement on opening relations. — Reuters



Photographer Mohammed surfaces to take a breath as he documents Palestinian spear-fishermen diving underwater in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of the southern Gaza Strip. – Reuters

Spearfishing in Gaza, a living improvised under the sea

GAZA: Armed with a snorkel mask and a home-made gun shaped like a trident, and dressed in a green sweatshirt and jogging pants, Ashraf Al Amoudi goes hunting every day in the coastal waters of Gaza.

He is one of scores of spear fishermen who scratch out a living close to shore in the Hamas-run territory, diving from boats to depths of around four metres without oxygen to prise oysters from the rocks and catch grouper, sea bream and mullet.

"At the beginning it was a hobby, and when I couldn't find work it became a job and a source of living," said Amoudi, who has been a fisherman for 13 years.

Now his catch nets him an

average of around \$14 a day. Gaza's unemployment rate is around 50 per cent and tight restrictions imposed by Israel — which cites security concerns in its conflict with Hamas — make it difficult to obtain diving equipment and sometimes force the closure of Gaza's fishing zones.

So Amoudi and his co-workers are used to improvising.

"We can repair fins, make an underwater gun, but there are things we can't (obtain) such as fins, suits, goggles and oxygen," he said. He says Gaza has around 250 men who fish with spears and some 4,000 who use boats and nets, among a population of two million.

— Reuters

Turkey evacuates Syria outpost long-encircled by regime

AL NAYRAB, Syria: Turkey on Tuesday started withdrawing from one of its largest outposts in northwest Syria encircled for the past year by Syrian regime forces, a war monitor and a pro-Ankara rebel commander said.

The outpost in Morek is Turkey's largest in the northwest province of Hama, which is now mostly under Syrian government control.

Forces loyal to President Bashar al Assad encircled it last year following the launch of a regime offensive against the last major opposition bastion in Syria's northwest.

"After midnight Turkish forces began to evacuate Morek, and this morning a large convoy left" the area, an Ankara-backed Syrian rebel said from Al Nayrab in neighbouring Idlib province.

The troops will be redeployed to Turkish outposts in Idlib, he said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported the pullout overnight.

The war monitor said that other observation posts also surrounded by regime forces could likewise be

evacuated.

Turkey supports Syrian rebel forces battling Assad's government and it has also launched multiple operations across Syria's northern border against Kurdish forces and the IS group.

Since September 2018, it has established 12 observation posts in the northwest.

They were set up as part of a deal with Russia, a regime ally which nevertheless often conducts joint patrols in Syria's north with Turkish forces.

Ankara has not officially commented on the evacuation and it was unclear if it was part of a broader deal, possibly with Russia with which Turkey has also been at odds in Libya and the Karabakh conflict.

Idlib itself is dominated by the Al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham alliance and its rebel allies.

They control half of Idlib province as well as pockets of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Latakia and Aleppo as well as Hama. A ceasefire since March has largely reduced fighting, despite intermittent air strikes and artillery attacks. — AFP

SCHOOL BEGINS AMID FEARS OF PANDEMIC



Students chant the national anthem during the morning drills at the beginning of the school year amid fears of the spread of the coronavirus in Sanaa, Yemen. – Reuters

GENEVA

Rivals in Libya conflict resume talks

The rival sides in the Libya conflict sat down for fresh talks on Monday in another bid to try to end a decade of bloodshed, the United Nations said.

Libya has been wracked by violence since a Nato-backed uprising in 2011 overthrew and killed veteran ruler Muammar Gaddafi.

Since then, the North African country has been dominated by armed groups, riven by local conflicts and divided between two bitterly opposed administrations.

But hopes for a solution have risen after the two warring factions in August separately announced they



would cease hostilities.

However, both sides continue to accuse each other of supporting "terrorist" groups.

BEIRUT

Lebanese security chief tests positive for virus

Lebanon's General Security chief Abbas Ibrahim has tested positive for the coronavirus while on an official trip to Washington, the Lebanese security agency said on Monday.

According to the agency, the high-ranking official tested positive prior to his scheduled departure from Washington to Paris.

"He will have to delay his return to Beirut and cancel his meetings that had been scheduled to be held in the French capital," the General Security agency said. It added that Ibrahim was in good health.

According to a government



source, Ibrahim held talks last week in Washington with top US security officials, during which he discussed the current deteriorating political and economic situation in Lebanon.

TEHRAN

Iran's COVID toll more than double official tally

The coronavirus-related death toll in Iran is more than double as high as official figures indicate, news agency Isna reported on Tuesday, citing a crisis management team seeking to stem contagion. Health expert Massud Mardani was cited as saying that the daily death toll cited by the Health Ministry, which stood at 337 on Monday, would have to be multiplied by 2.5 in order to get the real number of deaths.

Other health experts in Iran share Mardani's assessment that the country's actual coronavirus caseload is significantly higher than official figures due to limited testing



capacity.

Experts are demanding an immediate lock down in large cities — particularly in Tehran, a major hotspot — in order to prevent the healthcare system from becoming too strained.

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO PROBE COVID OUTBREAKS AMONG SEAFARERS

The Philippines is investigating coronavirus outbreaks on ships that changed crews in Manila, after several sick crew members have arrived in Australia recently.

Transportation Assistant Secretary for Communication Goddess Libiran said on Sunday that the department's security administration is organising a panel for an inter-agency investigation.

The probe comes after at least nine infections were recorded among crews of the Vega Dream and the Patricia Oldendorff that recently arrived from the Philippines in the state of Western Australia.

■ YANGON



INSURGENTS KIDNAP RULING PARTY CANDIDATES

Insurgents from western Myanmar on Monday claimed responsibility for the kidnapping last week of three ruling party candidates in conflict-torn Rakhine state, and demanded the release of detained student protesters in return for letting them go.

The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) said the three - two women and a man - were abducted on Wednesday while campaigning in Rakhine before a November 8 election.

The western region, has been beset by an insurgency that has intensified this year.

■ MUMBAI



INDIA POSTS LOWEST DAILY NEW VIRUS CASES IN 3 MONTHS

India posted its lowest daily coronavirus caseload in nearly three months, data from the health ministry showed on Tuesday, as new cases maintained decreasing trend from a peak in September.

The country reported 46,790 new infections in the last 24 hours, taking its tally to nearly 7.6 million — the second highest behind the United States.

It also reported 587 deaths, taking the total to 115,197. Experts have warned that infections could rise in India as the holiday season nears, with celebrations for the Hindu festivals of Durga Puja and Diwali due this month and in mid-November, respectively.

Thailand suspends TV station over coverage

Thailand has drawn criticism from rights groups for banning demonstrations and the publication of news seen as damaging by the government

BANGKOK: A Thai court on Tuesday ordered the suspension of an online TV station critical of the government, which has accused it of violating emergency measures aimed at ending three months of protests.

Voice TV had also been found to have breached the Computer Crime Act by uploading “false information,” digital ministry spokesman Puchapong Nodthaisong told reporters.

Thailand has drawn criticism from rights groups for banning demonstrations and the publication of news seen as damaging by the government as it tries to end the protests against Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and the powerful monarchy.

Rittikorn Mahakhachabhorn, Editor-in-Chief of Voice TV, said it would continue broadcasting until the court order arrived. “We insist that we have been operating based on journalistic principles and we will continue our work presently,” he said.

Thailand said on Monday that three other media organisations are under investigation. Voice TV is owned in part by the Shinawatra family of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Yingluck, who was



Pro-democracy protesters use hand signals during an anti-government protest in Bangkok. — Reuters

overthrown by Prayuth in a 2014 coup. Both fled Thailand to escape corruption cases they branded political.

Street protests since mid-July are the biggest challenge in decades to the monarchy under King Maha Vajiralongkorn and to Prayuth, who rejects accusations of engineering an election last year to keep power.

The demonstrations have been largely led by youths and students in contrast with a decade of street violence between supporters of Thaksin and conservative royalists before Prayuth seized power.

Protests have only gained momentum since the government announced a ban last Thursday and

arrested dozens of protesters, including many of the main leaders.

A lawyer for two of them, Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak and Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul, said they would be arrested again on Tuesday as soon as they had been freed on bail granted by a court over earlier charges related to the protests. Prime Minister

Prayuth has said he will not quit in the face of the protests.

His cabinet agreed on Tuesday to hold an emergency session of parliament next week about the crisis. Prayuth's supporters hold a majority in the parliament, whose upper house was named entirely by his former junta. — Reuters

Malaysian PM mulls cabinet reshuffle

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (pictured) is in talks on a possible cabinet reshuffle in an attempt to appease a key ally that has threatened to pull support for the ruling coalition, three sources said.

Muhyiddin is facing a premiership challenge from opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who last week met Malaysia's king in a bid to prove he has majority support from lawmakers, including from among government turncoats, to form a new government. The prime minister has since entered fresh discussions with the United



Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the largest party in his coalition, to negotiate new terms that could include more prominent cabinet positions for the party, sources close to the government and

UMNO said.

A breakthrough in the talks could stall Anwar's premiership bid, but also leave Muhyiddin hanging by a two-seat majority in the 222-seat parliament while he grapples with an economy battered by the coronavirus and a new surge in infections. “UMNO is negotiating and it shows they are not ready to exit the coalition,” said one source.

Another source from UMNO said the party wants more say in deciding on matters such as who among the party are appointed to cabinet and what portfolios they would hold.



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga with Vietnam's National Assembly's Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan in Hanoi. — Reuters

Japan and Vietnam agree broadly on defence transfer

HANOI: Japan hailed an agreement in principle to supply Vietnam with military gear and technology, as the two governments pledged on Monday to strengthen security and economic ties amid mounting concerns about China's assertiveness in the region. “It is a big step in the field of security for both countries,” Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters after meeting his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, in Hanoi.

The two leaders also agreed on the importance of maintaining peace, security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, and the peaceful settlement of disputes, Phuc said in a joint media appearance.

Suga, who took office last month after Shinzo Abe quit because of poor health, is making his overseas diplomatic debut this week, visiting Vietnam, the current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), and Indonesia, the group's largest nation.

“Vietnam welcomes Japan, a global power, to continue to actively contribute to regional and global peace, stability and prosperity,” Phuc said.

In a speech later on Monday, Suga said Japan opposed any steps to heighten tensions in the South China Sea, where Vietnam and other Asean members have territorial disputes with China.

“Regarding the South China Sea issue, it is important for all countries concerned not to rely on force or threat but to work toward peaceful resolution based on international law,” Suga said, avoiding harsh anti-China rhetoric.

Back in Tokyo, Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi told reporters that Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force will conduct a joint drill with US and Australian navies around the South China Sea on Monday, Kyodo news agency reported. Kishi also agreed with visiting Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds to start talks to make it possible for Japan's Self Defence Forces to protect Australian military assets such as warships and aircraft, Kyodo said.

Japan already has similar arrangements with the United States. Japan must balance its deep economic ties to China with security concerns, including Beijing's claims over disputed isles in the East China Sea.

Asean members remain wary of losing access to China's economy, and are reluctant to become entrapped in an intense confrontation between Washington and Beijing. Japan, which ended a decades-old ban on overseas arms sales in 2014 to help strengthen the nation's military and lower the cost of home-built military equipment, has been in talks with Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand on deals to allow such exports. — Reuters

After taking on plastic, Bali sisters want bar raised on climate action

BADUNG, Indonesia: Dismayed by the plastic waste strewn over their home island of Bali, sisters Melati and Isabel Wijsen have channelled Ted Talks and international conferences in raising global awareness through a youth-led movement to try to eliminate the scourge.

It was not “rocket science,” said Melati, 19, of the plastic waste problem that prompted the sisters to set up their “Bye Bye Plastic Bags” initiative seven years ago.

The campaign has grown internationally, with Bali leading the way in Indonesia banning single-use plastic bags. The sisters aren't resting on their laurels, however.

Tackling climate change is now among the world's most pressing issues, they say. “We know the urgency, we have to take action now,” said Melati, speaking from their home surrounded by paddy fields. “We need to see the bar set a lot higher and a lot sooner,” she said, calling on policymakers to take swift action.

Melati's activism started when she was only 12 years old and her sister even younger at 10. They have since garnered global attention, speaking at international conferences including setting out their ideas in a Ted Talk.



Youth environmentalists Isabel Wijsen and Melati Wijsen speak during Bali's Biggest Clean-Up 2020 in Petitenget Beach, Seminyak, Bali, Indonesia. — AFP

The sisters say they were inspired by figures such as Nelson Mandela, Princess Diana, and Mahatma Gandhi when at school. Growing up on the tropical island famed for its beaches and temples, they were disconcerted by the plastic waste everywhere.

