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ZVEREV CLINCHES BACK-TO-BACK COLOGNE TITLES



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GROWING PLANTS BRING POSITIVITY IN MINDSETS



P14

PANDEMIC PLUNGES LAGARDE INTO 'INTENSE' FIRST YEAR AT ECB



OMAN

HM thanked by leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's cable of greetings on the occasion of him taking the oath and assuming power in the sisterly State of Kuwait. His Majesty has also received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, in reply to His Majesty's cable of greetings on the occasion of 71st Anniversary of Founding the People's Republic of China. His Majesty also received a cable of thanks from President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus in reply to His Majesty's cable of greetings on his re-election as a president for his country. **DETAILS ON P2**

HM greetings to Turkmenistan

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow of the Republic of Turkmenistan on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Berdimuhamedow and the friendly people of Turkmenistan further progress and prosperity.

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INSIDE



JAPAN AIMS FOR ZERO EMISSIONS AND CARBON NEUTRAL SOCIETY **P6**



CAUGHT BY DELUGES AND DROUGHTS, CITIES PLAN TO BECOME SMARTER **P7**

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 21°C

SALALAH
MAX: 29°C
MIN: 18°C

NIZWA
MAX: 33°C
MIN: 18°C

SUNRISE 06.10 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

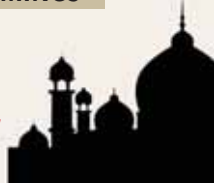
FAJR: 04:54

DHUHR: 11:56

ASR: 15:11

MAGHRIB: 17:37

ISHA: 18:48



Outward Bound Oman's training centre opens

MUSCAT: In the context of celebrations marking Omani Youth Day, His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday opened the training centre of Outward Bound Oman in Al Khoudh.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Honorary President of Outward Bound Oman and senior dignitaries.

The training centre was set up through the support of late Sultan Qaboos and it was designed by local consultants "23 Degrees North". The



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said opens the Outward Bound Oman's training centre in Al Khoudh.

building of the centre is unique as it adopts solar technologies.

The centre comprises equipment store, administrative offices, two indoor training centres, a lecture hall with a capacity for 60 people and a 9-metre climbing wall. The centre is the second in a row of three national training centres planned by Outward Bound Oman, with the third centre coming up at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

The first training centre was opened by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik at Rimal Al Sharqiya in March 2018.

So far, Outward Bound Oman has trained some 18,000 participants

since its inception in 2009.

Speaking on the occasion, Sulaiman Masoud al Harthy, Board Chairman, Outward Bound Oman, said that Outward Bound Oman today sets a distinctive landmark in its growth march. "Developing the talents of national youth and preparing them to join the labour market is a matter of great significance", said Al Harthy, adding that the centre will play a leading role in nurturing the skills of future generation and grooming them to act in line with the government's Oman Vision-2040. — ONA

SEE ALSO P3

TECHNICAL PREPARATIONS IN FULL SWING

COUNTDOWN TO NEW ACADEMIC YEAR



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

With the start of the new academic year in November just round the corner, the Ministry of Education, represented by all its departments in the governorates, continues its preparations to provide education through various technical platforms in the light of adoption of blended education system this year due to the outbreak of the corona

pandemic. During this week, schools in different governorates have started handing over study books to students, based on specific timetables for each class separately, to avoid overcrowding at the delivery point.

Faisal al Busaidy, Assistant Director-General at the ministry's General Directorate of Information Technology, said: "In the past, training courses for teachers were conducted on using various educational platforms according to different packages. The ministry worked to prepare appropriate

content for blended education requirements and to implement educational evaluation mechanisms while applying health protocol in blended education schools."

The work on educational platforms and uploading of all curricula, activities and necessary assessments, which started last May is already completed, the ministry said. This comes as part of preparing an atmosphere for remote study for students of the first and second cycle in light of the Supreme Committee's instructions to begin study for all students on November 1 and to adopt blended education curriculum according to the density of the schools, with emphasis on activating distance education.

Earlier, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, gave all educational directorates in the governorates powers enabling them to implement remote education at a rate of not less than 90 per cent according to a number of determinants. The directorates notified their affiliated schools on the type of education approved for this year, each according to its circumstances. In addition, the directorates have provided CDs to schools which do not have Internet services, including explanations and educational courses provided by specialised teachers,

TURN TO P3

Food poisoning cases in Dhofar after consuming shellfish

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 26

The Ministry of Health announced that a number of health institutions in the Governorate of Dhofar have registered several food poisoning cases due to eating shellfish, which are likely to contain poisonous substances as the beaches are affected by the red tide phenomenon.

In such cases, the infected person may suffer from various symptoms

such as vomiting, diarrhoea, symptoms related to the nervous system like numbness, weakened movement and shortness of breath.

The ministry cautions fishermen and consumers from eating fish and seashells extracted from the areas affected by the red tide.



The ministry has also called upon all to stay away from the areas suspected to be affected by the red tide phenomenon to avoid poisoning.

The ministry has called on fishermen not to fish in areas where this phenomenon exists, and also not to consume fish and shellfish during this period.

"At the same time, specialists are monitoring this phenomenon and evaluating the overall impact", a statement said.

Red tide is a phenomenon caused by algal blooms during which algae become so numerous that they discolour coastal waters (hence the name red tide). The algal bloom may also deplete oxygen in the waters and/or release toxins that may cause illness in humans and other animals.

No respite from COVID-19 deaths in Sultanate

VINOD NAIR
@vinod_nair

The number of COVID-19 related deaths continues to be major concern in the Sultanate.

A total of 68 deaths, including 16 on Monday, have been reported in October, indicating that the fight against the virus remains to be tough.

Majority of deaths reported in the country have been from Muscat (380), North Al Batinah (255) and South Al Batinah (160).

On the positive side, only 43 people were hospitalised in the last 24 hours, with the number of inpatients dropping to 439. The intensive care units patients have also dropped to 182. The Ministry of Health on Monday also reported 422 new cases, bringing the total number of COVID-19 cases registered in the Sultanate to 113,354, while the total death toll stood at 1,190.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has already warned that the situation in the region is worrisome.

"But if and when we have an effective COVID-19 vaccine, we must also use it effectively and the best way to do that is to vaccinate some people in all countries, rather than all people in some countries", WHO said on Monday. "We still have a long haul ahead of us."

"It's more important than ever that we focus on the elderly and other vulnerable populations who already struggle to get access to health services, including migrants and other marginalised groups", it said.

"We expect the situation to worsen and the coming months will be difficult for all of us as the virus sees more opportunities to spread. The flu season is also likely to exacerbate the situation", said Dr Ahmed al Mandheri, Regional Director of the WHO.



HM RECEIVES THANKS FROM KUWAIT, CHINA AND BELARUS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received thanks from Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the occasion of him taking the oath and assuming power in Kuwait.

Shaikh Nawaf expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's good feelings and best wishes. He commended the historic and fraternal relations binding the two brotherly countries and peoples, looking forward to enhance these relations for the interest of the two countries.

He prayed to Allah the Almighty

to perpetuate good health and well-being on His Majesty and achieve further progress, growth and prosperity for the Sultanate and its people under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

His Majesty the Sultan also received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's

Republic of China in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the occasion of 71st Anniversary of Founding the People's Republic of China. President Xi Jinping expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's congratulations.

He stressed his keenness on promoting the Omani-Chinese strategic relations to achieve further progress and prosperity, wishing His Majesty good health, happiness and permanent success.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received thanks from President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on his re-election as a president. President Lukashenko expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's congratulations.

He wished His Majesty good health and well-being, and the friendship and cooperation relations between the two countries further progress and growth. — ONA



ROP organises HR workshop

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 26

The Royal Oman Police's General Department of Criminal Inquiries and Investigations carried out a workshop for personnel to deal with reports of human trafficking.

The workshop included several topics, the most important of which are mechanisms for dealing with reports of human trafficking, responding to inquiries of the informant and the procedures to be taken regarding the report.

This workshop is part of the training programs for ROP employees for combating human trafficking in accordance with international standards, as it aims to provide a quick response to criminal reports in general, as well as developing and improving the capabilities of personnel in this aspect.



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman who wish to perform Umrah in the holy land would finally be able to do the rituals from next week onwards, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced gradual opening of the facilities in four stages earlier, according to the sources at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA).

"We, at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA), are expecting to send pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman by early next month as they will allow people from outside the country from November 1," a senior official from the Ministry told the Observer.

Saudi reopened the holy places for the year-round Umrah pilgrimage on October 4, after nearly seven months of closure with extensive health precautions.

Umrah pilgrimage usually attracts millions of Muslims from across the globe each year.

In order to aid more people to visit the holy land and perform Umrah rituals, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has launched Aetmarna application that is able to help those wishing to perform Umrah and request the issuance of permits to enter the Two Holy Mosques for Umrah.

"All the three stages were successfully completed with Friday prayers and limited five-times prayers and other rituals from time to time. The initial phase saw just 6,000 citizens and residents from within the kingdom who were allowed to take part each day," he added.

Worshippers were able to perform the ritual of circling the sacred Kaaba



As part of the 4th stage of opening, visitors from abroad will be permitted from November 1, when capacity will be raised to 20,000 pilgrims, with 60,000 people allowed into the mosque and others in the days that follow

along the socially distanced paths from October 4.

On October 18, the number of pilgrims was increased to 15,000 per day, with a maximum of 40,000 people allowed to perform prayers at the mosque.

As part of the 4th stage of opening, visitors from abroad will be permitted from November 1, when capacity will be raised to 20,000 pilgrims, with 60,000 people allowed into the mosque and others in the days that follow.

NAVAL DRILL SEA LION 2 BEGINS



The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) began its Asad Al Bahar2 (Sea Lion 2) naval drill in Al Batinah and Al Wusta on Sunday.

The vessels, participating in the Sea Lion naval exercise sailed from Said Bin Sultan Naval Base towards the exercise location.

Many joint naval military activities between the participating ships and crews will be conducted according to the plan.

The execution of the Sea Lion 2 Naval drill comes within the framework of the Royal Navy of Oman's training plans aimed to sustain the level of readiness of the RNO's fleet and personnel, in line with the national tasks entrusted to it.

Deadline for vacant seats now Oct 31

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Monday said the deadline for application for vacant seats and new programmes of the academic year 2020-2021 will be extended until October 31.

This extension comes to provide an opportunity for a greater number of students, especially those who did not receive academic offers in the first round, to apply for the new programmes in the internal scholarships in private higher education institutions and the full or partial scholarships offered by private universities and colleges.

The centre announced on its website that there are 5,309 vacant seats in the second phase of which 1,138 seats are at government higher education institutions and 4,132 seats at private higher education institutions, along with 39 external scholarship and grant seats.

The centre will announce the results on 5 November. The applicants will be given five days (November 8-12) for registration procedures at higher education institutions. — ONA

Youth essential for development, Vision 2040 to sharpen skills

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, marked the Omani Youth Day, which falls on October 26, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

HH Sayyid Theyazin delivered a speech during a virtual celebration held to mark the occasion in which he said: "It is our pleasure to extend our sincere congratulations to the Omani youth on this occasion stemming from our firm and constant belief on the youth's vital role in continuing the march of development for a renewed Omani renaissance, putting forward their aspirations and hopes for a brighter future in which they contribute to the prosperity of Oman."

"The government of the Sultanate has attached a great attention to the youth since the outset of the blessed Renaissance and harnessed all its capacities to enable them to undertake their responsibilities to push forward the development march and continue their achievements and realise their objectives and aspirations. The Omani youths proved that they possess a high level of national responsibility and full awareness of their contemporary issues and are armed with a strong determination to participate in building a renewed renaissance with openness to other cultures and readiness to coexist with others in peace and love."