“Sadly...we could see that no matter where we went there was plastic constantly surrounding us,” Melati said.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, is estimated to be the world's second-largest contributor of plastic pollutants in the oceans

after China, according to a 2015 study published in *Science* journal.

The Southeast Asian country this year unveiled a plan to cut marine plastic debris by 70 per cent within five years and to be plastic pollution-free by 2040.

But for the sisters measures on the environment are often too slow and reinforces the need for the young to take action.

“We believe that us kids may only be 25 per cent of the world's population, but we are 100 per cent of the future,” said Isabel. — dpa



President Trump ramps up US campaign rallies

MIAMI: With exactly two weeks until the election, President Donald Trump was continuing his campaign rally marathon on Tuesday with a trip to swing state Pennsylvania, the day after early voting began in another key state, Florida.

Trump and his wife Melania will head to Erie, Pennsylvania, where he will host another of his massive rallies. US media reported that the First Lady will be by her husband's side at the rally, her first such appearance in more than a year.

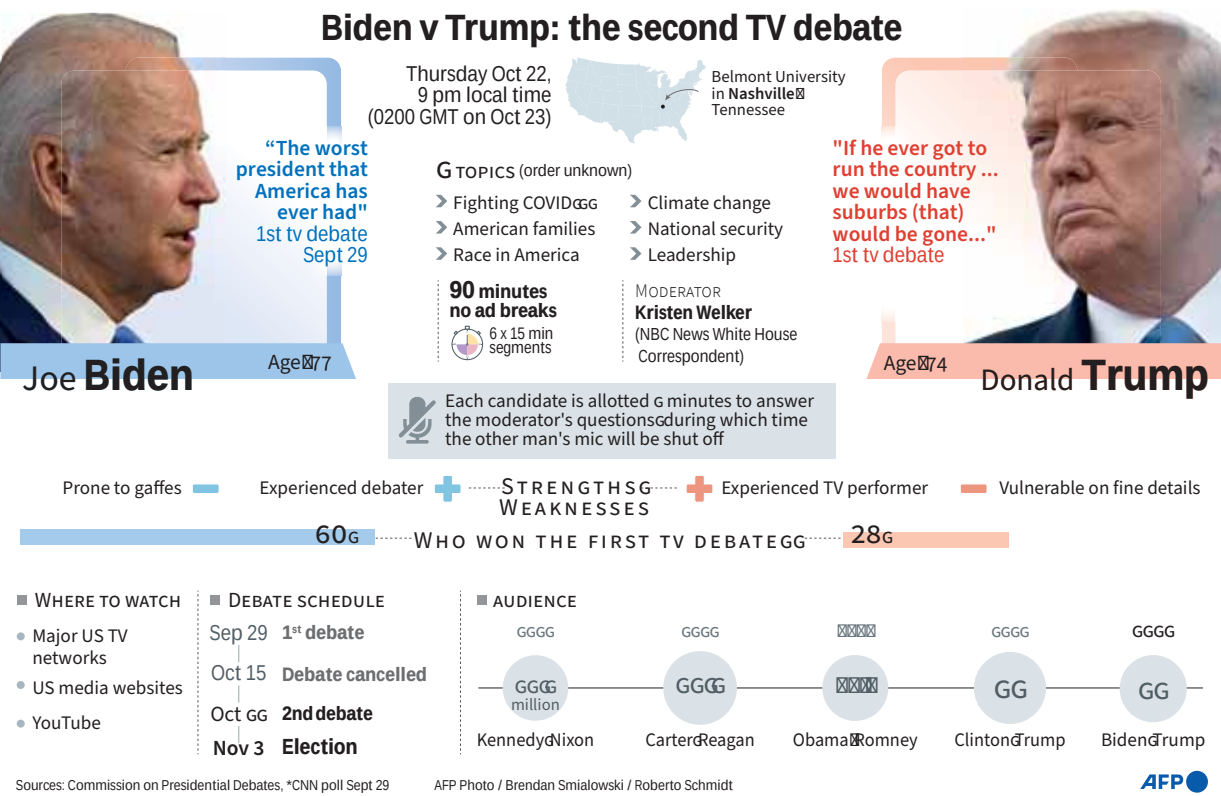
Record numbers of Americans have already cast ballots in person or by mail — 30 million, according to one tracker — ahead of the November 3 election, as Trump and his Democratic challenger Joe Biden race from one swing state to another to marshal support.

Nationwide, Biden leads Trump by 8.9 percentage points, according to a RealClearPolitics average of polls, and the Democrat has more modest leads in several battleground states.

With Biden dispatching his running mate Kamala Harris to Florida to rally voters there, Trump was on a western swing on Monday in battleground Arizona, where he won in 2016 but now narrowly trails his rival in statewide polling.

In Tucson, Trump pledged to build the coronavirus-ravaged economy back to pre-pandemic levels, calling the election “a choice between a Trump super-recovery... or a Biden depression.”

Americans are “pandemic-ed out,” he boomed to masses of supporters, many without masks and not



practicing social distancing, gathered at the outdoor rally.

The election is rapidly boiling down to whether voters see Trump as best placed to revive the battered economy, or they believe the president has exacerbated the pandemic and want Biden to fulfil his pledge to unify a divided country.

The battle has played out in eight or nine swing states for months, but perhaps nowhere more intensely than Florida, the largest up-for-grabs prize of them all, delivering 29 of the state-by-state Electoral College votes that decide who wins the presidency.

Early voting began on Monday in

Florida, and voters in the southern part of the state converged on polling stations, wearing masks and standing in line at a social distance.

At a Miami Beach polling station, Jacqueline Maurice, a writer in her 40s, was excitedly snapping selfies with an “I voted” sticker on after casting her ballot for Biden.

“I’ve been waiting four years to vote,” she said.

In nearby Hialeah, some 200 people, mostly Cuban Americans, were in line to vote at a library, including Ulysses Liriano.

The 51-year-old said he was voting for the president because “Trump has

made lots of changes for us in our country,” notably with the economy.

“It was an inconvenience what happened now with the corona, and they want to use that against him,” he said.

The Florida race is tightening down to a knife edge; statewide polls show Biden ahead by an average of 1.4 percentage points — compared with 4.5 points less than two weeks ago.

The increasingly diverse state is a bellwether, having voted for the candidate who ultimately became president in 18 of the past 20 elections — including Republican Trump in 2016. — AFP

Pinera condemns rioters as Chile referendum looms

SANTIAGO: President Sebastian Pinera on Monday strongly condemned the burning of two churches and other violence that marred anti-government demonstrations as Chile prepares to hold a landmark constitutional referendum.

Police said they had arrested nearly 600 people as a peaceful demonstration on Sunday to mark the anniversary of social protests descended into rioting and looting, including the burning of two Catholic churches in Santiago.

Pinera said tens of thousands of people had demonstrated peacefully, blaming “a minority of criminals who unleashed a wave of violence, looting and vandalism, including the burning of two churches of high historical and heritage value.”

“This criminal action must be condemned by all of us who believe in democracy and want to live in peace,” the conservative president said.

“And we must condemn not only those who directly execute criminal violence, but also those who, in one

way or another, promote, protect or justify it.”

Police stations were attacked as the authorities recorded 107 serious incidents nationwide while rioting continued overnight, Interior Ministry Under-Secretary Juan Francisco Galli told reporters.

The demonstration came just a week before Chileans vote in a referendum on whether to replace the dictatorship-era constitution — one of the key demands when the protest movement began in October 2019.

Pinera, a billionaire businessman who has not publicly stated whether he supports approval or rejection of the proposed constitutional change, called for massive voter turnout for next Sunday's referendum.

Sunday's violence erupted after around 30,000 protesters flocked to Santiago's central Plaza Italia for a peaceful demonstration, the government said. But as the afternoon wore on, clashes broke out on the periphery of the square, more than 300 metres from the main, peaceful, demonstration. — AFP



A demonstrator is detained by riot police during a protest against Chile's government in Valparaiso, Chile. — Reuters

Ireland is first EU country to re-enter lockdown

DUBLIN: Ireland will be the first EU country to return to coronavirus lockdown, Prime Minister Micheal Martin said on Monday, issuing a nationwide “stay at home” order but insisting schools will stay open.

Measures coming into effect for six weeks from midnight on Wednesday will see all non-essential retail businesses close and restaurants limited to takeaway or delivery service only.

“Everyone in the country is being asked to stay at home,” Martin said in a televised national address.

Only essential workers will be “permitted to travel to work”, he said, and citizens will be allowed out to exercise only within five kilometres of their residence.

The government warned in a statement that “there will be a penalty” for violating the five-kilometre restriction and that public transport will operate at 25 per cent capacity to serve essential workers only.

Martin said schools and childcare facilities are to remain open “because



Empty city centre shopping streets are seen as the coronavirus disease outbreak continues in Galway, Ireland. — Reuters

we cannot and will not allow our children and young people's futures to be another victim of this disease.”

A ban on visits between different households and on indoor events will also be extended, although two

households will be allowed to mix at outdoor venues such as parks.

A “social bubble” programme will also allow those living alone, at risk of social isolation or mental health issues, to mingle with one other household.

Prime Minister said schools, childcare facilities are to remain open ‘because we cannot and will not allow our children and young people’s futures to be another victim of this disease’

And unlike under the previous shutdown order issued in March, elite and professional level sports will be permitted behind closed doors across Ireland — which has suffered 1,852 deaths from the coronavirus.

Martin said the Republic's present restrictions were “probably Europe's strictest regime” but that “further action is now required”.

“If we pull together over the next six weeks, we will have the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way,” he said.

Lobby group Retail Ireland

Morales to Bolivia after ally's election victory

LA PAZ: Exiled former president Evo Morales on Monday signalled his intention to return to Bolivia after his leftist heir Luis Arce's sweeping presidential election victory.

Arce, a former economy minister under Morales, claimed victory in Sunday's election after exit polls suggested a crushing triumph over centrist rival Carlos Mesa.

Mesa conceded on Monday, saying Arce's 20-point margin of victory was “very forceful and very clear.”

“It is up to us, as befits those of us who believe in democracy... to recognise that there has been a winner in this election,” said Mesa, a former president.

Exit polls handed over 52 per cent of the vote to Arce, with Mesa mustering just 31.5 per cent — upending predictions he would force a second round runoff in November.

Private polling companies showed Arce winning by a similar margin.

BRUSSELS

Belgium may need to return to full lockdown

Belgium could be returning to full lockdown if there is no reversal of the surge in COVID-19 infections and hospital admissions, a senior Belgian virologist said in a newspaper interview on Tuesday.

“We would then have to consider even more restrictive measures, which could resemble a lockdown like the one imposed in March and April,” Yves Van Laethem told *La Dernière Heure*. Van Laethem, who addresses national news conferences on the COVID-19 situation, said only an eventual vaccine or effective treatment would overcome the



pandemic. As cases surge again in Europe, Ireland imposed some of Europe's toughest COVID-19 constraints on Monday, while Wales is set to begin a two-week “fire-break” lockdown on Friday.

BISHKEK

Kyrgyzstan detains ex-president's ally after crisis

Kyrgyzstan authorities on Tuesday detained on corruption charges a powerbroker closely allied to former president Sooronbay Jeenbekov, the national security committee said, as a new acting leader seeks to consolidate power with an anti-graft drive.

Ex-deputy customs chief Rayimbek Matraimov was regarded as a key financial backer for political parties and presidents, including Jeenbekov. Jeenbekov stepped down last week in the wake of protests that followed a disputed parliamentary election on October 4, leaving



power in the hands of Sadyr Japarov as prime minister and acting president. The national security committee said that Matraimov and other officials were part of “a corruption scheme established to extract shadow income during customs administration”.

ROME

Italy's Lombardy region to impose virus curfew

Italy's northern Lombardy region prepared on Tuesday to impose a nighttime curfew, the most restrictive anti-coronavirus measure the country has seen since emerging from a national lockdown in the spring. The curfew from 11 pm to 5 am is expected to begin on Thursday night and last to November 13.

Health Minister Roberto Speranza gave his consent late on Monday to the more restrictive measure proposed by the regional government, after an hours-long meeting.

“It's an appropriate and



symbolically important initiative that shouldn't have particularly serious economic consequences,” Regional President Attilio Fontana said in the newspaper *La Repubblica* on Tuesday.

Living with virus is complying with the laws as well

Even during this unprecedented time of global crisis that has devastated economies and the entire health system, it is painful to see that a vast majority of people are not complying with the laws as part of the precautionary measures to combat novel coronavirus spread.

Many of whom I spoke to claimed that they were trying to live with COVID-19 pandemic situation. Does living with the situation mean that we can break the laws? If not what do they mean by 'living with the virus'?

Almost 186 countries were forced to implement varying degrees of restrictions on population movement to prevent the spread of the infections with Oman being no exception.