HH Sayyid Theyazin noted that in continuation to the same wise



His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth

approach, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik affirmed in his Royal addresses and directives his attention to the youth considering them as the inexhaustible wealth, asset and resources of the nation. This attention was culminated by the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to serve as an umbrella to the youth's aspirations and creativity in various fields.

The Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth affirmed that the Omani youth participated in the formation of the Oman Vision 2040 confirming the government's reliance on the youth to continue with the development and flourishing process. The Oman Vision 2040 underscored the importance of developing the skills and knowledge of the Omani youth and supporting their national projects

and initiatives that contribute to pushing forward the development march while keeping up with the developments of the fourth industrial revolution, sciences and the novel economic fields.

HH Sayyid Theyazin affirmed that the ministry is moving ahead with its youth policies and the implementation of its programmes in active integration with government agencies and various

HH Sayyid Theyazin congratulated 21 winners of the Youth Excellence Award organised by the ministry, wishing them more success to attain their goals and aspirations and confirming his commitment to provide support to the youth to help them hone their skills

sectors in accordance to the wise vision of His Majesty the Sultan with the aim of building a youth generation capable of creative thinking. Besides, the government is going to draw up suitable mechanisms to listen to the youth and identify their points of view thus making them real partners in the futuristic plans and youth programmes that enhance their capacities and boost their potentials.

HH Sayyid Theyazin congratulated 21 winners of the Youth Excellence Award organised by the ministry, wishing them more success to attain their goals and aspirations and confirming his commitment to provide support to the youth to help them hone their skills. — ONA

In brief

MUSCAT

SAF CHIEF RECEIVES BRITISH OFFICIAL

Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar al Murtafa'a yesterday, Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigson, British Chief of Air Staff and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Obaidani, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), Air Commodore Ismail bin Ahmed al Matrooshi, Director-General of Military Cooperation and Military Attachés Affairs at COSAF and the defence attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat.

SAI TAKES PART IN GCC MEETING

The State Audit Institution (SAI) took part in the fifth online meeting of the deputy chairmen, assistants or persons acting in their stead at the Anti-Corruption and Integrity Protection Agencies for the GCC. The meeting reviewed a number of topics including the guiding law to protect public fund in the GCC countries, update of the guiding code of conduct for the Anti-Corruption and Integrity Protection Agencies of the GCC as well as discussion of the proposal for the GCC award for excellence in the field of integrity protection and anti-corruption.

ISG HOSTS MODEL UN CONFERENCE

Indian School Al Ghubra hosted the 5th Edition of the E. Ahamed Model United Nations Conference on a virtual platform on the 24th and 25th of October 2020.

This year the conference was attended by students from 47 schools across 10 countries around the globe.

Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, was the chief guest for the opening ceremony. In his address, he stated that on the 75th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations, the youth should understand that multilateralism is the only way forward for humanity. In her address, Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, who was the guest of honour and the keynote speaker, highlighted the importance of the UN as a symbol of hope and belief in the intrinsic goodness of the human race.



His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said at the launch of the training centre of Outward Bound Oman in Al Khoudh on Monday.



Technical preparations in full swing

FROM PAGE 1

TV CLASSES

Also, many educational lessons will be broadcast through Oman TV channels, which is in line with what will be presented in the different classes in the educational platforms.

Al Busaidy added that the ministry has made a partnership with a number of government institutions as well as private sector to reach the goals of the educational process.

"The ministry has sought to coordinate with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for performance tests on educational platforms. There is also coordination with others regarding basic infrastructure like Internet," he said. "The ministry has also signed a number of agreements which support blended education and distance learning initiatives that will be implemented during the current year to enhance the ease of educational workflow and e-learning strategies, including, for example: a partnership with Omantel to create Google Classroom, with Ooredoo to execute a platform for first cycle, with Occidental Oman to implement an electronic preparation platform for teachers, and a partnership with the National Bank of Oman to finance the national library project, which will contain enriching media and learning resources."

DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Through these platforms, students will be able to attend lessons, interact with activities, and do their homework. There will also be a simultaneous education service with visual communication between teachers and students. These platforms will allow students to be divided according to academic divisions, giving indications about the students learning process, and will also contain questions banks, media, etc. "They simulate what is in the actual school community," Al Busaidy said

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 26

Within the framework of strengthening community partnership, The Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp) employees distributed masks and sanitisers in the Musandam Governorate.

Saleh al Amri, DGM, HR and Admin, Oasis Water Company, said, "We have a long history of supporting our communities and this time too we wanted to do something meaningful. Our collaboration team distributed masks and sanitisers in the Musandam Governorate schools to create awareness among people about the importance of wearing masks and use of hand sanitiser to check the spread of the virus."

"Hand sanitisers and face masks play a very vital role in personal hygiene and protection from germs and other deadly infections. We want to tell people that when people wear masks and sanitise their hands, they do it to protect their families, neighbours and the people in their community."

Saif al Jalandani from the Ministry of Education said, "The health authorities in Oman have mandated the use of face masks and hand sanitisers in all the public places. The World Health Organization (WHO) too recommends washing hands frequently and wearing masks as the best



way to avoid infection. We thank the 'collaboration team' for distributing masks and sanitisers in schools in Musandam Governorate." The 'collaboration team' comprises a group of employees of Z-Corp and its subsidiaries who participate in community initiatives which are planned and conducted by them. The 'collaboration team' undertakes projects that bring to focus Z-Corp's continued and evolving socially relevant strategy to make a positive difference in the society. This initiative comes within the framework of the corporate social responsibility strategy of Z-Corp and displayed the group's

commitment to support the community it operates in.

Faisal al Manthri, Communication Manager, said, "We are happy that our collaboration team has taken up an important initiative. An important strategy at Z-Corp is that it encourages employees to get involved in their local communities by actively contributing their time for worthy causes and projects. The Zubair Corporation will continue to cultivate its employees' sense of responsibility and encourage them to indulge in meaningful activities." He added, "We encourage everyone to follow all health and safety

protocols. Z-Corp continues to strictly follow all protocols, guidelines, instructions, advisories and directions issued by the Supreme Committee and health authorities with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with directives of the government, Z-Corp is implementing several safety measures. To ensure the safety of its employees, the company complies with various government guidelines including wearing of masks, following of social distancing rules and temperature checks. Additionally, the company has installed hand sanitiser stations at the entrance and other points in the office."

Masks, sanitisers distributed in Musandam



SOUQ LOSES ITS CHARM



PHOTO BY IMRAN ZAHID

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

While markets around the world are facing widespread disruption due to the coronavirus breakout, shopping centres in Oman are no exception. Adding fuel to the fire is the mushrooming online stores, which can get you anything from anywhere.

Ruwi, a bustling souq and one of the oldest areas in Muscat and home to hundreds of business houses catering to citizens and residents with middle income, is the worst hit by the pandemic.

Most of its attractions that include shops selling jewellery, electronic and electrical items, watches, readymade shops and gift corners and restaurants have downed their shutters for lack of business.

Scenes of shops being vacated and 'to let' boards hanging in front of them have become common every nook and corner of

this decades-old part of Muscat.

Once hummed with shoppers from far off places, especially during the weekends, the main street and alleyways of Ruwi now wear a deserted look except for the passersby.

"It is harrowing to see that shops are closing down one after the other leaving this historic marketplace to no man's land", said Mubarak al Wahaibi, who has his family roots in Ruwi .

Even as Ruwi which falls under the Wilayat of Muttrah, was able to contain the virus following two consecutive lockdowns and slowly reopened, people have started abandoning its shops.

Many stores are still closed, some permanently, while those that are open have very little foot traffic despite the fact that there are touchless temperature checks, mandatory masks and hand sanitisers and

PEOPLE ARE
SLOWLY WALKING
AWAY FROM RUWI
HIGH STREET TO
ONLINE STORES
DUE TO PANDEMIC
CONCERNS

other COVID-19 precautionary measures are kept in place.

"The virus has wreaked havoc on our businesses with virtually no visitors to our shops", said Vijaybhai Narain, a readymade shop owner. He said that he is totally broke with no money to pay for rent and salaries to his staff.

"Except for shops selling essentials most shops do not have any sales so that they could make the ends meet. Now struggling to keep the place open with a pared-down staff, and sales are almost nil during the pandemic," he said.

Mohamed Mustafa, who already closed his restaurant, said, "Anyone in the food and dining business is really suffering right now. I think that's true in all the sectors. There is going to be a lot of pain."

Abdul Kareem, who deals in watches and electronic items, said he already closed one

of the shops and is planning to do so with the other as well.

Jewellery shops are no exception with a number of them downed their shutters after seeing that gold no more sparkles as the pandemic has upended its physical demand.

"Sales have plummeted mainly due to high price and lack of cash with people. Adding to the woes is the mass departure of the expatriates", said the manager of a leading jewellery brand.

But Faisal Ahmed, an expert in consumer durables said that shoppers have moved online so that the products reach their doorsteps — a habit most are expected to maintain even after the pandemic.

"As more and more people become accustomed to buying what they need from the comfort of their home, more shops lined up on the high street will vanish in the future", he said.

US early voting tops 60m as historic pace continues

WASHINGTON: More than 60 million Americans have cast ballots in the US presidential election with eight days to go, a record-breaking pace that could lead to the highest voter turnout in over a century, according to data from the US Elections Project on Monday.

The tally is the latest sign of intense interest in the contest between Republican President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden, as well as voters' desire to reduce their risk of exposure to COVID-19, which has killed about 225,000 people across the United States.

Democrats hold a significant advantage in early voting due to their embrace of mail balloting, which Republicans have historically cast in large numbers but have shunned amid repeated and unfounded attacks by Trump who says the system is prone



Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez votes in The Bronx. — Reuters

to widespread fraud.

Overall, Democrats hold roughly a two-to-one advantage in early voting numbers. The high level of early voting has led Michael McDonald, the University of Florida professor who administers the US Elections Project, to predict a record US voter turnout of about 150 million, representing 65 per cent of those eligible to vote, the

highest rate since 1908.

US voters have already cast more early votes during this presidential campaign than they did in all of 2016 when they passed the 47 million mark earlier this month, data shows.

TRUMP PLANS CELEBRATION

In another development, the White House on Monday planned a celebration to celebrate the Republican Senate's expected confirmation of President Donald Trump's conservative nominee Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, one a month after a similar event was linked to a COVID-19 outbreak that infected the president, among others.

While Democrats have fiercely opposed Barrett's nomination, Republicans hold a 53-47 Senate majority and her confirmation to a lifetime post on the court seems assured. — Reuters

In brief

■ DAMASCUS



AIR STRIKES ON REBEL CAMP KILL 20 PEOPLE

Air strikes on a camp in northwest Syria run by rebel fighters killed at least 20 people on Monday, a war monitor and a rebel source said.

The rebel source said Russian strikes targeted the Failaq al Sham faction in their base close to the border with Turkey, killing 20.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights put the death toll at 34, with dozens wounded.

Syrian government forces, backed by Russian air power, have driven rebels back to a pocket of territory adjoining Turkey after more than nine years of conflict triggered by protests against President Bashar al Assad in 2011.

■ MILAN



EUROPE WARNS OF BLEAK WINTER

European leaders warned of a bleak winter as resurgent COVID-19 infections forced countries to impose new restrictions to try to curb a second wave of the pandemic, with the United States, Russia and France setting new daily records for cases.

More than 42.9 million people are reported to have been infected by the coronavirus globally and 1,151,929 have died. The picture was undeniably grim as a string of countries reported record increases, led by France, which posted more than 50,000 daily cases, while the continent passed the threshold of 250,000 deaths. — Reuters



Hotels Management Company International SAOG

The Chedi, Muscat

P. O. Box 964, P.C. 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman

Board of Director's Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I hereby present the third quarterly report ending 30 September 2020 of the Hotels Management Company International SAOG.