We also know that such measures might have saved lives, but have come at the cost of severe socio-economic impact.

All sorts of things have changed as a result of the pandemic.

There is a huge push towards digital environments as we navigate social distancing measures and public health concerns. Ultimately,



Samuel Kutty
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THERE IS A HUGE
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DIGITAL
ENVIRONMENTS
AS WE NAVIGATE
SOCIAL
DISTANCING
MEASURES AND
PUBLIC HEALTH
CONCERNS

this is the direction the financial services industry was headed, but it is concerning that the pace of change may leave many members of society feeling daunted or disconnected.

We all know that lockdowns are entwined with a number of problems including unemployment, isolation, an unprecedented migrant worker crisis, and widespread loss of access to healthcare.

This means lockdowns and other extreme restrictions cannot be sustained for the long term except that they give time for countries to reduce the incidence of disease and put in place robust, yet sustainable, measures to prevent and control transmission to balance various health, social and economic concerns.

Still we allow room for the authorities to clamp lockdowns with our evasive attitude to simple laws of physical distancing or wearing masks. Even though it is only night lockdown we fear more curbs. This shows that we did not learn from the months-long curfew like situation that prevailed in our country.

We need to respect the

recommendations and measures issued by the authorities, to protect ourselves, our kith and kin and people who live in our society. We should not wait for something bad to happen so that we learn.

True, we have learned to do online transactions so that we do not have to go to the stores to get our essentials or other materials. We also learned how to work from home in addition to several things that reduce gatherings.

But one should know that when one gets infected with the virus due to a recalcitrant attitude, one might expose others to it. While we simply do not know the magnitude of what lies ahead, our experience since March is that of a resurgence.

So we should join the authorities to do what is necessary to protect and serve one another, today and in the future. Everything can end tomorrow. Focus on what is important to us. After doing this we can claim that we have learnt to live with the virus.

Remember that the best life lesson is learned during hard times and when we make mistakes. Let us not repeat mistakes.

BUILD BACK BETTER

For Biden, economic plans may wait on battle with virus

HOWARD SCHNEIDER

The Democratic party's sprawling presidential primary last spring offered a wide-open debate on economic policy ranging from the merits of wealth taxes and other ways to ease US economic inequality to aggressive proposals for reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Yet even a "blue wave" victory next month giving Democrats control of the White House and both chambers of Congress may strand that sort of transformational economic thinking on the sidelines until the battle against the coronavirus is won.

While an electoral victory by Democratic contender Joe Biden might shift the US response to the pandemic, he would also have to restore public confidence in things like restaurant dining, and get the country's commercial and work life back to normal — in short, navigate massive uncertainties surrounding vaccines, public behaviour, and divergent local approaches to a common health problem.

"It is extremely hard to imagine a sustainable, robust recovery absent virus control. So that

It is extremely hard to imagine a sustainable, robust recovery absent virus control. So that is step one," Biden economic adviser Jared Bernstein said in a recent webcast discussion, when asked how an incoming administration would juggle a wide set of competing priorities.

JARED BERNSTEIN
Biden Adviser

"Part two," he said, will be the likely need

for another fiscal package to help families and businesses through the current recession. After that will follow what Bernstein called the "more permanent lasting agenda" of investments in clean energy or broadening healthcare coverage.

The focus on the virus and the recession does not exclude pursuit of some longer-term aims, Bernstein said. For example, expanding and improving child care could help parents return to the workforce, and infrastructure investments could generate desperately needed jobs.

Still the state of the US economy two weeks before the election means that, rather than a clean slate to write economic policy equal to the sweep of Democratic aspirations, Biden would face an ongoing pandemic, the aftermath of 22 million lost jobs, a public unable to mingle freely, and major industries suffering depressed demand. Nathan Sheets, chief economist at PGIM Fixed Income, sees a troubling litany of problems: Jobs will be harder to find, the economy's productive capacity is lower, and many households and businesses will emerge with weaker balance sheets.

"Will those weaker balance sheets lead to less consumption, investment, less risk taking? These are scars that are emerging," Sheets said. That suggests a presidential transition spent deciding whether federal dollars should be allocated for direct aid to families and local governments or for the more strategic reforms of Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda, say his proposed \$2 trillion investment in clean energy, and whether to follow through on promised tax increases during a recession. The more ambitious programmes hinge not just on the virus, but the composition of the Congress. While the larger economic proposals are high priorities, "if there is a Republican Senate Joe Biden is going to have to dramatically scale back his proposals," said Neera Tanden, president of the Democratic-aligned Center for American Progress think tank. — Reuters

COVID CURBS

Drought and hunger drive Nepal farmers to India

AADESH SUBEDI

As an exceptionally wet monsoon season caused floods and landslides across much of Nepal, Buddhi Prasad Chaudhary, a farmer in the west of the country, was harvesting his rice early, after drought left it suitable only for animal feed. Chaudhary, 27, uses groundwater supplies to grow some of the crops on his half-acre farm in the Narainapur rural municipality of Banke district. But for a thirsty crop like rice, he depends on rain.

"It is almost impossible to grow rice using groundwater irrigation only," said the farmer, who relies on rice farming to earn an income and feed his extended family of 10. "This year is the first time I have had to buy rice, as my harvest won't be sufficient for my family for the whole year," Chaudhary said. An unusually dry monsoon season in Narainapur has ruined rice crops across the area, leaving thousands of farmers with so little food or income that some have broken a coronavirus travel ban, in place since late March, to seek work in India.

Seasonal migration for economic reasons is common in the region — and when India imposed a strict lockdown to curb the pandemic, drying up casual jobs in cities, tens of thousands of Nepalese migrant workers returned home across the border.

Travel between Nepal and India is likely to be prohibited due to COVID-19 restrictions until at least next month. But Laxmi Kant Mishra, Narainapur's crisis management chief, said many people were leaving illegally



A farmer harvests rice at a field on World Food Day in Bhaktapur, Nepal. — Reuters

WHEN INDIA
IMPOSED A STRICT
LOCKDOWN, TENS
OF THOUSANDS
OF NEPALESE
MIGRANT WORKERS
RETURNED HOME
ACROSS THE
BORDER

"as it is better to go to India and search for a job rather than die hungry here".

Arjun Singh Thapa, Nepal programme officer at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said drought had become more frequent and erratic in the South Asian nation in recent years.

Farmers who could previously rely on monsoon rains from June to September now struggle to plan their harvests, while recurring dry spells have hardened the ground, he

said. That means any rain that does fall cannot penetrate deep enough to adequately recharge groundwater supplies, he added. The increasingly widespread use of chemical fertilisers has also inhibited the soil's ability to retain rainwater, he noted.

"In past years, crops would grow well even if we didn't have sufficient rainfall for four or five months. But these days, 15 days of dry (weather) is enough to damage crops," said Thapa.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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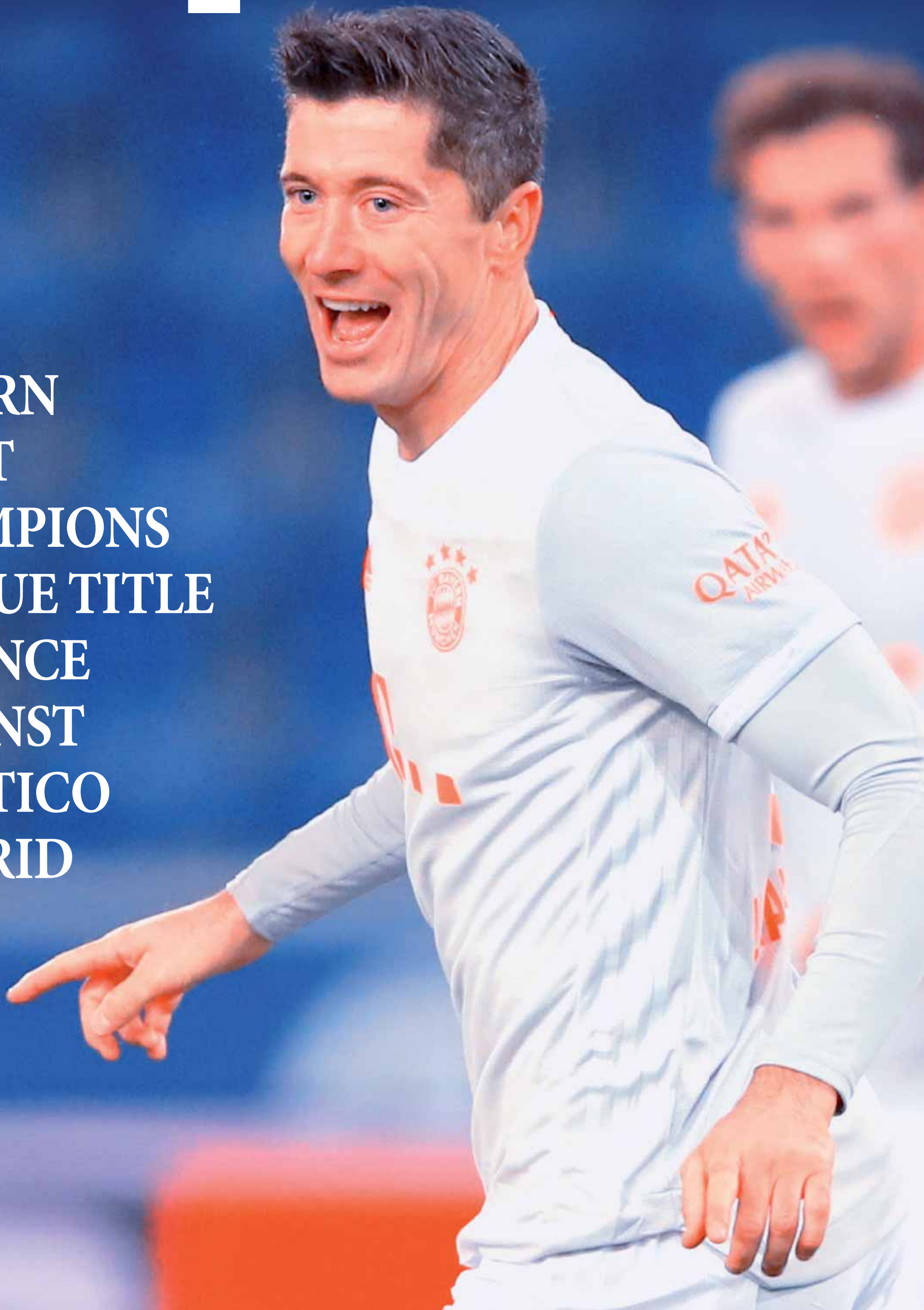
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sport

BAYERN START CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TITLE DEFENCE AGAINST ATLETICO MADRID



BERLIN: Only 59 days after their Champions League triumph in Lisbon, Bayern Munich start their title defence on Wednesday with a difficult home game against Atletico Madrid.

It's the third competition Bayern start this season amid a tight coronavirus-affected football calendar, which will force the club to play several mid-week games. Players had no rest and not much time to savour their first Bundesliga away win of the season at Arminia Bielefeld on Saturday(4-1). "We need to maintain the

rhythm and win the next game too," striker Robert Lewandowski said after the match.

"The Champions League is always special, but we're prepared for the game." The matchup doesn't bring good memories to Munich. The last meeting between the clubs was in the 2016-17 season when each won the irrespective group stage home game 1-0 and went through to the next round. But in the previous season (2015-16) Atletico eliminated Bayern in the semifinals thanks to an away goal scored at the Allianz Arena.

Since then a lot has changed, but the title holders maintain their respect for their season's opening opponent. "They're a strong and awkward team. They were rightly in the knockout stages last season," goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said.

"Everyone knows the players, so we can look forward to a great night of football on Wednesday. It's the first game, so you never know where your opponents are at in the Champions League."

After the win in Bielefeld, coach Hansi Flick said the team are "missing some training sessions"

and "it will be a challenge, but there is no other option and for that reason we'll take it."

However, to handle the packed schedule in a better way and attempt to defend three titles (Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League) Bayern have brought in new players since their 1-0 win against Paris Saint-Germain in the final last season.

Signings such as Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, Alexander Nuebel, Marc Roca, among others and a talented youth academy will give Flick the chance to rotate his

options as seen against Dueren in Bayern's German Cup opener on October 15.

Newcomer Leroy Sane, however, is still working his way back to fitness after a knee injury and at best will have a seat on the bench. "We must evaluate from game to game and see how fit each player is. We must all work together, coaching staff and also the players," Flick said.

For family reasons, Joshua Kimmich, who already missed the game at Bielefeld, is not certain to play on Wednesday. "Against

Atletico he is very important. I hope he can be there. It's a home game so chances of him being there are bigger," Flick told newspaper *Bild*. As for Atletico they confirmed on Monday that Douglas Costa won't travel to Germany. The Brazilian-born Spain international striker limped off with what appeared to be a hamstring strain on Saturday in Atletico's 2-0 league win over Celta Vigo.

The game at the Allianz Arena will take place behind closed doors amid rising coronavirus infection rates in Europe. — **dpa**

CHENNAI CONCEDE IPL SEASON COULD BE OVER AFTER SEVENTH DEFEAT

MUMBAI: One of the most successful and consistent teams in the history of the Indian Premier League, Chennai Super Kings, appeared to have given up hopes of turning their current season around after their seventh loss in 10 matches on Monday.

Led by former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Chennai have reached the playoffs in every edition they have played in the Twenty20 tournament, which is being held in the United Arab Emirates this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The side, who were banned for two years due to an illegal betting scandal, have lifted the trophy three times and reached the final on five other occasions.

But with four league-stage matches left, Chennai are bottom of the table and have very slim hopes of making the playoffs.

The team have been criticised for continuing with their aged players despite the poor run but that could change for the remainder of the tournament.

"This season, we were not really there," the 39-year-old Dhoni,

who played his 200th match in the IPL on Monday, said during the presentation following his team's seven-wicket thrashing by Steve Smith's Rajasthan Royals.

"There were a few chances to the youngsters and maybe we didn't see the kind of spark that they could have given us to say, okay, push (out) the experienced guy and maybe make some space for them. "Today, the result, what it really does is give those guys whatever is left in our league stages, they will get a chance and they will have no real pressure on them. They can go out and express themselves."

Chennai did not have an ideal pre-season when many people from their touring party tested positive for the novel coronavirus upon arriving in the UAE, and experienced players like Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh withdrew due to personal reasons.

"It's fair to say looking at the table now that this team may have run out of juice," said Chennai coach Stephen Fleming, adding that the mood in the camp was "pretty down."

— Reuters



Players may withdraw from tours due to bubble burnout: Morgan

ABU DHABI: England's players can withdraw from tours if they feel playing in bio-secure bubbles during the COVID-19 pandemic will take a toll on their mental health, limited overs captain Eoin Morgan has said.

England hosted West Indies, Pakistan and Australia after cricket's restart in July, with the teams restricted to playing in Manchester and Southampton where the ECB had set up bubbles.

The Indian Premier League has set up a bubble for players in the

United Arab Emirates and similar curbs on movement will be in place with England expected to tour South Africa next month.

"We've spoken about this as a team and we've accepted that guys will come in and out of the bubble as they feel it is affecting their mental health," Morgan said during an online charity event. "I do think we will see people pull out of tours. That's just going to be the reality of things." Morgan said it was important to create an environment for players to be

comfortable with making that decision.

"I don't think people should look down on it and they shouldn't feel like people aren't doing their job or not committing to their country," the 34-year-old added. "That's a reactive way of dealing with things and we want to be at the forefront of making it acceptable for people to say 'I need to spend time with my family now and I'm taking this tour off' just because of the extraordinary circumstances."

— Reuters

Gayle leads star imports for delayed Lanka Premier League



COLOMBO: Chris Gayle, Faf du Plessis, Shahid Afridi and Carlos Brathwaite were among 23 star imports named on Tuesday for the twice-postponed Lanka Premier League which will finally begin next month.

Each of the five LPL teams is allowed up to six imported players and they have until November 1 to fill any remaining slots.

West Indies' Gayle and South Africa's du Plessis are playing in the Indian Premier League which is currently taking place in the United Arab Emirates.

The 23-match Twenty20 Sri Lanka tournament was originally scheduled for August but was moved to November 14 and then November 21 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Players will have to go into quarantine for 14 days on arrival and the tournament, which will be played with no spectators, has been reduced from three to two venues — Kandy and Hambantota — with the final on December 13.

Bangladesh called off a Test series in Sri Lanka last month because of quarantine restrictions.

— AFP



Doping charges
against Bahrain's
400m world
champion Naser
dismissed



This file photo taken on October 3, 2019 shows Bahrain's Salwa Eid Naser celebrating after winning the Women's 400m final at the 2019 IAAF Athletics World Championships at the Khalifa International stadium in Doha. — AFP

LONDON: The doping charges brought against Bahrain's 400 metre world champion Salwa Eid Naser have been dismissed, the Athletics Integrity Unit announced on Tuesday.

The 22-year-old Naser was provisionally suspended in June and charged with failing to meet 'whereabouts' criteria.

The AIU charged the Nigerian-born runner with four alleged 'whereabouts' failures which included three missed tests between March 2019 and January this year. But the World Athletics Disciplinary Tribunal did not confirm a missed test from April 2019, therefore meaning Naser had not missed three tests within 12 months which is required to prove an anti-doping violation.

The AIU added that it has the right to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Naser stunned athletics in Doha last year when she powered to the third-fastest 400m time in history to win the world title.

Her time of 48.14 seconds has only been bettered by East German Marita Koch in 1985 and former Czech runner Jarmila Kratochvilova in 1983. — AFP

— Reuters

Australia still negotiating India's arrival for Test series

SYDNEY: Only a few weeks before the players are due to start arriving, Cricket Australia are still negotiating with Queensland health officials over the quarantining of the India team ahead of their blockbuster test series.

The India squad is scheduled to quarantine in Brisbane and play six short-form internationals in Queensland in late November and early December before moving on to Adelaide for the first of four tests.

The Indian and many of the

Australian players will be coming from the United Arab Emirates, where the Indian Premier League (IPL) concludes on November 10, but CA have not yet had their plans agreed by Queensland's health department. CA said they held a "productive" meeting with Queensland Health on Monday and were confident of hosting "a full schedule of matches" against India.

"This is an extremely detailed and complex plan that places the health

and safety of the community, players and staff as paramount and there is clarification required in order to finalise arrangements," CA said.

"We would like to thank our friends at the BCCI for their patience and understanding as we work towards a swift and successful outcome." Queensland was the most successful of the populous eastern Australian states at containing the new coronavirus and closed its borders to the rest of the country

in early August. Health security has become an issue in campaigning for state elections to be held on October 31 and a rugby league team from Canberra was last week denied permission to arrive in the state a few hours early before a major match in Brisbane. If CA cannot reach agreement with Queensland Health, they might soon have to start looking at other options to ensure the lucrative series goes ahead.

The chairman of the Sydney

Cricket Ground Trust, which controls the historic venue and other stadiums in the city, said New South Wales would be willing and able to help out. "We've got ground availability, we've got the processes and we can certainly manage the biosecurity. We'd certainly be a very willing substitute," Tony Shepherd told the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Tuesday. "We'd be interested in helping cricket in any way we could."

Zimbabwe squad arrives in Pakistan, without Indian coach

KARACHI: Zimbabwe's cricket squad arrived in Pakistan on Tuesday -- minus their Indian coach, who had been advised to stay away from the rival South Asian nation.

The 20-man Zimbabwe team is competing in a series of one-day internationals and Twenty20s, the first of which is slated for October 30 in Rawalpindi after the players complete a mandatory virus quarantine period.

Pakistan had granted Zimbabwe coach Lalchand Rajput a visa, but he did not travel as per his government's advice.

"Zimbabwe head coach Rajput will miss the Pakistan tour after Indian embassy in Harare wrote to us asking that Rajput, who is an Indian national, be exempted from visiting Pakistan," a Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) statement read.

India and Pakistan have been bitter rivals since independence from Britain in 1947, with relations taking a fresh turn for the worse last year following New Delhi's decision to strip Indian-administered Kashmir of its partial autonomy.

In Rajput's absence, bowling coach Douglas Hondo will supervise Zimbabwe for the tour, with allrounder Chamu Chibhabha at the



The Zimbabwe cricket squad of 20 players poses for pictures as they depart the country at Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare. — AFP

helm.

The schedule will see three one-day internationals in Rawalpindi on October 30, November 1 and 3, while three Twenty20 internationals are set

for Lahore on November 7, 8 and 10.

Rajput played two Tests and four one-day internationals in a short career before turning to coaching. He was appointed Zimbabwe coach in

August 2018.

The limited-over series will further the revival of international cricket in Pakistan, suspended after the Sri Lankan team bus was attacked

in Lahore in 2009.

Zimbabwe were the first team to end Pakistan's five-year isolation by touring in 2015.

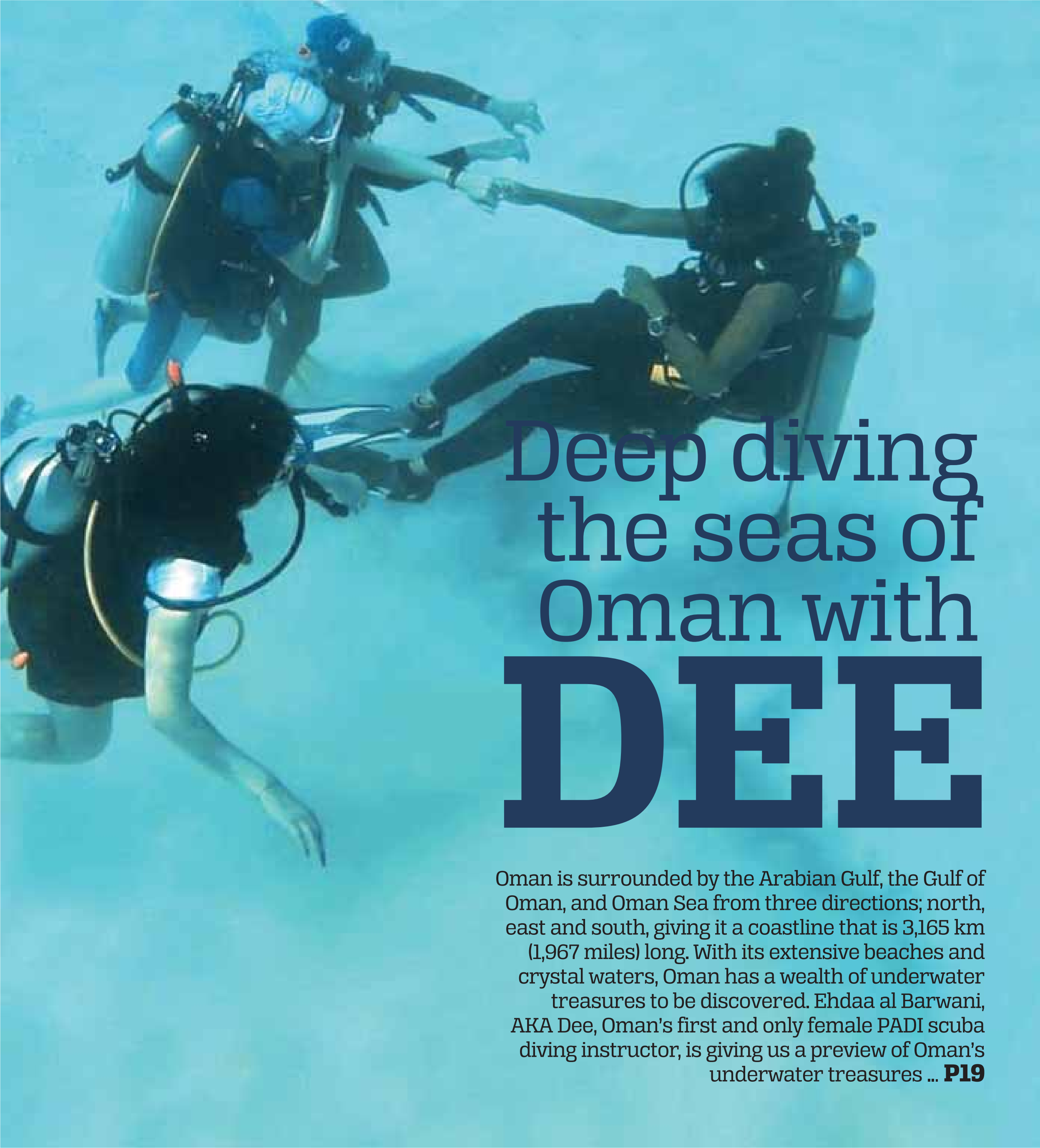
South Africa is also slated to tour

Pakistan in January, while England seem likely to come for the first time since 2005 for a three-match Twenty20 series, also in January.