During the period under review, the Company suspended its normal hotel operations consequent to Covid 19 pandemic starting from 25 March 2020 till 14 September 2020.

The company achieved the following financial results during the period :

- The company has generated total revenue of RO. 2.626 million (vs. related period previous year RO. 6.215 million) which is a decrease of 57.75% as compared to the corresponding period of previous year in total revenue.
- The company has Net loss of RO. 0.874 million vs. related period previous year net profit of RO. 0.825 million. It shows a decline of 205.93% as compared to the previous year of the same period.

Achievement

The Chedi Muscat maintains its top market position in Muscat and the standards among the Leading Hotels of the World.

The Annual General Meeting held on March 15, 2020 declared Dividend distribution of 0.570 per share and is fully paid.

Outlook

The Chedi Muscat is focusing to increase its market share locally as well as from GCC countries.

Creating awareness and building an Asian Zen style staycation dream in Omani travel enthusiasts, who are desperate to travel but restricted by the pandemic is the core objective.

Successful creation of a fair demand of our staycations locally however will not avoid the gap of international tourists, that are non-existent due to travel restrictions in Oman. Hence we have a conservative business outlook for the next quarter. Leveraging on our vast pen spaces and creating new dining concepts, thereby increasing food and beverage sales will be the main goal in-order to generate additional revenue .

Appreciation.

The members of the Board of Directors join me in acknowledging sincere thanks to our valued guests and shareholders for their continuous confidence in our hotel.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Tourism, Capital Marketing Authority and Muscat Securities Market for their prudent supervising and guidance on our endeavors.

We also thank the Hotel management and staff for their dedication and commitment.

We salute and pledge our allegiance to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said as he takes the country on continued progress and prosperity.

The Chairman

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 September 2019

	30-Sep 2020	30-Sep 2019
Non-current Assets	7,137,121	7,978,933
Property, plant and equipment	7,096,570	7,937,956
Deferred tax Asset	40,551	40,977
Current Assets	3,395,863	4,841,142
Inventories	503,393	552,495
Debtors and Prepayments	253,883	480,946
Due from related parties	32,202	44,968
Bank and cash	2,606,385	3,762,733
Total assets	10,532,984	12,820,075
Current Liabilities	1,063,614	1,581,259
Creditors and Accruals	911,351	1,384,912
Due to related parties	152,263	50,781
Provision for taxation	0	145,566
Non-current liabilities	523,270	600,440
End of service benefits	523,270	600,440
Total liabilities	1,586,884	2,181,699
Net assets	8,946,100	10,638,376
Equity		
Share capital	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal reserve	1,000,000	1,000,000
Retained earnings/(accumulated losses)	4,946,100	6,638,376
Total equity	8,946,100	10,638,376

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME For the Period ending 30 September 2020

	30-Sep 2020	30-Sep 2019
Turnover/ Revenue	2,625,809	6,214,851
Operating costs	(3,226,345)	(4,727,620)
Operating profit	(600,536)	1,487,231
Administration & selling expense	(281,933)	(400,870)
Management & licence fees	(73,305)	(238,323)
Net Operating Profit	(955,774)	848,038
Interest income	82,009	122,400
Profit for the period	(873,765)	970,438
Provision for taxation	0	(145,566)
Profit after tax provision	(873,765)	824,872
Earnings per share	(0.291)	0.275

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

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SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
22/2020 Recall	Supply of Pharmaceuticals for The Royal Hospital	28/October/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 04/November/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 70.000 Per set
214/2020	Supply of Surgical Items (Shoulder Arthroscopy & Arthroplasty)	05/November/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 18/November/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
215/2020	Supply & Installation CCTV IP System at Al-Rustaq Hospital in South Al-Batinah Governorate	05/November/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/December/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
216/2020	Provision of Cleaning & Pest Control Services to Various Health Establishment in South Al-Batinah Governorate	05/November/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/December/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
217/2020	Supply & Installation of Medical Equipment for Renal Dialysis Unit at Al-Amerat in Muscat Governorate	05/November/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 02/December/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
218/2020	Supply of Pharmaceuticals for The Royal Hospital	05/November/ 2020	Before 08 am on Wednesday 25/November/ 2020	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.

- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.

- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

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

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



صندوق النمو العماني
Oman Growth Fund

Invitation to the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of Oman Growth Fund

The Investors Committee of Oman Growth Fund (hereinafter referred to as "Fund") is pleased to invite all Unit Holders to the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Fund which will be held electronically at 4:00 PM on Tuesday, 10/11/2020, via the platform of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, which can be accessed on the company's website (www.mcd.gov.om).

If the quorum is not reached, a second meeting will be convened at 4:00 PM on Tuesday, 17/11/2020 to consider and discuss the following agenda:

- Consider a proposal for the exit or continuity of the Fund's Unit Holders in light of the new changes in its objectives and strategic objectives, as indicated in Annex No. (1).
- Consider a proposal to amend some provisions of the Fund's Articles of Association as set out in Annex No. (2)

In accordance with the Fund's articles of association and the CMA Rules for Convening General Meetings through Electronic Means, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

Only a juristic Unit Holder is permitted to authorise a natural person to attend and vote at the ordinary and extraordinary general meeting on its behalf, provided that the natural person holder a MCDC investor number.

Unit Holders may, through the Portal, vote remotely on the items proposed on the agenda of the meeting. Unit Holders can register their votes online up to three days prior to the scheduled date of the General Meeting. If a Unit Holder votes and subsequently the number of units held by it increases or decreases prior to the meeting, any votes it has previously registered in respect of such units will be invalid and the Unit Holder will have to vote again at the meeting.

If you have any questions about the EGM agenda, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Mohammed Bin Waheed Al Kharoussi on 24503836.

Chairman of the
Investors Committee

External Auditors

Legal Adviser



صندوق النمو العماني
Oman Growth Fund

Invitation to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Oman Growth Fund

The Investors Committee of Oman Growth Fund (hereinafter referred to as "Fund") is pleased to invite all Unit Holders to the Ordinary Annual General Meeting of the Fund which will be held electronically at 5 PM on Tuesday, 10/11/2020, via the platform of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, which can be accessed on the website (www.mcd.gov.om).

If the quorum is not reached, a second meeting will be convened at 5 PM on Tuesday, 17/11/2020 to consider and discuss the following agenda:

- Consider and approve the allowance for attending the Investors Committee meetings for the current financial year (as per Appendix No. 1),
- Consider and approve a proposal to pay remuneration and attendance allowances to members of the Investors Committee for the current financial year (as per Appendix No. 2)
- Elect new Board members of the Fund. A candidate applying for Board membership must fill out the Fund's Board Candidacy Form. Submission of candidacy for membership of the board of directors should be done five days prior to the general meeting, i.e. by no later than end of business on Monday, 11/2/2020. The candidate must satisfy the conditions for membership of the Fund's Board of Directors.

In accordance with the Fund's Articles of Association and the CMA Rules for Convening General Meetings through Electronic Means, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

Only a juristic Unit Holder is permitted to authorise a natural person to attend and vote at the ordinary and extraordinary general meeting on its behalf, provided that the natural person holder a MCDC investor number.

Unit Holders may, through the Portal, vote remotely on the items proposed on the agenda of the meeting. Unit Holders can register their votes online up to three days prior to the scheduled date of the General Meeting. If a Unit Holder votes and subsequently the number of units held by it increases or decreases prior to the meeting, any votes it has previously registered in respect of such units will be invalid and the Unit Holder will have to vote again at the meeting.

If you have any questions about the AGM agenda, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Mohammed Bin Waheed Al Kharoussi on 24503836.

Chairman of the
Investors Committee

External Auditors

Legal Adviser



Japan aims for zero emissions, carbon neutral society by 2050

TOKYO: Japan is aiming to cut greenhouse gases to zero by 2050 and become a carbon-neutral society, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said on Monday as he unveiled a major shift in position on climate change.

Japan had previously said it would be carbon neutral as soon as possible in the second half of the century, rather than set an explicit date.

“Responding to climate change is no longer a constraint on economic growth,” Suga said in his first policy address to parliament since taking office last month.

“We need to change our thinking to the view that taking assertive measures against climate change will lead to changes in industrial structure and the economy that will bring about great growth.”

Japan’s target of no greenhouse gases emissions on a net basis by 2050 brings it into line with the European Union, which set a target of being carbon neutral by that same date last year.

Chinese President Xi Jinping in September pledged to make his country “carbon neutral” by 2060. Japan is the world’s fifth-biggest



Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga delivers his first policy speech during an extraordinary session at the lower house of parliament in Tokyo on Monday. — AFP

emitter of carbon dioxide, and while steps are being taken to increase renewable energy, it also plans to roll out new coal-burning power stations.

Later, Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama told a news conference that plans for attaining key parts of the goal would be drawn up by the end of the year. “Carbon neutrality itself is a

growth strategy, and we must carry it out with all we have,” he added.

To achieve its goals, Suga said new solar cells and carbon recycling would be key, and Japan would intensify research and development in those areas, along with digitalising society — a policy he has pushed since taking over from Shinzo Abe.

The announcement was cheered by policymakers and investors. “Japan joining the EU in targeting carbon neutrality by 2050 is very welcome, and so is PM Suga’s focus on green technologies and especially solar, as a growth driver,” said Eric Pedersen,

Nordea Asset Management’s head of responsible investment. But he also warned that Japan would need to start decommissioning coal power and stop building and financing new coal power abroad. In a nod to Japan’s deep economic ties with giant neighbour China, Suga said a stable bilateral relationship was essential — but also said that Japan would maintain contact with “all like-minded nations for a free and open Indo-Pacific”.

Suga last week made his first visit to Vietnam and Indonesia, part of Japan’s efforts to strengthen ties with Southeast Asian countries as a counter to China’s growing push to assert claims over disputed East China Sea isles. Suga initially was buoyed by strong support, but a poll conducted by the Nikkei and TV Tokyo at the weekend said his approval had fallen by 11 points to 63 per cent since a poll after he took office a month ago. — Reuters

■ POMPEO, ESPER IN INDIA



US Secretary of State of Mike Pompeo and US Defence Secretary Mark Esper landed in India on Monday, the first leg of a five-day Asian trip aimed at strengthening strategic ties. Pompeo is due to travel to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Pompeo will end his trip, which comes in the final week before the US presidential election, in Indonesia. — Reuters

Typhoon lashes Philippines, 12 fishermen missing



An electric fan and belongings are seen on the floor of a destroyed house after tropical storm Molave hit the town of Pola. — AFP

MANILA: A strong typhoon lashed the southern part of the Philippines’ main Luzon island overnight, dumping heavy rains, toppling power lines and leaving at least 12 fishermen missing on Monday, disaster officials said.

Typhoon Molave, packing 125 kilometres per hour wind speeds and gusts of up to 150 kph, caused flooding and prompted forced evacuation orders for tens of thousands of people.

There was no immediate report of casualties, but 12 fishermen at sea failed to return to Catanduanes province off the country’s eastern coast. “They have been missing for 24 hours. They were supposed to come back home before noon,” Gremil

Alexis Naz of the Civil Defence office told DZMM radio, adding that search and rescue operations would be conducted.

Molave, the 17th typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, follows Tropical Storm Saudel, which last week caused widespread flooding in Quezon province in the Calabarzon region, southeast of the capital Manila.

In Albay province, 15,000 evacuees were allowed to return to their homes but many areas remained inundated and without power, Governor Alfrancis Bichara told DZMM radio. Storm warning levels remain in force in the capital and nearby provinces.

About half of the Philippines’ 107

million population live in the Luzon region. The country is hit by an average of 20 typhoons each year.