— AFP

features

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Deep diving the seas of Oman with DEE

Oman is surrounded by the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and Oman Sea from three directions; north, east and south, giving it a coastline that is 3,165 km (1,967 miles) long. With its extensive beaches and crystal waters, Oman has a wealth of underwater treasures to be discovered. Ehdaa al Barwani, AKA Dee, Oman’s first and only female PADI scuba diving instructor, is giving us a preview of Oman’s underwater treasures ... **P19**

DAILY PICKS

FASHION



UNSUITED TO NEW ERA? FATE OF FORMAL FASHION HANGS BY A THREAD

Italian luxury designer Brunello Cucinelli makes men's suits that sell for up to 7,000 euros (\$8,200). But even he - like most people across the globe - hasn't worn a suit for months, let alone bought one... Story on **Page 16**

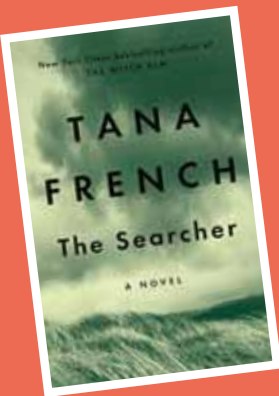
COOK LIKE A CHEF



CRISPY OCTOPUS WITH JAPANESE MAYONNAISE

The chefs of W Muscat will be taking centre stage in the next two weeks offering some of the hotel's best creations... Story on **Page 15**

READ



THE SEARCHER BY TANA FRENCH

After a divorce, a former Chicago police officer resettles in an Irish village where a boy goes missing.

ITALIAN WEEK



WORLD ITALIAN LANGUAGE WEEK TAKING PLACE FROM OCTOBER 19 TO 25

Under the theme "Italian Between Word and Image: Graffiti, Illustrations, Comic Strips", the 20th Edition of the Week of Italian Language in the World kicked off worldwide on October 19, 2020... Story on **Page 18**

CELEBRATE



REPTILE AWARENESS DAY

Reptile Awareness Day was create awareness about the importance of the world's reptiles that usually don't have the best public image. To celebrate today, learn and study of one of the unique reptiles that can be found in the country you are in and check how you can support their conservation.



Deep diving the seas of Oman with DEE

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY
@needstoshutup

The world's oceans face a myriad threat: Worldwide, coral reefs are being irreparably damaged. Species of marine life are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. Conservation of the marine ecosystem is at a delicate point, and there is no group better placed for the advocacy of marine protection than the dive industry.

Oman is surrounded by the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and Oman Sea from three directions; north, east and south, giving it a coastline that is 3,165 km (1,967 miles) long. With its extensive beaches and crystal waters, Oman has a wealth of underwater treasures to be discovered.

Meet Dee a.k.a Ehdad al Barwani, Oman's first and only female PADI scuba diving instructor whose mission is to not only share her love for the world under the sea but also educate and train a new generation of divers who not only expose the world under but also the devastation us on land continue to cause it.

"It all started whilst I was backpacking through south-east Asia and I ran out of money, and as I was looking for a job and that's when I got drawn to diving. It seemed like the natural thing to do living by the coast, with beautiful views and amazing dive spots and that's when I took my first dive and I was instantly hooked." Said Dee.

Took her first dive in 2011, Dee now trains and has been a PADI certified scuba instructor for the past year.

Diving, whether scuba or free, has always been a popular sport in Oman amongst both locals and tourists, especially its diverse marine life and amazing dive sites

makes it the perfect place to enjoy the beach and enjoy the world below sea level. But what Dee noticed was although it was popular, divers were more commonly men. Ladies seemed interested, but culture and comfort often got in the way and without many ladies teaching diving, many women didn't feel comfortable enough to learn in such a male-centric space. "Honestly, I didn't expect to be the first female instructor, I got a job in Salalah and I went there for one season that lasted 6 months and then came back and that's when I realised I was the only female Omani instructor, there were many ladies who were dive masters, but non who were PADI certified instructors. That's when I realised, it was time I opened up my centre, encourage the ladies to join. They are interested, and they are keen to join but without a space that didn't cater to them, they weren't able to. And to my surprise, once I opened up my centre, I was shocked by the number of girls and women signing up and honestly, it made me so proud, so proud!" She said.

Scuba diving is probably the best way to experience Oman's marine life as you get as close as possible to its hidden treasures and the oceans and coral reefs are under ever-increasing pressure from the burgeoning human populations and the effects that they have on our oceans.

Oceans full of plastics, reefs degraded by pollution, warming oceans causing coral bleaching, the list of threats to the world's oceans goes on. Dive instructors train the scuba divers of the future, but they also have a role to play in training them how to be environmentally respectful and responsible divers.

Initiatives by groups or individuals, clearing up beaches and public spaces are an amazing way to get involved, but its a small solu-

tion to a very big problem. Like the beaches in the rest of the world, The Sultanate too faces the problem of people leaving behind their trash, and whether plastic or not, it doesn't belong in our oceans where they invariably end up.

Dee Explained, "We have a beautiful coastline, why not venture into it. And along with the adventure, teach. We're sitting here screaming about too much plastic

Scuba diving is probably the best way to experience Oman's marine life as you get as close as possible to its hidden treasures and the oceans and coral reefs are under ever-increasing pressure from the burgeoning human populations and the effects that they have on our oceans

and use reusable, too many straws and too much rubbish in the oceans but other than a few socially aware groups of people, most don't seem to understand the extent of the issue that the earth and our seas are facing. And it's not that they don't care, but they haven't seen for themselves how bad things are underneath the water."

Marine debris has become an 'unnatural disaster' of epic proportions. This is probably no surprise to the many scuba divers out there that have discovered pollu-

tion in its many forms strewn about what would otherwise be a pristine underwater paradise.

The way to tackle the issue is not having groups cleaning up on land and under the sea but removing these problems, to begin with. Like many other countries, plastics can and should become a thing of the past, bags, straws, drink lids alike. We need to create awareness, not through lectures and lessons but actual awareness by showing people what the extent of the damage is along with the actual harm it is causing to our oceans and marine life. We need people and organisations to come up and become more proactive by educating and training people and this is something the Dee is very keen on with her organisation.

She said, "Something I'm very particular about when I take my groups out is not only focusing on their training but also reminding them that their jackets (BCD) have pockets. So if you see a piece of plastic, or a cap or some sort of trash that doesn't belong there, you pick it up and put it in your pocket. Other than the evil plastic, another thing you see trash at the bottom are soda cans and often fish end up living in them. These cans wreak havoc as they rust, and leech toxins from the paint into the water and to the fish that use it as a spot to live or hide in and it is important to always empty the cups before putting them into your pocket and my students are often so surprised with what they find in the cans. It's amazing but I've noticed that as they watch me do it, they have started doing it and now many even do it when they go on dives on their own and it honestly makes me proud but also made me realise how important it is to lead by example."

Follow Dee and her fellow aura divers @dive.with.dee and if you want to join the crew yourself, check out their website www.auradivers.com





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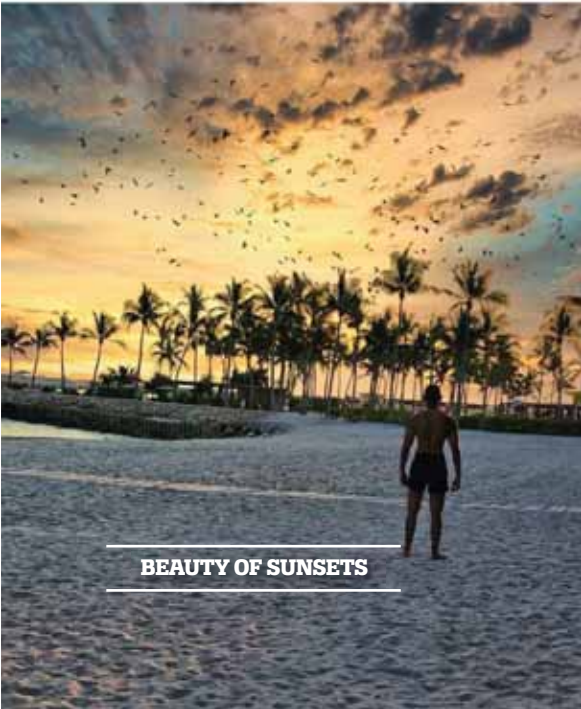
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Crispy Octopus with Japanese mayonnaise



FULFILLING DINING EXPERIENCE

W Muscat has some of Oman's best places for dining and offers the most sumptuous of food available in this part of the world. The chefs of W Muscat will be taking centre stage in the next two weeks offering some of the hotel's best creations. As a bonus, this month has seen the launching of Ba Ban, the newest addition to its fine restaurants that offer the spirit of 1920s and 30s Shanghai and life around the Bund, a by-gone era of entertainment and charm. Reservations are mandatory at Ba Ban which is open for lunch Tuesdays - Saturdays from 12 PM - 430PM.

PREPARATION METHOD

In a medium pot, add octopus, water, soy sauce and sugar. Bring it to the boil, put a lid or cover on the pot, and allow to simmer for 40 minutes on medium-low heat.

After 40 minutes, add the sparkling water and allow to simmer for another 15 minutes.

Turn off the heat and leave octopus to cool down in the water.

In a small mixing bowl, mix the miso paste and kewpie mayonnaise. Stir in the rest of the sauce ingredients and leave in the fridge to rest.

Strain the octopus and cut into bite-sized pieces and dust with tempura flour.

Heat oil in a large frying pan and fry octopus until golden brown, approximately 5 minutes. Place fried octopus on a paper towel to remove excess oil.

Serve octopus with sauce on the side and a sprinkling of chopped spring onions and red chilli slices for garnish.



ABOUT THE CHEF

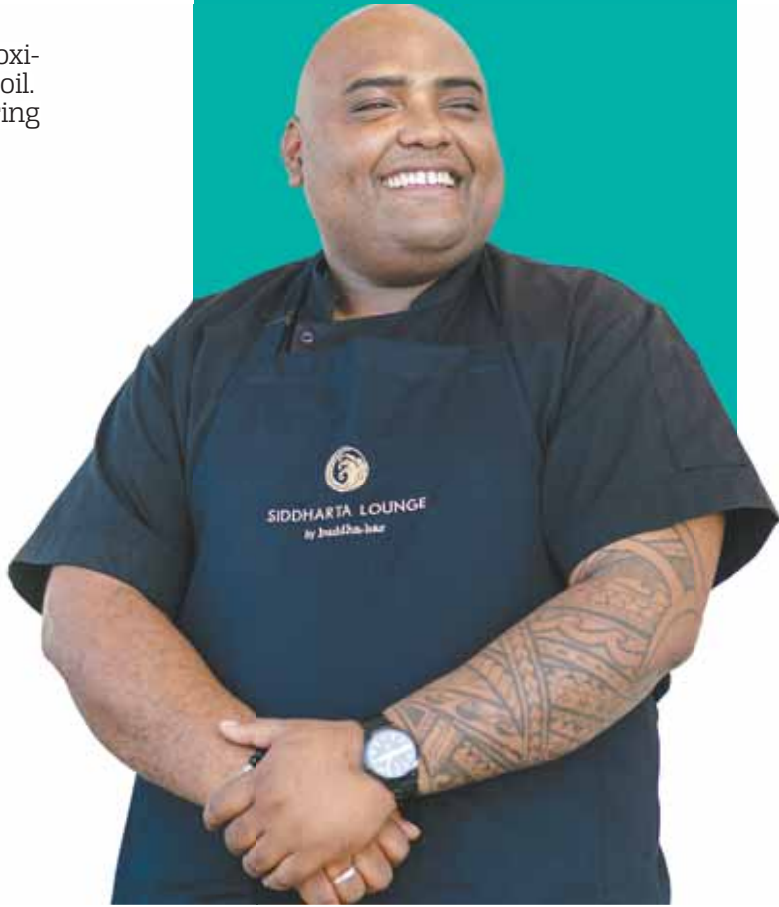
CHEF DAREL BAZERQUE

Head Chef
Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar

Hailing from the luxurious beaches of Mauritius, Darel joined W Muscat in 2019 as Chef de Cuisine at Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar. Taking inspiration from the panoramic ocean views and abundance of fresh seafood, Darel has mastered the rooftop restaurant's Asian-Mediterranean menu and offers up the freshest of local produce.

Darel joined W Muscat from Dubai, where he worked in multiple 5-star hotels earning his way up through the ranks from Junior Sous Chef. With fifteen years of experience in tourism and hospitality kitchens across Africa and the Middle East, he has worked with Michelin starred chefs in some of the world's grandest restaurants.

Darel is perfectly at home in his beachfront location and loves nothing more than enjoying fresh seafood on the beach with friends and family. Of course, as might be expected from an Islander, he can never pass down adding a little extra spice, and a little extra coconut to his meals!