The agriculture agency said affected regions were able to harvest crops from some 133,292 hectares of farmland before the typhoon arrived, saving an estimated 530,593 tonnes of unmilled rice from destruction.

Molave should exit the Philippines on Tuesday and is headed towards Vietnam, where Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc on Monday issued an urgent warning to provinces and cities in its path to prepare.

Vietnam’s government said the provinces need to ready plans for evacuating nearly 1.3 million people.

— Reuters

UK special forces storm tanker, detain stowaways

SOUTHAMPTON: British special forces stormed a Greek-operated oil tanker in the English channel to wrestle control of the vessel from seven stowaways who had threatened the crew in a suspected hijacking.

Troops from the Special Boat Service, a navy special forces unit whose headquarters in just a few miles away from where the vessel began showing signs of distress, boarded the Nave Andromeda near the Isle of Wight off southern England.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace and Home Secretary Priti Patel authorised the armed forces to board the ship “to safeguard life and secure a ship that was subject to suspected hijacking”, the defence ministry said. “Armed forces have gained control of the ship and seven individuals have been detained,” the ministry said. “Initial reports confirm the crew are safe and well.”

The defence ministry declined to confirm or deny the involvement of the SBS — in line with British government policy of not commenting on special forces operations. But a source with knowledge of the matter said the SBS were involved. SBS operations are usually classified.

Former Royal Navy warfare officer Chris Parry said the SBS had been involved. The navy’s Special Boat Service, considered a sister unit to the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS), is one of Britain’s most secretive special



Nave Andromeda, an oil tanker is berthed at Southampton docks. — AFP

forces units.

An elite maritime counter-terrorism unit, the SBS traces its history back to World War Two and has been involved in many of the conflicts of the past 70 years including Afghanistan and Iraq. The SBS’s closest equivalent in the United States is the SEAL Team Six, or Task Force Blue. It was not immediately clear where the stowaways were from or what their intentions were.

Thousands of illegal economic migrants and would-be asylum seekers have sought to cross the English Channel from France to reach British shores this year, often

paying people traffickers to help them traverse one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes in overloaded rubber dinghies.

Police said the crew had been subject to threats from the stowaways and that they were working with coastguard and border forces to resolve the situation. “They had made verbal threats towards the crew. No one has been reported injured,” a police spokesman said.

Refinitiv vessel tracking data showed the Liberia-flagged Nave Andromeda had been expected to arrive in the English port of Southampton. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BANGKOK

‘Please resign,’ Thai opposition tells PM

Thailand’s biggest opposition party called on Monday for Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to resign, as parliament opened a special session called by the former junta leader to discuss months of protests.

“The prime minister is a major obstacle and burden to the country. Please resign and everything will end well,” said Sompong Amornvivat, leader of the opposition Pheu Thai party, the largest single party in parliament.

Prayuth called the parliament session this week after the imposition of October 15 emergency measures to end the demonstrations — including



a ban on protests — only inflamed anger and brought tens of thousands onto Bangkok streets.

“I’m confident that today, regardless of our different political views, everyone still loves the country,” Prayuth said in his opening address.

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia to host virtual APEC summit in Nov

Malaysia said on Monday it will host the first-ever virtual summit of leaders from Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) nations in November, amid political uncertainty faced by its Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin. Doubts had arisen earlier in the year if the summit will go ahead due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Zealand, which is hosting next year’s APEC summit, has said it will use virtual platforms to conduct the meeting due to travel restrictions and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Muhyiddin is facing calls to resign as doubts swirled over the support he commands, after the Malaysian king rejected his request to declare a state of emergency to fight the pandemic.

In a statement, the International Trade & Industry Ministry said Muhyiddin will chair on November 20 the Economic Leaders’ Meeting (AELM) which will have the participation of all 21 APEC economic leaders.

“Malaysia is making history by transforming APEC’s usual ways of doing business and convening a majority of APEC Meetings in a fully virtual-format,” it said. — Reuters

CARACAS

Maduro claims 100% effective virus treatment

Venezuela has discovered a highly effective treatment to completely eliminate the novel coronavirus without side effects, the country’s president Nicolas Maduro claimed.

A molecule called DR-10 was found during a six-month study by the state research institute IVIC and wipes out the virus 100 per cent, he said. The molecule has already been used to treat Hepatitis C, HPV and Ebola, Maduro added.

The process to have the treatment authorised by the World Health Organization (WHO) has already begun, he said. The WHO said earlier this month that several potential



coronavirus medications being tested worldwide had shown little or no results, according to the health agency’s Solidarity Trial of 11,000 patients in 30 countries. — dpa

Is the art of journalism in danger?

This is an interesting time for journalism and the whole spectrum of media as the field continues to evolve.

From the time of sending out notes with pigeons to telegrams and the birth of the first newspaper, information flow has taken leaps over the years but now it is in a strange situation.

Journalists like any other professionals have guidelines to follow and the intention is to provide unbiased news to the public. However, at the moment there are so many interpretations to this across the globe. Of course there are agendas but now the predicament is another matter.

With the profession of public relations and communications coming to the main front there is a danger of media being understood to be just a receiver and publisher of press releases. If that is the case then it is a sad situation for journalism and journalists.

Could the days of interviews and stories be part of a bygone era?

Events happen but what used to be interesting for readers and viewers were the interpretations and reviews of the writers. As with press releases there is a very thin line between advertisements and press releases. But the saddest part is when a request for an interview is declined with an answer stating, “There would be a



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

ONE GOOD ELEMENT IS THAT AT ALL TIMES THERE HAVE BEEN AN URGE TO BE CREATIVE – WHETHER IT WAS NEWS, FEATURES, WEATHER OR DOCUMENTARIES

press release soon.” If that is the case, where is a need for a journalist?

On the other hand, social media individuals have taken their roles seriously which has its merits but one of the demerits is their interpretations may not be completely right creating confusion in an already stressful set up.

News does not always have to be sensational and breaking, of course that is not the case if the objective is hits and likes. With all that said, it could be just time what is needed for everything to be understood and settled.

More than ever before information flow is seeing an easy approach and an inexpensive one compared to all the expense required to use satellite technology that was required to go live on television from location or on an international network even in the 90s.

One good element is that at all times there have been an urge to be creative — whether it was news, features, weather or documentaries. But if we were to settle down just for press releases there is not much room for creativity and imagination.

Nothing to fuss about actually, except the fact that a news report is to be objective and that is missed when it is a press release.

So maybe the original concept of journalism is becoming part of the old world charm. So should it be preserved? Is the art of journalism

— writing with realism, originality and style peculiar to each writer and publication — in danger? Of course there is a place for press releases — this is what makes it easier with facts and numbers, but what about quotes? Should all the publications carry the same matter?

Now how exciting was it to see ten journalists attend the same event and come up with different angles on the next day in the newspapers.

Let the talent not go waste and let wonderful stories not be missed in the urge to control information. After all, transparency is the best element of authenticity and the true sense of success.

With no time press releases are going to be boring to read and there will not be much for newcomers to journalism to practice on if the trend for press releases is going to continue. Maybe one of the solutions could be a blended system approach. Oh yes to have a press conference is going to be difficult with the pandemic around, but then online platforms are rich with options too.

The challenge could be time. But let us be creative and bring back the charm of real interviews. Let it be a two-way channel; providing information is good but it is great to have time for question and answer sessions because at the end of the day it is the public and the readers who matter.

SNAKES AND SEWAGE

Housing troubles grow in South Africa’s Soweto

KIM HARRISBERG

Crumbling walls, sewage leaking into homes, dangerous loose wires — and sometimes, snakes. These are some of the myriad issues residents in Soweto, South Africa’s biggest township, have been dealing with for decades, as they say the government continues to deny them title deeds and urgent upgrades to their homes outside Johannesburg.

“It was a dream come true when the government allocated us these homes after more than 15 years of living in a shack,” said Nkosinathi Khumalo, resident of the Soweto suburb known as Snake Park because of its slithering visitors.

His home was built on top of wetlands, including a corrugated roof that blows off in high winds and water damage on the walls. “The sad part was when I realised we were being dumped here. We have been suffering for so long,” said Khumalo, 35, who is currently unemployed.

Made up of five smaller townships, Snake Park is home to about 5,000 properties built under South Africa’s Reconstruction and Development Programme, an ongoing government-funded social housing project that began in 1994.

According to official statistics, about 14 per cent of South African homes — or 2.3 million properties — are subsidised by the government. Houses are allocated to low-income families and people with disabilities, although several families in Snake Park said they

waited at least a decade to get their homes.

Now, residents are angered by the rapid deterioration of those homes, saying the government took shortcuts when it built them so close to a wetland, making the houses susceptible to flooding, cracking and crumbling.

Those hazards have come to the fore in recent months, after the government ordered South Africans to stay home during a strict six-month lockdown to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. “Obviously it is a challenge to stay home and inside if your house is flooding,” said Thabiso Toti, a 53-year-old unemployed Snake Park resident.

Residents have 90 days from when they are allocated their house to sign a so-called “happy letter” confirming they are satisfied with the quality of the property, said Edward Makwarela of the human settlements department of Gauteng province, where Johannesburg is located. After that, any issues must be referred to the National Home Builders Registration Council for repairs, the project manager said in e-mailed comments. Makwarela noted that the Snake Park homes were part of the government’s People’s Housing Programme, in which communities are actively involved in building the properties. “Another issue could be the poor workmanship... driven by the community themselves, and they were not skilled,” he said.

Residents said they would like the chance to fix their homes themselves, but most cannot afford to. And bank loans are out of reach, they added, because they have no title deeds, which South African banks often require as collateral.

Makwarela pointed out that while the homes in Snake Park all have water, sanitation and electricity, the area still has no roads or stormwater drains, which he said is holding up the process of distributing title deeds. — Reuters

CLIMATE RISKS

Caught by deluges and droughts, cities look to become smarter

ROLI SRIVASTAVA

India’s southern city of Hyderabad is known as a high-tech hub — but its infrastructure is looking increasingly dated in an era of strengthening climate change impacts.

The city — home to offices of Microsoft and Google — this month saw its heaviest rainfall in a century, which left 70 dead and 5.7 billion rupees (\$77 million) in damage to roads and drains, officials said.

In many cities in India, which find themselves increasingly caught between worsening droughts and deluges, urban planners have rarely considered growing climate risks when designing projects.

That lack of preparation — a global problem — is expected to be hugely costly, with about \$90 trillion likely to be spent worldwide building and updating infrastructure by 2030, according to the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate.

But India — hit by worsening disaster-related losses — hopes to begin correcting that with a project launched last month to train cities to become climate smart.

“Cities are experiencing huge variability in climate... one year there is flood, another year water scarcity,” said Umamaheshwaran Rajasekar, who heads the Climate Centre for Cities at India’s National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). The institute is helping India’s housing and urban affairs ministry to implement the project, with Rajasekar at the helm.



Residents search for their belongings in a flooded housing colony following heavy rains on the outskirts of Hyderabad on October 20. — AFP

HYDERABAD SAW ITS HEAVIEST RAINFALL IN A CENTURY, WHICH LEFT 70 DEAD AND \$77 MILLION IN DAMAGE TO ROADS AND DRAINS

“It is not about looking at the past but looking at the future... how we can enable future development through informed action,” he said by phone.

The effort is part of an ambitious broader plan to modernise cities with everything from high-speed Internet to better transport systems. Under it, 139 cities will be trained to integrate climate risk in the planning stage of projects.

The “Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework” will tackle

the “increasing frequency of cyclones, floods, heatwaves, water scarcity and drought-like conditions”, according to the government.

Cities will incorporate climate considerations in their management of water, waste and mobility, and in projects designed to make cities walkable and air breathable. Virtual trainings have already begun with city planners and municipal authorities, officials said.