INGREDIENTS:



SERVES: 4 PEOPLE

FOR OCTOPUS:

- 1 whole octopus, approx.1kg
- 1000ml water
- 100ml soy sauce
- 100gr sugar
- 100ml sparkling water
- 100gr tempura flour
- 300ml oil
- 20gr spring onion
- 1 whole red chilli

FOR SAUCE:

- 15gr white miso paste
- 50gr kewpie mayonnaise, or regular mayonnaise if you can't find kewpie.
- 5ml soy sauce
- 10gr balsamic vinegar

LANGUAGE WEEK

World Italian language week taking place from October 19 to 25



SETTIMANA
DELLA LINGUA
ITALIANA
NEL MONDO

UNDER THE theme "Italian Between Word and Image: Graffiti, Illustrations, Comic Strips", the 20th Edition of the Week of Italian Language in the World kicked off worldwide on October 19, 2020.

Organised by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and its diplomatic and consular network, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism (MiBACT) and the Ministry of University and Research (MUR), as well as the main partners of linguistic promotion in Italy (Accademia della Crusca, Dante Alighieri Society), the Week has over time become one of the most important initiatives dedicat-

"LRNZ", an Italian visual artist, will lead a workshop with the Omani author Nofal Zadjaliyah and other Omani illustrators to explore the relationship between image and word in different cultural contexts.

Lucca Comics, a partner of the Embassy in Muscat for the 2020 Week, will also include, among the initiatives, an online competition for young talents in comic strips.

The 20th edition of the Week of Italian Language in the World, scheduled from October 19 to October 25, 2020, will focus on those expressive forms that enhance the Italian language through images, with a particular emphasis on comic strips, graphic novels and,



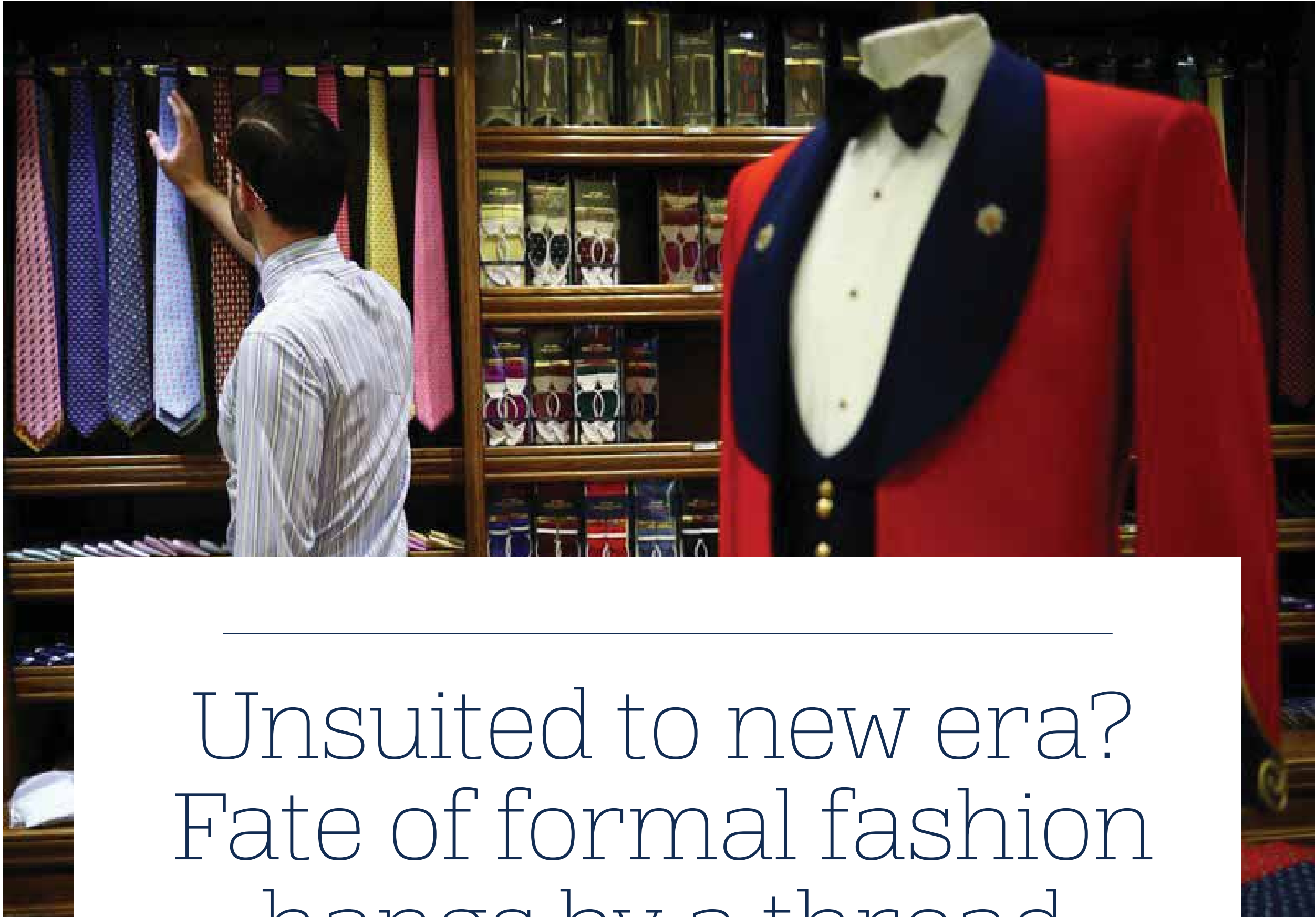
ed to the celebration of the Italian language in the world. The initiative, since its inception, has annually been granted the High Patronage of the Presidency of the Italian Republic. An important partner of the initiative is the Government of the Swiss Confederation, one of whose official languages is Italian.

For the 2020 edition, the Italian Embassy in Muscat will propose, among various activities, a reading and illustration online workshop for children by the illustrator Chiara Armellini and dedicated to Gianni Rodari, to celebrate this famous author on the occasion of the centenary of his birth. Further, to discover and compare the realities of comics between Italy and Oman, Lorenzo Ceccotti

more generally, the publishing chain for children and adolescents.

Each year the Week is dedicated to a different theme, which serves as a common thread for a rich programme of conferences, exhibitions and meetings. The last edition, entitled "Italian on the Stage", gave birth to a wide range of events (about 900 in over 100 countries) dedicated to music, popular songs, theatre, dramaturgy and melodrama.

As usual, the Accademia della Crusca edited a collection of essays on the theme of the event. The participation of the Swiss Confederation will see its diplomatic representations abroad collaborate with the Italian Embassies in the organisation of events to promote the Italian language.



Unsuited to new era? Fate of formal fashion hangs by a thread

Italian luxury designer Brunello Cucinelli makes men's suits that sell for up to 7,000 euros (\$8,200). But even he — like most people across the globe — hasn't worn a suit for months, let alone bought one.

"We've all been locked away at home, so this is the first jacket I have put on since March," Cucinelli said in Milan as he presented his latest collection in September, wearing a light grey blazer. Most people in "white-collar" jobs are working from home, with a newfound love of sweatpants, a trend that some experts expect to outlive the pandemic. And few, if any, weddings or parties are taking place.

This seismic shift in behaviour is having profound repercussions across the supply chain for suits and formal wear, upending a sartorial sector spanning every continent. In Australia, the world's biggest producer of merino wool, prices have been in freefall, hitting decade lows. Many sheep farmers are in dire straits, storing wool in every available shed in the hope of a rebound.

In northern Italy, the wool mills that buy from the farmers and weave the fabric for high-end suits have seen their own orders from retailers nosedive. In the United States and Europe, several retail chains specialising in business attire such as Men's Wearhouse, Brooks Brothers and TMLewin have closed stores or filed for bankruptcy over the past few months, and more could follow. Players at all levels said they were being forced to adapt to survive, from farmers turning to other forms of agriculture to mills making stretchier fabrics for a new breed of suits that don't crease easily and are more



In northern Italy, the wool mills that buy from the farmers and weave the fabric for high-end suits have seen their own orders from retailers nosedive

resistant to stains.

"People want to be more comfortable and are less inclined to wear a formal suit," said Silvio Botto Poala, managing director of Lanificio Botto Giuseppe, a wool mill in Italy's textile hub of

Biella which counts Armani, Max Mara, Ralph Lauren and Hermes among its customers. "With Zoom conferences and smart working, you'll see men wearing a shirt, perhaps even a tie, but not many suits."

MERINO FARMERS CLING ON

Fine wool prices in Australia have more than halved during a tumultuous 18-month period, as usually healthy purchases of merino wool from Italian mills have almost ground to a halt. The benchmark price for merino wool fell to A\$8.58 (\$6.1) per kg in early September, auction results show, down from A\$20.16 in early 2019. It has since partly recovered to just over A\$10.

Andrew Blanch, managing director of New England Wool in New South Wales, which sources wool from farms for Italian textile makers, said many buyers now had excess supplies. "They've all got wool to get rid of before they even come back to the market here," said Blanch, speaking on the phone from wool auctions in Sydney's western suburbs. "If the shops aren't open, everything just backs up. A lot of the orders we had bought wool against just got cancelled by their clients in the US and around Europe." He said that China, which alongside Italy purchases most of Australia's more than A\$3 billion in annual wool exports, was now "the only show in town" even though Chinese buyers were also acquiring less wool.

Many merino sheep farmers are storing their wool in sheds or storage facilities; though some who are still emerging from a three-year drought are selling their bales into the weak market to stay financially afloat. "Not everyone is big enough to hold on to their wool clip and wait for the price to change," said Dave Young, a farmer near the New South Wales town of Yass. "We are in the position where we have to meet the market within a relatively short time after shearing." — **Reuters**



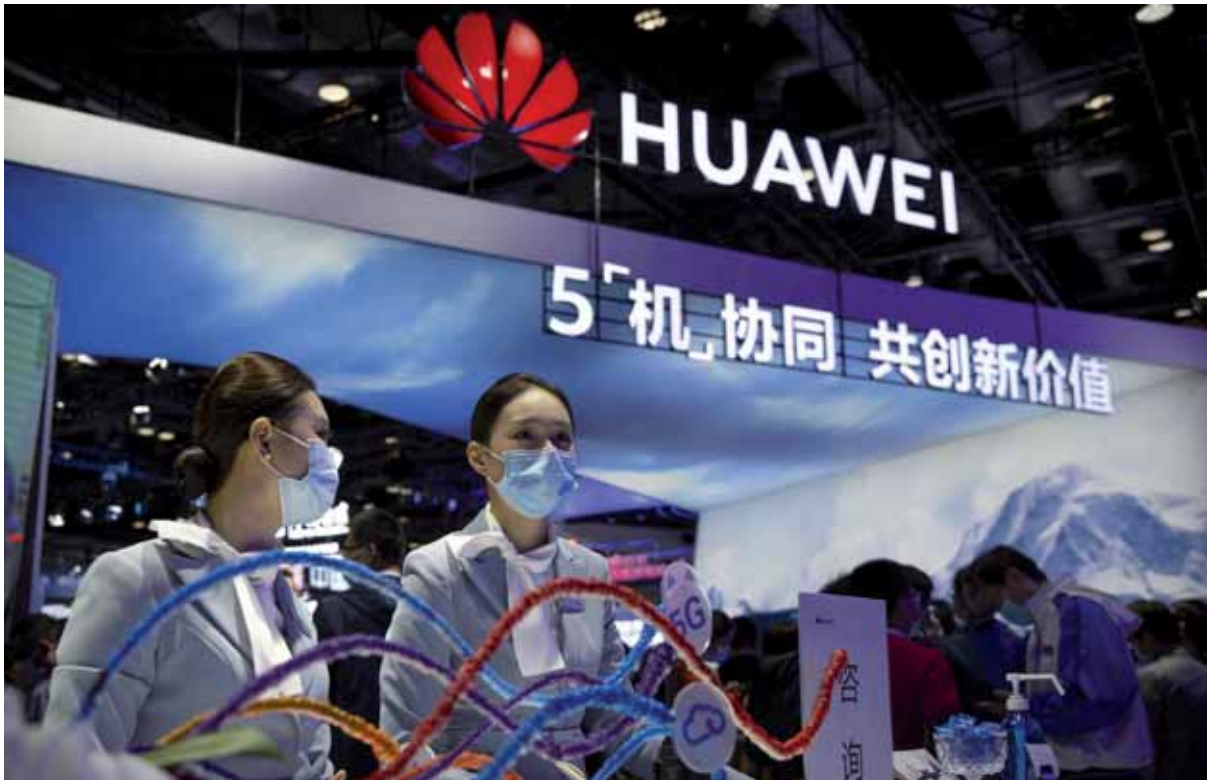
Sweden bans Huawei, ZTE from 5G networks

European governments have been reviewing the role of Chinese companies in building their networks following pressure from the United States

STOCKHOLM: Swedish regulators on Tuesday banned the use of telecom equipment from China's Huawei and ZTE in its 5G network ahead of the spectrum auction scheduled for next month.

The Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS) said the setting of the licence conditions followed assessments by the Swedish Armed Forces and security service.

European governments have been reviewing the role of Chinese companies in building their networks following pressure from the United States, which says they pose a security threat because, among other concerns, Chinese companies and citizens must by law aid the state in intelligence gathering. Sweden's security service



Staff members stand at a booth from Chinese technology firm Huawei at the PT Expo in Beijing. – Reuters

called China "one of the biggest threats against Sweden". The United Kingdom in July

ordered Huawei equipment to be purged completely from Britain's 5G network by 2027, becoming one of

the first European countries to do so. Huawei and ZTE did not immediately respond to requests

The ban leaves network operators with less options and risks slowing the rollout of 5G in markets where competition is reduced

for comment on the decision by Sweden, home to Ericsson, one of Europe's leading telecoms equipment suppliers.

"The ban leaves network operators with less options and risks slowing the rollout of 5G in markets where competition is reduced," said Ben Wood, chief of research at CCS Insight. The ban is likely to benefit rival telecom equipment makers Ericsson and Finland's Nokia.

PTS said companies taking part in the auction must remove Huawei and ZTE gear from existing central functions by January 1, 2025. The regulator defined central functions as equipment used to build the radio access network, the transmission network, the

core network and the service and maintenance of the network.

PTS said the licence conditions were decided to address the assessments made by the armed forces and security service. It has approved the participation of Hi3G Access, Net4Mobility, Telia Sverige and Telenor in the planned spectrum auction of 3.5 GHz and 2.3 GHz, key bands crucial for the rollout of 5G.

Tele2 and Telenor will participate together as Net4Mobility to secure spectrum for a joint nationwide 5G network.

Tele2, which uses Huawei equipment in its network, which had earlier called Huawei an important vendor, said the PTS decision "does not change our plans substantially".

"We may have to phase different costs differently between years to meet security conditions on time," a spokesman said.

The 5G spectrum auction was originally planned for early 2020, but last year PTS said it would delay the auction due to a security review. — Reuters

In brief

■ BERLIN

GERMAN DEBT LEVEL SEEN RISING TO 71 PER CENT OF GDP



Germany's debt level will likely rise to 71 per cent of GDP this year, a finance ministry document showed, as the country spends more to cushion the blow of the coronavirus pandemic. Next year's level is seen at 70.25 per cent when compared to the gross domestic product, due to the expected recovery of the economy, the document also showed. — Reuters

■ LONDON

OIL PRICES SLIP ON RISING CORONAVIRUS CASES AND OIL SUPPLIES



Oil prices fell on Tuesday on worries that a resurgence of coronavirus cases globally is stifling a recovery in fuel demand while growing Libyan output adds to already plentiful supply. Brent crude futures were trading down 34 cents, or 0.8 per cent, at \$42.28 a barrel by 0903 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell 15 cents, or 0.4 per cent, to \$40.68. COVID-19 cases topped 40 million on Monday, according to a Reuters tally, with a growing second wave in Europe and North America sparking various degrees of lockdown measures. A meeting on Monday of a ministerial panel of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and its allies, together known as Opec+, pledged to support the oil market as concerns grow over soaring coronavirus cases. For now Opec+ is sticking with a deal to curb output by 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) to the end of the year and then increasing production by 2 million bpd in January. — Reuters

Swiss bank UBS posts best Q3 in a decade

ZURICH: Swiss banking giant UBS said on Tuesday it nearly doubled its net profit in its best third quarter in a decade, the latest in a string of global lenders to report better-than-expected results despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The world's largest wealth manager saw net profit jump 99 per cent year-on-year to \$2.5 billion, it said in a statement, handily beating analyst expectations for \$1.5 billion.

The rise comes after net profit dropped by 11 per cent in the second quarter to June as the firm stepped up provisions for bad loans with the global economy in a tailspin due to the pandemic.

UBS' profits received a one-off, third-quarter boost from the \$631 million sale of a majority stake in its fund platform Fondcenter AG to Clearstream, a subsidiary of the Deutsche Borse group.

Its operating profit increased 26 per cent to \$8.9 billion, also surpassing analyst expectations. CEO Sergio Ermotti said he was proud of the third quarter results, his last at the helm, with ex-ING group chief Ralph Hamers taking over as



People walk past UBS logo in Bern, Switzerland. – Reuters

chief executive officer on November 1. "UBS has all the options open to write another successful chapter of its history under Ralph's leadership," Ermotti said in the statement.

But UBS did not give any estimate of its outlook, due to a "high level of uncertainty". "Going forward, the pandemic and political uncertainties may lead to periods of higher market volatility and could affect client activity positively or negatively," it said in the statement.

Other global banking giants to report surging profits this earnings season include Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup. — AFP

Vietnam's GDP growth seen slowing

HANOI: Vietnam's economic growth is expected to slow to 2-3 per cent this year after expanding 7.02 per cent in 2019 due to the wider impact of the coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said on Tuesday.

"The coronavirus pandemic has left a huge impact on socio-economic conditions, reducing people's income," Phuc told a meeting of the National Assembly, the country's lawmaking body.

The Southeast Asian country has performed better than many other countries combatting the coronavirus, recording only 1,140 infections, with 35 deaths. It has not reported any locally transmitted cases for 47 days. Phuc said Vietnam's first priority was to continue containing COVID-19. "We have done a good job in containing the virus, paving the way for reviving economic activities," Phuc said.

The Southeast Asian country has, however, faced a series of recent natural disasters. Floods and mudslides in October have killed 105 people and left 27 others



The coronavirus pandemic has left a huge impact on socio-economic conditions, reducing people's income

NGUYEN XUAN PHUC
Prime Minister

missing in the country's central provinces, with more heavy rain due in coming days.

Vietnam is targeting economic growth of 6 per cent next year, and an average annual growth of 6.5-7.0 per cent for the next five years, he

said. "The impact of the pandemic may last for a longer time, and therefore the targets are difficult," the Prime Minister said, referring to growth during the 2021-2025 period. — Reuters

■ BILLIONAIRES CLUB

China's super rich got \$1.5 trillion richer in 2020

BEIJING: China's super wealthy have earned a record \$1.5 trillion in 2020, more than the past five years combined, as e-commerce and gaming boomed during pandemic lockdowns, an annual rich list said on Tuesday.

An extra 257 people also joined the billionaires club in the world's number-two economy by August, following two years of shrinking membership, according to the closely watched Hurun Report.

The country now has a total of 878 billionaires.

The US had 626 people in the top bracket at the start of the year, according to Hurun in its February global list. The report found that there were around 2,000 individuals with a net worth of more than 2 billion yuan (\$300 million) in August, giving them a combined net worth of \$4 trillion.

Jack Ma, founder of e-commerce titan Alibaba, once again topped the list after his wealth surged a whopping 45 per cent to \$58.8

Jack Ma's wealth surged a whopping 45 per cent to

\$58.8

billion as online shopping firms saw a surge in business owing to people being shut indoors for months during strict lockdowns to contain the virus.

billion as online shopping firms saw a surge in business owing to people being shut indoors for months during strict lockdowns to contain the virus.

He was followed by Pony Ma (\$57.4 billion), boss of gaming giant and WeChat owner Tencent who made an extra 50 per cent despite concerns about his firm's US outlook after it was threatened with bans



Alibaba Group founder Jack Ma attends a press conference in Shanghai, in this file photo. – Reuters

there over national security fears.

First-time list member Zhong Shanshan, 66, best-known for his bottled water brand Nongfu, parachuted into third spot with \$53.7 billion after a Hong Kong IPO

in September, the report found.

"The world has never seen this much wealth created in just one year," Hurun Report chief researcher Rupert Hoogewerf said in a statement.

This year's list shows China was "moving away from traditional sectors like manufacturing and real estate, towards the new economy", he added.

Wang Xing, founder of food delivery app Meituan, quadrupled his wealth and jumped 52 places to 13th in the list with \$25 billion, while Richard Liu, the founder of online shopping platform JD.com doubled his money pile to \$23.5 billion.

Healthcare entrepreneurs also moved up the list on the back of the pandemic, with Jiang Rensheng, founder of vaccine-maker Zhifei, tripling his value to \$19.9 billion.

China shut down major cities around the country in late January and February to contain the virus that first emerged in Wuhan, causing an unprecedented economic contraction in the first quarter.

With infections appearing to be under control, the country is on track to become the only major economy to expand this year, according to the IMF. — AFP

Spread of virus leads to fear of national lockdown

While London has entered Tier 2 lockdown since the weekend, it is nowhere near as drastic as the Liverpool City region which has Tier 3 lockdown – the highest – imposed.

But the capital's size and importance counts for more. The number of people infected with coronavirus in the UK is at its highest level in around five months with cases rising rapidly, according to official data.

With each day that passes, businesses in the capital, like those around the rest of the country, continue to suffer and uncertainty goes on.

With the situation as it is, the winter is going to be grimmer and

firms will struggle to survive. The government's chief scientist has added to calls for tougher lockdown restrictions by warning that measures need to be implemented "fast and hard" to get infection rates under control.

Sir Patrick Vallance echoed comments made by the chief medical officer, Professor Chris Whitty, that the "baseline" measures of tier three on their own would not be enough to bring the R value of transmission below one.

He added that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies had recommended a short circuit-breaker to get on top of the outbreak. Health Minister, Matt Hancock, said in parliament that the virus is "spreading exponentially", few would bet against a short-circuit national lockdown, even if just for a week or two.



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

WITH EACH DAY THAT PASSES, BUSINESSES IN THE CAPITAL, LIKE THOSE AROUND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, CONTINUE TO SUFFER AND UNCERTAINTY GOES ON.

Over the past two to three months, many businesses have slowly started to get back on their feet, but the progress is being pushed back again.

The economy is already in deep crisis mode and the growth in regional lockdowns will be the final straw for many businesses, especially those in the hospitality, retail and arts sectors.

Many smaller firms will go out of business, more households will feel severe financial strain. The new restrictions mean separate households will no longer be able to meet indoors.

Restaurants and bars will be allowed to stay open, but the reduction in group sizes will have a severe effect on the hospitality sector, experts said.

Speaking just hours before restrictions were confirmed, UK

Hospitality Chief Executive Kate Nicholls said the new rules could "well be the death knell for many hospitality businesses".

She said a move into Tier 2 wipes a further 15 per cent off very low revenues, which are currently at 20 to 30 per cent of normal levels in London. Many will not recover if London moves into Tier 3 lockdown restrictions, which would force restaurant and bars to close.

Meanwhile, Richard Burge, Chief Executive of the London Chamber of Commerce, said central London will be particularly impacted by the lockdown as people reduce public transport use.

He said: "With no non-household mixing allowed indoors and a reduction in journeys on public transport requested, Tier 2 will hit London's hospitality sector hard, particularly in its centre."

The health secretary says there are "brighter skies ahead", but for a huge number of businesses in every sector at present, it will be hard to see them. Much the same will apply to the public as a whole.

People realise that this virus needs managing and controlling, but one can't help feeling that the government is losing control. If there's one positive in all this, it's the way that businesses have toughened up.

The problem is that to recover and fire the economy again, businesses need a degree of certainty in order to invest and thrive.

At present, that certainty is just not there, and it's hard to see it emerging for at least another six months. And that is an optimistic view.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK).

Bank Muscat wins Best Bank for SMEs in Oman Award



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has won the Best Bank for SMEs 2020 (Oman) from Asiamoney in recognition of its role in strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) so as to diversify the Sultanate's economy and create job opportunities for Omani youth.

Facilitating financial inclusion, Bank Muscat's SME products and services have created a benchmark, helping SMEs to overcome hurdles and chart successful ventures with proper planning, financial discipline and prudent management. Early on, Bank Muscat identified the opportunities and challenges faced by this vital segment to develop a relevant suite of products and services, which have been making a world of difference to this crucial pillar of the economy over the last two decades.

Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi (**pictured**), Assistant General Manager, Small and Medium Enterprises, Bank Muscat, said: "The SME sector plays an important role in the development of economies across the globe. This Award recognises the bank's pioneering efforts in boosting the SME sector in Oman so as to contribute in a big way towards creating employment, improving economic diversification and increasing its contribution to the GDP. We are very happy and encouraged to see our efforts in developing this sector recognised by a top international publication like Asiamoney."

Recognising the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) early on as an economic engine of growth, Bank Muscat launched its Al Wathbah programme to provide financing to the sector in the early 2000s. Over the last many years, the programme has succeeded in building up this crucial part of the economy to one of substantial strength.

The bank's focus on SMEs has been gathering pace and the bank has supported thousands of enterprises with different banking and financing facilities over the years. An important part of the bank's drive to promote sustainability is the non-financial support extended to SMEs.