— Reuters

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Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates with the trophy after winning against Argentina's Diego Schwartzman. – AFP

ZVEREV CLINCHES BACK-TO-BACK COLOGNE TITLES

COLOGNE, Germany: Alexander Zverev claimed his second ATP indoor title in Cologne in a week on Sunday, as he cruised to a dominant, straight-sets win over Argentine Diego Schwartzman.

Zverev had lost two of his previous three meetings with Schwartzman, but was unstoppable on Sunday, dispatching the Argentine 6-2, 6-1 in just one hour and 11 minutes.

"Alexander was just much better than me today. He was perfect on

court," said Schwartzman.

World number seven Zverev, 23, lived up to his top seeding to seal both titles on home soil in the back-to-back German tournaments.

Dogged by a hip problem earlier in the tournament, the US Open finalist looked entirely untroubled as he strolled to an eighth straight win in Cologne.

"Two days ago, I wasn't sure if I was even going to finish the tournament, and now I'm here," he said, adding that his best is still to

Two days ago, I wasn't sure if I was even going to finish the tournament, and now I'm here. It's getting better, I think I'm going to be on the top of my game very soon

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

Germany

come. "It's getting better, I think I'm going to be on the top of my game very soon."

Zverev is set to compete at the ATP Finals in London next month, where he will be out to regain the

title he won for the first time in 2018.

HUMBERT TAKES SECOND ATP TITLE

Young Frenchman Ugo Humbert claimed his second ATP title on Sunday with a straight-sets victory over Australian Alex de Minaur in the European Open final in Antwerp.

The 22-year-old, who also won the Auckland Open in January, raced through the opening set

before taking a second-set tie-break to win 6-1, 7-6 (7/4).

Eighth seed De Minaur, who reached this year's US Open quarter-finals, is without an ATP title since September 2019.

Humbert is set to rise from 38th in the world rankings to number 32, boosting his chances of being seeded at Grand Slam tournaments next year.

His best effort at a Slam was a run to the 2019 Wimbledon last 16.

— AFP

Sabalenka beats sick Azarenka to win Ostrava Open

PRAGUE: Third seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus won the Ostrava Open WTA tournament after beating her compatriot Victoria Azarenka, who was battling a migraine, in straight sets on Sunday.

World number 12 Sabalenka took only an hour and eight minutes to ease past 14th-ranked Azarenka 6-2, 6-2.

It was Sabalenka's second title this year after a win at the Qatar Open in February, before the coronavirus pandemic broke out.

"I'm happy with this week, it was a thrilling week for me and I'm really happy with this result," Sabalenka said in the empty ice hockey arena.

The first-ever all-Belarusian final on the WTA Tour offered a fierce battle from the start with both showing the best of their attacking styles.

The 22-year-old Sabalenka started on a high and earned two break points in the first game, but Azarenka survived the scare and



they both held on to their serve until 2-2.

But Sabalenka turned out the more aggressive of the two as she then broke Azarenka's serve to love

before adding another break two games later to win the set.

"I would say that the first six games were really tough, she played really well and she made me move,"

said Sabalenka.

"After each point I was really tired, she pushed me a lot in this match."

Playing her 40th WTA final,

I'm happy with this week, it was a thrilling week for me and I'm really happy with this result

ARYNA SABALENKA

Belarus

Azarenka won the first game of the second set before losing the next two as she visibly started struggling with her health, finding it hard to move.

The former world number one and this year's US Open finalist took a medical timeout as she was grappling with a migraine.

"I started to feel bad yesterday (Saturday), I had a really bad migraine, it happens sometimes," Azarenka said, adding the lights in the arena made the problem worse.

"Retiring... I think would have been better in terms of my condition, but I wanted to see if I couldn't do something during the match, see if I can feel better, so I took it as a challenge for myself."

The 31-year-old Azarenka returned to the court, despite looking dizzy and struggling with her movement.

She lost another two games before suddenly breaking Sabalenka's serve to cut the gap to 4-2.

"There were winners from her shots, she closed her eyes and hit every point and I couldn't do anything," Sabalenka said.

But that turned out to be a momentary lapse from the energetic youngster who took the break back and then won the match with another game to love.

Sabalenka also won the Ostrava doubles together with Elise Mertens after beating Gabriela Dabrowski and Luisa Stefani 6-1, 6-3 later on Sunday. — AFP

KULUSEVSKI RESCUES POINT FOR JUVENTUS AGAINST VERONA

MILAN: Dejan Kulusevski came off the bench to rescue a point as champions Juventus, playing without Cristiano Ronaldo, were held to a third Serie A stalemate at home against Hellas Verona on Sunday.

Portuguese forward Ronaldo remains absent after testing positive for coronavirus with Juventus preparing for next week's Champions League tie against Barcelona in Turin.

"We had a too wait-and-see first half, we weren't very aggressive with the midfielders but we had the most dangerous opportunities," said Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo.

Substitute Andrea Favilli put Verona ahead after an hour in Turin but Swedish forward Kulusevski rescued Pirlo with 13 minutes to go.

"In the second half after the goal there was a good response, but we shouldn't need a slap in the face to wake us up.

"When you play against Verona it's hard for everyone, but we could have done better."

To add to Pirlo's problems before hosting Barcelona, defender Leonardo Bonucci went off with a thigh problem. Veteran Giorgio Chiellini is already out.

"He had already felt something on Tuesday (against Dynamo Kiev), he felt something again today," said Pirlo.

"We will evaluate it tomorrow, calmly."

Juventus are fifth in Serie A, three points behind leaders AC Milan, who host Roma on Monday.

The nine-time reigning champions have stalled under new coach Pirlo after winning their opener against Sampdoria, their only victory on the pitch in Serie A this season.

They drew against promoted Crotone 1-1 and 2-2 at Roma. Between those matches they were awarded a 3-0 victory after Napoli refused to travel to Turin on October 4 because of coronavirus cases.



Juventus' Dejan Kulusevski (left) fights for the ball with Verona's Davide Faraoni during the Serie A match against Verona at the Allianz Stadium in Turin. — AFP

On Sunday, Ebrima Colley had a goal ruled offside after quarter of an hour for Verona with the hosts also denied an Alvaro Morata goal for a marginal offside.

Favilli came on after 55 minutes and five minutes later had the visitors ahead finishing off a Mattia Zaccagn

cross.

Morata missed another chance on 72 minutes. Paulo Dybala, making his return after three months, hit the crossbar five minutes later. Then Kulusevski beat Silvestri from an angle.

The Verona goalkeeper pulled

off two late saves to stop Dybala and Morata.

Napoli go second

Napoli moved up to second place, one point behind AC Milan, after a 2-1 win over promoted Benevento, a match in which brothers Lorenzo and Roberto Insigne scored for rival clubs.

"I'm very happy, but sorry my first goal in Serie A was against my brother", said midfielder Roberto, 26, who opened the scoring after half an hour against his hometown club who he left two seasons ago for Benevento.

Lorenzo Insigne, 29, marked his return from injury with a stunning



We had a too wait-and-see first half, we weren't very aggressive with the midfielders but we had the most dangerous opportunities

ANDREA PIRLO
Juventus coach

equaliser for his 68th top-flight goal for Napoli, with Matteo Politano setting up Andrea Petagna for the winner seven minutes later.

Gennaro Gattuso's side got back to winning ways after their surprise 1-0 Europa League home defeat by AZ Alkmaar.

"After the game? I told him (Roberto) my left is better than his", joked Lorenzo.

"No, I'm kidding, we also hugged because today was an exciting day for our family. I'm happy with the goal and congratulate my brother too.

"The left foot is not my favourite but I struck it very well and I must say it was a beautiful goal."

Napoli have won all four Serie A games they have played this season

Mid-table Fiorentina got back winning 3-2 against Udinese thanks to a Gaetano Castrovilli brace either side of a Nikola Milenkovic header.

A pair of Stefano Okaka headers had revived 18th-placed Udinese hopes.

In Sardinia, Argentine striker Giovanni Simeone, son of Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone, scored his fourth goal in five games as Cagliari beat 10-man Crotone 4-2.

Five of the goals came in a thrilling first half. Cagliari are 11th while Crotone bottom of the table. — AFP



Granada players celebrate at the end of the match. -- Reuters File Photo



Real Sociedad top La Liga, Granada scrape past Getafe

BARCELONA: Mikel Oyarzabal bagged a brace as Real Sociedad swept to a 4-1 victory over Huesca, moving top of La Liga on Sunday.

Granada earned a 1-0 win over Getafe earlier in the day to pull level with second-place Real Madrid, who beat rivals Barcelona 3-1 in the Clasico on Saturday at Camp Nou.

Real Sociedad took the lead from the penalty spot after Pablo Maffeo handled the ball in the area, with Oyarzabal dispatching it. Huesca, still looking for their first victory, levelled

just after half-time when Rafa Mir headed home.

Oyarzabal spurned a pair of good chances before netting his second to send Real Sociedad back ahead, heading home Andoni Gorosabel's cross.

Cristian Portu extended the Basque side's lead in San Sebastian from a tight angle, before Swedish forward Alexander Isak netted when sent through on goal by former Manchester City star David Silva.

Huesca's Sergio Gomez had a

late consolation ruled out for offside against Mir, and the promoted side are 17th, but could drop into the relegation zone if Celta Vigo avoid defeat at Levante on Monday.

"I think that we are happy now but we have to be self-critical and think we can't throw away the lead like that at the start of the second half", said Oyarzabal.

"We are happy for the reaction after that and we must keep working. (Missing two chances), that's football, and then I scored maybe the most

difficult." At the Coliseum Alfonso Perez, visitors Granada took the lead just before half-time when Yangel Herrera was fouled by Djene Dakonam in the area.

Angel Montoro slotted home the penalty, the first goal Getafe have conceded at home this season. Getafe might have equalized with five minutes to go but Mauro Arambarri's effort was ruled offside after Enes Unal headed against the crossbar.

"We are a very competitive side and we like it (like that)", said Montoro.

"We're always training and working hard for better results. "I'm really happy for the group and for our fans. We're going game by game. I'm happy for scoring the goal, and for us getting the three points."

Earlier Cadiz striker Alvaro Negredo had a goal ruled out for offside by VAR as the Andalusian minnows earned a creditable 0-0 draw with Villarreal. The result leaves the hosts sixth and Unai Emery's Villarreal third.

Alaves eased to a comfortable

victory over 10-man Real Valladolid, with the winless, bottom of the table strugglers seeing defender Nacho sent off in the 21st minute for a cynical foul on Lucas Perez.

Perez struck the bar with the resulting penalty and Alaves began to dominate the game with an extra man.

Tomas Pina broke the deadlock in the 55th minute after a cut-back from the left and Borja Sainz doubled the lead for the visitors with five minutes to go, turning in Deyverson's effort.

— dpa



STOKES TON KEEPS ROYALS IN HUNT FOR IPL PLAY-OFFS



DUBAI: England's Ben Stokes smashed an unbeaten 107 to keep Rajasthan Royals in the chase for the Indian Premier League play-offs after their eight-wicket win over holders Mumbai Indians on Sunday.

The win for Steve Smith's Royals knocked the Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led Chennai Super Kings out of the final-four race despite their win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in the first match of the day.

Stokes combined with Sanju Samson, who made 54 not out, to put on 152 runs for the third wicket as Royals achieved their target of 196 in 18.2 overs in Abu Dhabi.

The left-handed batsman came into his own, hitting 14 fours and three sixes in his 60-ball knock to help Royals rise to sixth in the eight-team table with five wins from 12 games.

Stokes, who joined his team late this season after spending time with his ill father in New Zealand, hit a six to bring up his second IPL ton and surpassed his previous best score of 103 — in 2017 — with the winning boundary.

"It's sort of bittersweet to be honest. Bit taken back by why it's taken me so long to get into the tournament for the team," said Stokes.

"To be honest the training I've had yesterday was the best I had throughout my time here, so I came into this with a bit of confidence. It was coming on nicely." The New Zealand-born Stokes, whose father is battling cancer, said: "Things are a bit difficult right now, but hope this has given a bit of happiness back

home."

The powerful batting show from the star allrounder, who had scored 110 from five games before this knock, put Hardik Pandya's 21-ball 60 in the shade after Mumbai finished on 195 for five.

Mumbai though still stay top of the table, locked on 14 points with Delhi Capitals and RCB in the fight for a place in the top two. The qualifiers begin on November 5.

‘ENJOY THE GAME’

The top two will clash in the first qualifier in Dubai, while the third and fourth-placed teams meet in the eliminator on November 6 in Abu Dhabi.

The winner of the eliminator will then play the loser of the first qualifier on November 8, with the final slated for two days later in Dubai.

Earlier on Sunday, opener Ruturaj Gaikwad hit his maiden IPL half-century as CSK thrashed Virat Kohli's Bangalore by eight wickets in Dubai.

The 23-year-old Gaikwad smashed an unbeaten 65 to lead Chennai's chase of 146 in 18.4 overs and give the bottom-placed team only their fourth victory this season.

"I felt this one was one of the perfect games. Everything went to plan, and the execution was there," said Dhoni.

"You have to enjoy the game no matter where you are on the table. If you are not enjoying the cricket, it can become cruel and painful. So I am glad with how the youngsters have responded."

Gaikwad, who hit three sixes in his 51-ball knock, put on a key 67-run second-wicket stand with Ambati Rayudu, who scored 39, as Chennai bounced back after three straight losses.

Earlier, Chennai restricted Bangalore to 145 for six despite an attacking 82-run third-wicket stand between Kohli, who made 50, and AB de Villiers.

RCB still hold THE third spot in the table and Kohli said they "are playing really good cricket". — AFP

BEN STOKES,
Rajasthan Royals



Gaikwad powers CSK to upset win over RCB

DUBAI: Opening batsman Ruturaj Gaikwad hit his maiden Indian Premier League half-century as the struggling Chennai Super Kings thrashed Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore by eight wickets on Sunday.

Gaikwad smashed an unbeaten 65 to lead Chennai's chase of 146 in 18.4 overs in Dubai and give the Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led team only their fourth win this season.

The 23-year-old Gaikwad hit the winning runs for his side, who can still mathematically qualify for the play-offs, although they will drop back to the foot of the table if Rajasthan Royals beat the Mumbai Indians later on Sunday.

"I felt this one was one of the perfect games. Everything went to plan, and the execution was there," said Dhoni who hit 19 not out in an unbeaten 37-run stand with Gaikwad.

"You have to enjoy the game no matter where you are on the table. If you are not enjoying the cricket, it can become cruel and painful. So I am glad with how the youngsters have responded."

Gaikwad, who hit three sixes in his 51-ball knock, put on a key 67-run second-wicket stand with Ambati Rayudu, who scored 39, as Chennai bounced back after three straight losses.

Dhoni praised Gaikwad who had to undergo added quarantine in the United Arab Emirates after testing positive for coronavirus ahead of the IPL campaign.

"Rutu (Gaikwad) played really well, backed himself to play the shots that he would play than worry about big shots," said Dhoni.

"It's been tough on Rutu as well. He batted in Chennai, then COVID, the extra quarantine took precious time away from him. He got comfortable with every run today after the single he got."

Earlier, Sam Curran's figures of 3-19 in three overs restricted Bangalore to 145 for six despite an attacking 82-run third-wicket stand between Kohli, who made 50, and AB de Villiers.

RCB still hold the third spot in the table and Kohli is confident of better things to come.

"We are playing really good cricket and you have to accept you will lose games here and there," said Kohli, who hit his third half-century of the season. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI IPL final to be played in Dubai on November 10

The 2020 Indian Premier League (IPL) final will be played on November 10 in Dubai, the country's cricket board (BCCI) confirmed on Sunday. The playoff matches will be played from Nov. 5 in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The top four teams qualify for the playoffs. Defending champions Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals, Royal Challengers Bangalore and Kolkata Knight Riders occupy the top four spots with three rounds left to play. This year's IPL, which was originally scheduled to begin in March in India, is being held in the United Arab Emirates due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



— Reuters

HONG KONG South Korean striker Lee to retire



South Korean striker and Asian Champions League record goalscorer Lee Dong-gook has said he will bring an end to his 23-year career at the end of the season. The 41-year-old, who has won two Asian club titles, will play his last domestic league game for Jeonbuk Motors against Daegu on November 1,

a match that could bring him an eighth Korean league crown. "It's been 23 years for me as a pro, however, it felt like one lost year for me because I was not been able to fully enjoy this time as a player with many people due to COVID-19," Lee said in a video posted on Youtube.

— Reuters

DUBLIN Cooney joins Ireland squad ahead of France clash

Ulster's John Cooney has been called into Ireland's squad for this weekend's potential Six Nations title decider against France in Paris, the Irish Rugby football Union announced on Monday.

Cooney will provide additional scrum-half cover after Jamison Gibson-Park suffered a hamstring injury during last weekend's win over Italy which took Ireland to the top of the standings.

The 28-year-old was preferred to Cooney as Conor Murray's back-up against the Azzurri and came off the bench to win his first cap. — AFP



features



Elegant and well-crafted giveaways find its niche in Omani society

BY BADRIYA MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI

There is nothing like exchanging little beautiful giveaways prepared personally at home and packed with high care to be handed to loved ones on various special occasions. Giveaways had become the best treats for all occasions and among Omani families, it became a symbolic gesture of hospitality as tiny colourful gifts packed with love by the host family are given to visitors.

These giveaways are also handed to kids ornately wrapped and placed in small boxes with cards or bags along with little sweets. Giveaways could be food, money, perfumes, scents, sweets, pieces of jewellery, chocolates, souvenirs or any other type of beautiful and affordable gifts the host family wants to surprise the guests with.

Nowadays people in most parts of Oman prepare variously decorated giveaways to be given to the family members, relatives and friends in occasions like birthdays, Eid Al Adha and Eid Al Fitr, Bridal Showers, baby welcoming receptions and in traditional Omani habits like Qaranqasho besides weddings and engagement parties.

The giveaways of today had taken numerous forms. From its simple origin, today, they have become decorative. In many events, they are packed with mouth-watering and the best selection of chocolates and nuts. Little touches like sweet small notes written by the giver are also included.

Other than being cute, elegant and attractive, customary among giveaway

Nowadays people in most parts of Oman prepare variously decorated giveaways to be given to the family members, relatives and friends in occasions like birthdays, Eid Al Adha and Eid Al Fitr, Bridal Showers, baby welcoming receptions and in traditional Omani habits like Qaranqasho besides weddings and engagement parties

givers is the idea that they should be useful and memorable and something that can be the gift as a souvenir.

In many parts of the Sultanate, such giveaways had also become a practice not only during birthday celebrations but also baby welcoming receptions. There are occasions that the givers go all out giving parents with inspirational even expensive giveaways that will guarantee the receiver's joy and happiness.

Wedding and engagement commemorations had also been influenced by the practice. People decorate and celebrate the sharing of the amazingly

made giveaways among guests. It has become a custom in some villages of Oman to start the day of Eid and many occasions with receiving attractive giveaways from the host family members.

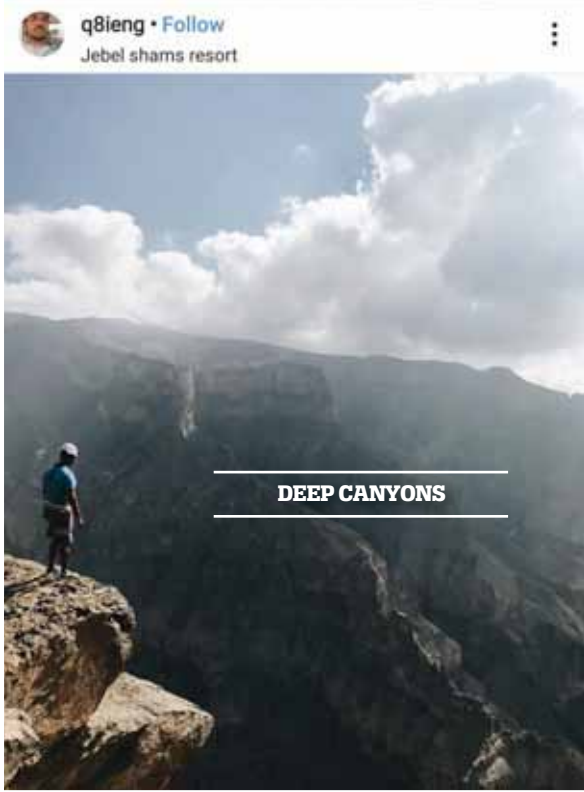
Some Omani ladies prepare creatively designed gifts and giveaways when they come back from Hajj or Umra rituals. They welcome their guests and visitors with outstanding gifts brought from KSA that are wrapped with themes, logos and religiously attractive designs that mark Hajj.

Moreover, nowadays baby welcoming reception does not happen without the showcasing of colourful unique giveaways as it is a beautiful long-awaited celebration that is socially enjoyed among family members, neighbours and friends in which the presentation of giveaways and sweets fabulously marks the happiness of the occasion.

Children and adults along with parents feel very glad about receiving the special giveaways of social occasions celebrated among Omani families. The glow of happiness is seen on the faces of loved ones receiving the surprising giveaways. Kids share the experience of unwrapping the fabulous giveaways they receive with one another. Giveaways are great for getting people to speak up about a person's gorgeous selection of an occasion's giveaways. Mariya al Balushiya, a 27 years old citizen of Wilayat of Al Musannah who received a giveaway in one of the recent birthday parties from her family members, told the *Observer* "I genuinely loved the creativity used to distribute the birthday giveaways. In particular, arranging a special kind of chocolates along with little cards packed as a giveaway inspired my imagination".



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COVID-19 STRESS MANAGEMENT:

Growing plants bring positivity in mindsets



BY DR PRIYANKA VERMA

In the face of unprecedented social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our concerns about our mental and emotional well-being have become increasingly significant. While the most salient preventive measure of social distancing is our physical defence against the virus, there is wisdom in acknowledging the cost and burden of this protection; a heavy sum incurred by the mind and the soul. Health resides not solely in the flesh. If the spirit withers, the body is only a defenceless fortress. This article then is about tending-tending, as a conscientious gardener does, his small patch of earth, his orchard and his vineyard, and through the intimacy of his labour teaches us the value of tending to our souls.

Whenever getting the time away from household responsibilities, I spend tending to my baby plants. Every new root, every emerging leaf, is a source of delight. As much as I nourish them, unknowingly and in profound ways, they nourished in return. More often I pick small

seedlings, cuttings, dried or side-stream plants all of which are available at reasonable rates of ranging 500 baisa to 3.0 rials. Personally I do not prefer already-grown specimens for as a plant tissue culturist, I know that a single healthy cell can sprout into full growth given the proper conditions and nourishment.

Always mindful of spending time with plants, I experiment with various elements vital to their growth: the duration of sunlight, compost vs. hydroponics, cluster growth vs. single growth, with or without NPK fertiliser. Whenever a plant is not responding positively to outdoor conditions I raise their hydroponic cultures indoor.

Being a medicinal plant biotechnologist, I have a keen interest in growing medicinal plants. Salient reasons for their cultivation are the wound healing properties of false eranthemum; antimicrobial, carminative to antispasmodic activities of mentha and the antioxidant activity of aloe.