Madayn survey to assess industrial investor satisfaction

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has launched industrial survey, value-added measures and investor satisfaction research project.

The commencement of the project comes in conjunction with the World Statistics Day that is celebrated internationally every five years on October 20. The project aims at developing comprehensive information base on the localised projects in Madayn's various industrial cities, which will play a significant role in the development of prospective plans and strategies.

Hasan bin Marhoon al Marhoon, Director-General of Planning and Business Development at Madayn, stated that the industrial survey and the research on value-added measures and investor satisfaction represent key pillars on which Madayn relies on in the development of Madayn Vision 2040 emanating from Oman Vision 2040.

He pointed out that the efforts undertaken by Madayn aim at



setting up world class business cities and emphasising on the role it plays in strengthening PPP to develop and operate these business cities. Al Marhoon added that Madayn seeks to develop an integrated survey to bring together statistical data from all the companies and factories based at the various industrial cities using latest available tools and technologies.

"Eventually, the results of this project will allow decision makers in the Sultanate's industrial sector in general and Madayn in particular, to be aware of the business environment in the industrial cities and the challenges faced by investors at the current phase, develop effective solutions to tackle the challenges, and formulate plans and strategies that go along the lines of the future aspirations of the sector."

■ **BANKING REVOLUTION**

Oman Arab Bank launches 'Step to the Future 3.0' digital initiatives

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance its digital services and improve its overall customer experience, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced the launch of a wide range of advanced digital solutions set to provide superior customer experience within the banking industry in Oman.

Introduced at a conference yesterday, these new services emphasise the Bank's commitment to technological progress. Entitled 'Step to the Future 3.0', this marks the next stage of OAB's digital evolution, with various AI-driven e-payment solutions and facilities set to make banking for its customers even easier.

Any Omani citizen or resident can now take advantage of a one-of-a-kind simplified and secure online onboarding system via the OAB Online App, which allows the opening of an account in under 5 minutes, without the need to physically visit the branch or sign any printed documents.

Additionally, OAB customers with personal loans can instantly top-up their existing loans through the app, receive approval and have the additional amount transferred to their bank account almost immediately.

Lastly, customers who open new



accounts through the app can benefit from a new Super Growth savings account, which offers a special interest rate of 3 per cent per annum.

Commenting on the launch of 'Step to the Future 3.0', Rashad al Shaikh, Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "OAB has continuously endeavoured to strengthen its presence in the digital arena and implement innovative solutions and modern facilities to position itself as a pioneer in the local banking sector."

"Given the rapid changes brought about by technological advancement, we are aware that businesses across the globe are transitioning into the digital space.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

Based on Royal Directives stipulated in Oman Vision 2040, which aims to empower the private sector and support it to match global competitive standards, local Omani firm Kaizen Medical Management Company has announced the launch of an initiative that includes all healthcare providers from clinics and hospitals in the Sultanate by providing its services in the field of evaluation and the application of quality and international accreditation, totally free of charge.

The company through this initiative aims to support the sector, to promote it in order to be able to compete at the GCC level and the region as a whole.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company, Dr Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, said, "This step will not be phased, but rather



a permanent service that we will endeavour for Kaizen to provide to healthcare workers in the private sector for free. It is our conviction that real development in this sector requires the initiators and continuous development of services."

Dr Al Wahaibi added, "During our many years of work in this field, we were able to enumerate a list of the obstacles facing health service providers, at the top of which is the issue of quality and international accreditation, which requires a great

effort to implement and allocate a budget for its development.

"This is why our initiative was to cooperate with health facilities operating in the private sector and to reduce the financial burden by providing these services free of charge."

Bassem al Mubarak, Chief Operating Officer in Kaizen Medical Management, said, "The medical sector in the Sultanate is entering a new phase that takes health services to an advanced level.

"Therefore, the application of quality is the only way for the sector to advance and comply with international standards and at the same time it is a way to protect our society from infection and medical errors."

Kaizen provides these services in the form of a field visit to the facility by a specialised team in the company's quality assurance department.

SHORT TAKES

■ **MUSCAT**

'THREE DECADES OF EXCELLENCE IN BANKING' FOR BANKDHOFAR AT OMAN BANKING & FINANCE AWARDS

In recognition of its ongoing contributions to the growth of the Omani banking sector and diversification of the national economy over the past 30 years, BankDhofar received the 'Three Decades of Excellence in Banking' Award at the Oman Banking & Finance Awards.

The high profile event was part of the 5th edition of New Age Banking Summit – Oman, which was held in Muscat recently under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, and was attended by Abdul Hakeem Omar al Ojaili, BankDhofar's CEO and Chairman of Oman Banks Association. Representing the Bank at the event was Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Operating Officer at BankDhofar.

Reflecting on the 30 years of successful operations, Al Ojaili noted: "We are proud of BankDhofar's achievements and the significant role it played in the development of the finance industry in Oman.

"We have facilitated various large-scale national level infrastructure projects and worked on different investment and business partnerships across



the Sultanate.

"Today, I am glad to see BankDhofar perfectly poised to take up challenges in such a dynamic and rapidly changing business environment, and it is geared to tackle any scenarios in order to serve the interest of our customers, investors, shareholders and strategic partners."

The award was received by Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Operating Officer at BankDhofar, during the event that was attended by CEOs of Omani banks, representatives of Oman Banks Association, fintech experts, finance and investment professionals, insurance and business consultants.

business

MUSCAT STOCK MARKET

3,586.98



CRUDE OIL PRICE

Oman Crude	\$ 42.00
Brent Crude	\$ 42.38
Light Crude	\$ 40.85



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Oman's first unemployment insurance scheme to help stabilise labour market

SAFETY NET: Slated for implementation on November 1, 2020, the Unemployment Insurance Scheme will have beneficial impacts for the Omani labour market



CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A first-of-its-kind Unemployment Insurance Scheme, due to be launched next month on the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will help encourage Omanis to strongly consider risk-free employment in the private sector.

The initiative, also known as the Employment Security Scheme, seeks to initially provide a safety net to Omanis being laid off amid the ongoing economic downturn triggered by low international oil prices and aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic.

In the second stage of its implementation, the scope of the scheme will be expanded to cover Omani job-seekers in general.

Instituted by Royal Decree on August 17, 2020, the Employment Security Scheme was established with an initial grant of RO 10 million by His Majesty the Sultan. Further contributions will come from public and private sector employees who will be required to pitch in one per cent of their monthly income effective from January 1, 2021.

The scheme will provide social protection for the Omani workforce against a major risk they face in the private sector; namely, involuntary unemployment

DR FAISAL ABDULLAH AL FARSI
PASI General Manger

Significantly, the programme has the potential to encourage Omanis to consider employment opportunities in the private sector considering that a safety net is being put in place if their jobs are in peril for any reason, according to a top official of the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI).

"The scheme will provide social protection for the Omani workforce against a major risk they face in the private sector; namely, involuntary unemployment," said Dr Faisal Abdullah al Farsi, General Manager.



(Picture for illustration only)

"Since the scheme will provide insurance coverage in this aspect and give priority to those who have lost employment — in addition to the benefits they will receive — to have access to decent jobs, it will be one of the most important incentives for the Omani workforce to work in the private sector," the official stated in an interview published recently by ILO News, a newsletter of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Slated for implementation on November 1, 2020, the Unemployment Insurance

Scheme will unleash other benefits for the Omani labour market, Dr Al Farsi noted. I

t will "lead to job stability for workers in all sectors, help activate employment policies, and stimulate the Omani workforce to enter the labour market and work in jobs with potentially high unemployment risks," the official stressed.

The novel insurance scheme, the official said, is among a raft of measures adopted by Oman's authorities to help mitigate the adverse impacts of the

economic slump and the pandemic on the labour market, as well as low income sections of the community. "These measures include the introduction of an unemployment insurance scheme, whereby the Sultanate's finalisation of the necessary studies and identification of the necessary financing and implementation mechanisms — in cooperation with the ILO — coincided with the emergence of COVID-19 and with low oil prices," he added.

Worried about weak oil market demand, Opec pledges action

LONDON: Opec and allied producers pledged action to support the oil market as concerns mounted that a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic will hobble demand and an earlier plan to raise output from next year would further depress prices.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), said no-one should doubt the group's commitment to providing support, while three sources from producing countries said a planned output increase from January could be reversed if necessary.

Already Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held two phone calls last week. Kremlin Dmitry Peskov spokesman said regular contact was necessary as the markets were volatile. Opec and its allies, including Russia, have curbed output since January 2017 to try to support prices and reduce inventories.

"This group has shown, especially in this year, that it has the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances when required. We will not dodge our responsibilities in this regard," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said. "Nobody in the market should be in any doubt as to our commitment and our intent," Prince Abdulaziz told the opening of an Opec+ ministerial monitoring committee.

— Reuters

FLAGSHIP STORE

Swedish furniture brand IKEA to launch in Muscat in Q1 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 20

Al Taher Group, a diversified business group in the Sultanate, signed on Tuesday a strategic agreement with the UAE based conglomerate, Al-Futtaim Group, to introduce globally renowned furniture brand IKEA, at Oman Avenues Mall, in Muscat.

The development would be part of the new expansion of the mall which would have IKEA spread over 2 floors.

The new store would be one of the largest stores of the iconic Swedish retailer in the region which promises to boost the diverse retail offering of Oman Avenues Mall, as it re-energizes the country's thriving trade landscape.

The country's flagship IKEA store will not only serve the capital city and the vicinity, but also attract

shoppers from across the Sultanate. Commenting on the announcement, Shaikh Mohammed bin Saud al Khalili, board member of the Al Taher Group, said, "We are pleased to collaborate with Al-Futtaim Group, to bring the globally renowned IKEA brand to Oman Avenues Mall.

At Al Taher, we are well equipped to confidently approach new market opportunities on a global scale, while continuing to build winning relationships.

This move is in line with the vision to provide the necessary impetus to promote the Sultanate as a premiere investment destination across the region and beyond.

We believe that IKEA Oman will not only strengthen the position of Oman Avenues Mall as the premier shopping destination, but



also position the mall firmly as the shopping mall for the whole of Oman."

It is anticipated that the opening of IKEA would bring with it a renewed thrust to the local economy, with

creation of job opportunities, as well as local sustainable development of infrastructure and a robust domestic supply chain.

Talking about the brand's strong expansion road map, Vinod Jayan,

Managing Director of IKEA — Al-Futtaim Group, said, "We are very excited to announce the entry of IKEA into Oman, which wouldn't have been possible without an expert partner like the Al Taher Group and a shopping mall platform like Oman Avenues mall.

Choosing the right partner, right location, and developing the right infrastructure for an IKEA store is critical to the brand's expansion in a new market.

These decisions were indeed instrumental in our choice of being associated with a strong mall partner like Oman Avenues Mall, that will now enable the new destination IKEA to be placed in the heart of Muscat.

The presence of leading global brands with a flavour of local shopping at Oman Avenues Mall is

in perfect synergies with IKEA's local-global philosophy. We look forward to a mutually rewarding association."

Along with enhancing the road/flyovers infrastructure around the mall to handle the increased volume of traffic with the expansion, Al Taher Group is also developing additional parking facility which would connect horizontal and vertical parking to the store as well as a new link to the second floor of the existing mall which also houses the food court, cinemas and the entertainment centre. Ananth A V, Director, Lulu Group International who operates Oman Avenues Mall, said, "We are pleased and proud to be hosting IKEA at the Oman Avenues Mall. It is our constant endeavour to provide unmatched shopping experience to our customers all under one roof, hassle-free, and safe."

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

BANKING

SWISS BANK UBS POSTS BEST THIRD QUARTER IN A DECADE

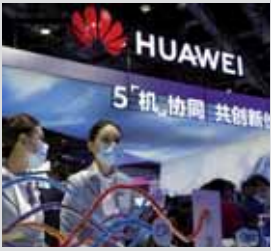


Swiss banking giant UBS said on Tuesday it nearly doubled its net profit in its best third quarter in a decade, the latest in a string of global lenders to report better-than-expected results despite the coronavirus pandemic. UBS saw net profit jump to \$2.5 billion.

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TELECOM

SWEDEN BANS HUAWEI AND ZTE FROM 5G NETWORKS



Swedish regulators banned the use of telecom equipment from China's Huawei and ZTE in its 5G network. The regulators said the setting of the licence conditions followed assessments by the Swedish Armed Forces and security service.

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SURVEY

MADAYN SURVEY TO ASSESS INDUSTRIAL INVESTOR SATISFACTION



Madayn has launched industrial survey, value-added measures and investor satisfaction research project. The commencement of the project comes in conjunction with the World Statistics Day that is celebrated internationally every five years on October 20.

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