The plant species *Boswellia sacra* (anti-inflammatory frankincense) that is endemic to Dhofar Governorate of Oman is one of the most important specimens in my nursery. Sur is located in the coastal area of Oman

which experiences long hot and dry summers with less humidity. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt various plant growth habits that can contribute to acclimatising the plant in harsh conditions.

Indoor hydroponics with an induced rooting system is one of them. The *Pseuderanthemum carruthersii* was one such plant that was unable to survive the hot summer months. However, it responded well and grew successfully under hydroponic conditions. Currently I have the stock of 25 plant species in indoor and outdoor conditions in a span of 6-7 months.

It includes outdoor plants namely *Thevetia peruviana* (yellow oleander); *Nerium oleander* (pink oleander); *Plumeria obtusa* (frangipani); *Catharanthus roseus* (periwinkle); *Pseuderanthemum carruthersii* (false eranthemum); *Ixora coccinea* (Dwarf ixora); *Mentha* (mint); *Epipremnum aureum* (Pathos); *Coleus scutellarioides* (coleus); *Sansevieria trifasciata* (snake plant); *Boswellia sacra* (frankincense); *Sabal minor* (Dwarf palmetto).

Xerophytes including *Opuntia* (cacti), succulents like *Agave americana* (century plant), *Aloe vera* (Aloe), *Portulacaria afra* (dwarf jade), *Guzmania* (Bromeliad) are the other outdoor plants. The

indoor plants include *Dypsis Lutescens* (Areca palm); *Dianella variegata* (flax lily); *Euphorbia pulcherrima* (Poinsettia) along with hydroponically grown *Pathos*, bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*), *Agave* and snake plants.

With experience of 15 years in medicinal plant biotechnology, I have a deep conviction that we can have a strong anti-viral of plant origin that combat the mutative strains of deadly disease causing viruses in the future.

My time growing plants during the social isolation of COVID-19 has strengthened my bonds with nature, fortifying the belief that one's passion towards greenery can repair earth environments. If the delicate way of handling plants is inculcated in children, they will learn to appreciate life and protect the single units that essentially constitute the lungs of the planet while also cultivating within themselves a patient and positive attitude towards life.

Speaking from my own experience as a researcher and a homemaker, while I advice on plant cultivation to all those afflicted by the stress and isolation caused by Covid lockdowns, but especially I am receptive of the psychological needs of women who find themselves juggling a multiplicity of tasks and priorities.

HUMAN INTEREST

Naples teachers bring socially distanced school to streets and balconies



NAPLES, ITALY: Since schools in the southern Italian region of Campania closed due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, teachers have been taking their classes to the streets to prevent students from falling behind.

Campania, around Naples, escaped largely unscathed from Italy's first coronavirus wave in the spring, but the region has seen infections soar in recent weeks and local authorities have closed

their balconies and on the streets outside their homes.

"We do everything to respect the rules because I think this emergency in Italy is serious and real," Stornaiuolo said.

The government has so far avoided imposing nationwide curbs on schools, businesses and freedom of movement, but has urged regional authorities to draw up their own restrictions if needed.



most schools until the end of October.

"Mothers called me and said the kids are in floods of tears, they want to go back to school, they don't understand why schools need to be stopped," said Pamela Buda, while holding a class for pupils sitting on public steps in central Naples.

Tonino Stornaiuolo yells out his lessons to pupils listening from

Lombardy, where Milan is located, has already introduced a curfew from 11 pm to 5.00 am to put a stop to late night gatherings. Campania has said it will follow suit.

"I wanted to find a way in which the kids could see us and share time with us, at least as long as it is possible and until we know whether there will be another lockdown," Stornaiuolo added.

— Reuters



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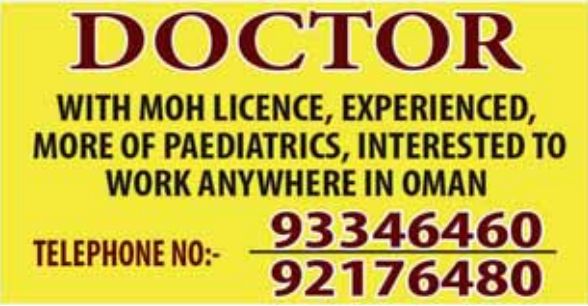
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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

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Oil prices fall as increasing COVID-19 cases stoke demand fears



A pump jack operates in the Permian Basin oil production area near Wink, Texas. — Reuters

TOKYO: Oil prices fell on Monday, extending last week's losses, as a jump in COVID-19 infections in the United States and Europe raised alarms over crude demand, while the prospect of increased supply also hurt sentiment.

Brent crude was down by 53 cents, or 1.3 per cent, at \$41.24 by 0052 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) dropped 53 cents, or 1.3 per cent, to \$39.32, having fallen more than a dollar shortly after the start of trading.

Brent fell 2.7 per cent last week and WTI dropped 2.5 per cent.

The United States reported its highest number yet of new coronavirus infections in two days through Saturday, while in France new cases hit a record of more than 50,000 on Sunday, underlining the severity of the outbreak.

On the supply side, Libya's National Oil Corp on Friday ended its force majeure on exports from two key ports and said production would reach 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in four weeks, a quicker ramp-up than many analysts had predicted.

Opec+, a grouping of producers including the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and Russia, is also set to increase output by 2 million bpd in January 2021 after cutting production by a record amount earlier this year.

"A resurgence in COVID-19 cases in Europe and North America has stopped the recovery in demand in its tracks," ANZ Research said. "If market conditions worsen, (Opec+) will have no choice but to delay the increase of quotas by a month or two at its meeting on 1 December," ANZ said.

— Reuters

Chevron bets on Middle East gas riches

The plan is anchored by Wirth's \$11.8 billion purchase this month of US-based Noble Energy, which holds a stake of about 40 per cent in the aptly-named Leviathan gas field in the Mediterranean Sea

HOUSTON/LONDON: After years of focusing on US shale, Chevron Corp is staking its natural gas future on the Middle East, a volatile and divided region where energy majors have long tread warily.

CEO Michael Wirth's pivot away from home is underpinned by a bet that the Middle East is entering an era of reconciliation that will make it ideal for tapping natural gas, as demand for the cheaper and cleaner fuel is forecast to outstrip oil.

The new strategy is seeing the company pitch new gas deals in Egypt, Israel, and Qatar, while cutting spending on American shale exploration.

The plan is anchored by Wirth's \$11.8 billion purchase this month of US-based Noble Energy, which holds a stake of about 40 per cent in the aptly-named Leviathan gas field in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Israel.

"Five years ago the Eastern Med wasn't viewed as endowed from a resource standpoint as I think most people would say today. That's a fundamental shift," Wirth said in an interview. "There's not a lot of capital investment required in the near term," he said. "At a time when cash flow matters, that's a very appealing



An aerial view shows the newly arrived foundation platform of Leviathan natural gas field, in the Mediterranean Sea. — Reuters

attribute."

Wirth said Middle Eastern commercial and diplomatic relations "are becoming more codified and stronger, that's a trend that we think augurs well for the region."

Chevron also made a courtesy call about the Noble deal to officials in Saudi Arabia, a key partner in several Chevron oil projects and a nation with historically strained relations with Israel, according to a

senior source at the US company.

Despite risks, Chevron - which at one point leap-frogged rival ExxonMobil this month to be the largest US oil company by market value - is ploughing ahead with efforts across the region.

The Leviathan field and others nearby have the potential to become major factors in regional fuel supplies. Chevron could send gas to an Egyptian liquefied natural gas

(LNG) plant that could ship the fuel to Europe or Asia, Wirth said.

European and Asian nations have been moving toward gas, solar and wind, and away from coal and nuclear power.

"The reality is you need gas in tandem with renewables," said Christopher Kalnin, CEO of Banpu Kalnin Ventures, which invests in US shale gas. Asia, in particular, will remain dependent on imported

gas, he said, because it complements solar and wind.

Global gas demand through 2025 is projected to rise 1.5 per cent per year on average, largely on growing purchases by customers in China and India. In contrast, oil consumption may have already peaked at last year's 100 million barrel per day (bpd) level, forecasters say, and this year could sink to 91.7 million bpd, a seven-year low. — Reuters

China begins economic planning session

BEIJING: China's communist leadership on Monday kicked off a four-day meeting to draw the next five-year economic plan and set development goals until 2035.

China's 14th five-year plan is set to focus on economic self-reliance, technological innovation and a cleaner environment. Beijing is pushing ahead with a "dual circulation" philosophy, which aims to boost economic self-reliance while still benefiting from globalisation.

Chinese President Xi Jinping read a work report aloud as he opened the plenary session of the Communist Party's Central Committee, a top ruling body, state broadcaster CGTN said. The plenum is set to run until Thursday, but decisions made there will likely not be announced until the

next parliamentary session, which usually takes place in March.

The meeting takes place against the backdrop of increased trade, human rights and the coronavirus pandemic with the United States, Australia and other Western countries.

While the US, Europe and other parts of the world are experiencing a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, China has managed to keep The virus largely under control, which has allowed its economy to recover.

The economy accelerated to 4.9 per cent growth in the third quarter of the year after a historic decline of 6.8 per cent in the first three months of the year and 3.2 per cent growth in the second quarter. — dpa

German business confidence dips

FRANKFURT: German business confidence in October fell for the first time since April, as businesses become increasingly anxious about the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, a closely watched survey showed on Monday.

The Ifo institute's monthly barometer slid to 92.7 points from a seasonally adjusted 93.2 points in September, marking the first drop after five months of rises.

"Sentiment among business leaders has clouded over... Companies are considerably more sceptical regarding developments over the coming months," Ifo President Clemens Fuest said.

However, the reading is broadly in line with the 94.5 level of October 2019, suggesting that German business has a long way



Employees work on chassis at a car factory in Stuttgart, Germany. — Reuters

to go to revisit the lows recorded during the damaging lockdowns in the spring.

The figure "is not weak enough to fear another collapse of the economy," said Carsten Brzeski at ING, but the outcome "definitely marks the end of the rebound and

the start of double-dip (recession) fears."

The Ifo index dived to a record low in April when Germany ordered factories and shops shut, before picking up the following month as business activity gradually resumed. — AFP

■ TOUGH LEADERSHIP

Pandemic plunges Lagarde into 'intense' first year at ECB

FRANKFURT: It's been a baptism by fire for Christine Lagarde whose first year as head of the European Central Bank has been dominated by the coronavirus pandemic and the drastic action needed to keep the eurozone economy afloat.

The former International Monetary Fund chief, who became the ECB's first female president last November, says the past 12 months have been "very intense" and at times "without much sleep" as policymakers confront an unprecedented economic shock.

"It has been a very tough time for Christine Lagarde," said ING bank analyst Carsten Brzeski, "and probably not what she had imagined when accepting the job."

Lacking the technical expertise of her predecessors has caught her out over the past year but ECB watchers have also praised Lagarde, a former

French finance minister and top corporate lawyer, for her political instincts and cool handling of the crisis so far.

She will on Thursday chair her eighth monetary policy meeting at Frankfurt's gleaming ECB tower, with the 25-member governing council once again holding their discussions via video link because of virus precautions.

The meeting comes as Europe battles a spike in coronavirus infections that is forcing countries to reimpose some of the painful lockdowns that pummelled the economy in the spring.

Lagarde, 64, warned last week that the second COVID-19 wave and new restrictions "are adding to the uncertainty and weighing on the recovery" in the 19-nation euro area.

Nevertheless, observers expect the ECB to adopt a wait-and-



European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde speaks at the bank's headquarters in Frankfurt, in this file photo. — AFP

see approach Thursday, before adding greater muscle to the bank's pandemic stimulus in December.

When Lagarde first arrived in Frankfurt, a key task on her to-do

list was to patch up a rift between ECB members openly divided over her predecessor Mario Draghi's ultra-loose monetary policy.

But the spat was quickly

Lagarde notably gaffed in the early stages of the pandemic, triggering a sell-off in bond markets after saying it was not the ECB's job to "close the spread" between Italian and German bond yields

overshadowed by the pandemic, which saw the ECB leap into action and roll out a 1.35-trillion-euro emergency bond-buying scheme to keep credit flowing and cushion the impact from the biggest global downturn since World War II.

"Extraordinary times require extraordinary action," Lagarde said, stressing that the ECB stood ready to

do even more.

"Under her leadership the ECB has been successful in averting a sovereign debt crisis," said Andrew Kenningham of Capital Economics, although Lagarde "has on occasion seemed unsure of herself in handling some of the more technical-economic aspects of the job".

Lagarde notably gaffed in the early stages of the pandemic, triggering a sell-off in bond markets after saying it was not the ECB's job to "close the spread" between Italian and German bond yields.

She learned the hard way that "every single word of the ECB president can have an enormous impact," Brzeski said.

"It is under Lagarde that the ECB (website) had to introduce the 'blog' entry to repair any communication damage from the press conference the day after." — AFP

Relief seeks to make VAT consumer friendly in Oman



MITUL PATEL

With the lowest standard rate of VAT at 5 per cent, as compared to anywhere in the world and a broad list of reliefs — the proposed VAT system in Oman would appear to be, comparatively, consumer friendly. Whilst the introduction of VAT in Oman may come with an inflationary effect it is

not expected to be significant.

The reliefs defined in the newly issued VAT law focuses heavily on alleviating the burden of tax on goods and services which are essential to everyday life such as rental of residential units, basic food, healthcare and education. Certain limited reliefs have also been extended to sectors which significantly contribute to the national Gross Domestic Product such as Oil and Gas as well as Financial Services.

The Oman VAT law includes two types of relief, a zero rate and an exemption, which both result in no VAT being directly charged to the customer. However, the practical application of these reliefs is very different as explained below:

- The zero-rate relief takes its literal meaning such that VAT will be charged at 0 per cent. Examples include, but are not limited to, the sale of basic food items, medical



supplies, certain investment grade metals, international transport, certain hydrocarbon products and exports

- In contrast the VAT exemption applies to different a

range of supplies including certain financial services, healthcare, education, undeveloped land, residential rents, resale of resident property and local passenger transport.

Except for international transport, most of those items which benefit from the zero-rate are goods. Owing to the way the VAT system works the vendor, who will incur VAT on their purchases, will be able to recover the VAT they have incurred in the course of making these zero-rated sales.

This means that VAT should not be a cost to either the vendor or the customer.

The key difference between the exemption and the zero-rate supply is that when a vendor makes an exempt supply, they are not entitled to recover any VAT incurred on the purchase made in the course of providing that exempt supply.

As such this could result in a cost escalation for the vendor which may have a knock-on effect to the customer by way of a price rise.

Of those items listed within the exemption — financial services are a particularly interesting example

with many countries opting to apply an exemption owing to the difficulty in defining the value added on financial products.

In Oman, the exemption on financial services will apply to products ranging from interest on loans to life insurance however products which charge a fixed fee, for example FX commission, shall be taxable at the standard rate.

Aside from the zero-rate and the exemption, VAT shall not be applied on salaries and certain charitable donations. Whilst these activities are not specifically relieved, they fall outside the range of activities on which VAT is considered.

As a final note, it is important to highlight that the VAT reliefs discussed herein are not exhaustive and may change overtime. Stay tuned to this space for more articles and insights on VAT from EY Oman.

[The writer is Senior Manager – Indirect Tax at EY Oman]

Lulu opens 25th branch in Markaz Al Bahja

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket Oman opened its latest branch in Markaz Al Bahja yesterday, as part of its ongoing expansion strategy. The new store was officially inaugurated by Dr Nasser bin Rashid bin Abdullah al Maawali, Under-Secretary to the Ministry of Economy, in the auspicious presence of Wali of Seeb, Shaikh Ibrahim bin Yahya al Rawahi, Lulu officials and representatives from other business communities.

The new hypermarket, which is the 25th branch in Oman and the 194th globally, occupies a selling space of 80,000 sq ft spread over two levels at Markaz Al Bahja. The hypermarket is designed using modern and international standards with a futuristic design to provide customers a complete shopping experience. Wider aisles, multiple counters, and ample parking facilities are all added features for a smarter and more efficient system of shopping.

The new branch has separate sections for fresh foods, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, poultry, meat and fish, as well as hot food and bakery section.

There is also a huge area dedicated to department store, which includes garments, electronics, IT products,



stationery and home appliances. There is a wide range of products to choose from the huge collection of latest electronics and IT gadgets at amazing prices.

Speaking after the inauguration, Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, said “Despite the retail industry going through a rough patch due to the current situation, Lulu remains optimistic.”

The opening of the new store demonstrates our resolve and conviction to meet the emerging challenges. We have set clear strategies and procedures about how

we should operate, keeping in mind and respecting the health guidelines issued by the government and local authorities.

“We will do all we can to keep operating and serving our community in the days ahead”, headded.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director of Lulu Oman, remarked, “Lulu is committed to offer the best range of products available to our customers. The new store will give the local community access to everyday essentials to cater to diverse needs. Our overall mission is to make shopping a satisfying and happy experience always.”

Pact signed for electronic system of road freight transportation services

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 26

Makhazen Logistics Company, a subsidiary of Shumookh Investment and Services — the investment arm of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), signed an agreement with Nafith Logistics Services to manage and operate an integrated electronic system related to road freight transportation services.

The agreement aims at supporting the Omani carrier through an application that receives transportation requests electronically and subsequently notifies the registered Omani carriers in the application. The agreement was signed by Salah al Zakwani, Chairman of the Board of Makhazen Logistics Company, and Nourah Mehyar, CEO of Nafith.

Through this agreement, the two parties aspire to work on an integrated system in the emerging field of logistics services and road freight transportation services through providing and managing the business of goods transportation within and outside



the Sultanate as well as to provide job opportunities for job seekers in this field.

The system shall enable all transporters, owners and operators of trucks to register and offer their services.

Besides, the system shall distribute the transportation requests in a transparent and fair manner among the carriers, taking into account the classification and quality of the trucks owned by the carriers.

It should be noted that Nafith Logistics Services is experienced in providing leading logistics services related to land transport sector and contributing to supporting and facilitating the national trade,

as well as enhancing the safety and security of the trade through adopting cutting-edge technology.

Madayn established Shumookh Investment and Services in 2010 to develop infrastructure projects and encourage investments in Madayn's industrial cities.

The vision of Shumookh is to develop globally competitive industrial infrastructure in the industrial cities of Madayn and create the best environment for the growth of industries in Oman through the attraction of strategic partnerships to invest and implementation of diverse infrastructure development projects in the industrial cities pertaining to Madayn

Octal posts 15% jump in PET exports

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 26

Responding to food and beverage packaging requirements, Oman-based PET packaging manufacturer Octal has reported a 15 per cent increase in PET volumes compared to the same period last year. From February till May 2020, Octal produced and shipped 247,000 MT of PET sheet and resin to various destinations around the world.

The company said it has deployed its substantial capacity for operational flexibility and reliability ensuring essential food supplies remain available to consumers around the world. Beyond timely delivery, a robust supply chain has enabled customers to meet surges in consumer demand, while providing them with superior production efficiency, optimized cost structures, and an improved environmental



profile.

Octal is steadily and successfully expanding its presence into wider geographical markets, including Latin America and Asia, as the global demand for PET continues to surge. Bolstered by its sustainability features, PET or polyethylene terephthalate, the most recycled of plastics has witnessed a global call-to-action during COVID-19 with

single-use packaging helping prevent virus transmission.

Octal, which last year secured \$625m in financial backing, continues to position itself for strong and rapid growth. In addition to recording a 26 per cent increase in profitability, Octal also reported an 8 per cent year-on-year increase in sales across its main segments, sheet and resin.

SHORT TAKES

HYUNDAI SPECIAL SERVICE CAMPAIGN — FROM JUST RO 10 ONWARDS!



OTE-Hyundai service offers special periodic maintenance service starting from just RO 10 including free oil and filter. Customers with MY 2015 and prior cars can avail this offer across all 17 OTE-Hyundai service centers which are spread across the Sultanate. Apart from the special low pricing, a bouquet of offers such as upto 50 per cent discount on parts, 40 per cent discount on labour charges, free wash, free lube service etc., are being offered to Hyundai owners to rejuvenate their cars with necessary repairs to continue enjoying more happy miles.

Prices and offers may vary depending upon the models and the nature of repairs that are required to be done. Exact offer details can be found out at any of the OTE-Hyundai service centres.

Also, Hyundai customers can be fully assured that OTE-Hyundai service is taking all precautions by practicing safe social distancing and regularly cleaning & disinfecting the customer interface areas to provide a safe environment.

MUZN LAUNCHES NEW TIJARAH ACCOUNT TO HELP BUSINESSES MANAGE LIQUIDITY AND SECURE GROWTH

Muzn, National Bank of Oman's pioneering Islamic Banking window, has announced the launch of its new Tijarah Account. This innovative product enables Muzn's SME and Corporate customers to earn attractive returns on their surplus liquidity in Sharia compliant manner. Tijarah account comes with many

customer friendly features like low minimum balance requirement, no lock-in of funds, no withdrawal limit and no minimum balance charges. This product has been designed to cater to customers of all sectors and sizes. Customers can enjoy the flexibility of operating the account from their office through Corporate Internet Banking.

Salima al Marzuqi (pictured), Head of Muzn Islamic Banking, said, “At Muzn we have fostered a profound and solid relationship with our corporate clients and remain fully committed to elevating their overall banking experience. As part of this, the Tijarah account is a comprehensive solution to help businesses ensure their daily financial transactions run smoothly and their surplus cash continues to earn attractive returns.”



MEETHAQ WINS 3 AWARDS FROM IFN

Meethaq has won three awards from the prestigious Islamic Finance News (IFN) which include the Best Islamic Bank in Oman 2019 Award, Deal of the Year 2019 Award and Deal of the Year 2019 in Ijarah Award. The IFN Awards honour the best in the Islamic financial industry worldwide and are highly recognised by the global Islamic Banking and Finance fraternity.

As the leader in the Islamic banking industry in Oman in terms of financing receivables, branch network, products and services, IT infrastructure development and human resources since its launch in 2012, Meethaq has a strong track record of winning many prestigious local, regional and global awards for its outstanding achievements in Islamic banking, including awards from Global Finance, and Global Islamic Finance. With its innovative Sharia based products, Meethaq extends support to all key economic sectors and is well positioned to provide sustained Islamic financial expertise promoting the good of the society as a whole.

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Pacts worth RO 183 million signed for North-South grid interconnection

LANDMARK PROJECT:
'Rabt' has major economic,
investment and environmental
spinoffs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 26

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), member of Nama Group, signed on Monday a number of agreements for the implementation of the first phase of the 'Rabt' project — a landmark initiative to connect the National Grid in the north with the electricity transmission network of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the networks of the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) in Al Wusta Governorate, and that of the Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Wilayat of Duqm. Total investment in this phase is RO 183 million.

The agreements were signed by Eng Masoud bin Salam al Riyami, Acting Chief Executive of OETC in the presence of Eng Omar bin Khalfan al Wahaibi Chief Executive of Nama Group, at OETC headquarters. Also present were representatives



of contractors specialising in the construction of electricity transmission networks.

In Phase 2 of the Interconnection Project (Rabt), the national grid in the north of Oman will be interconnected with Dhofar electricity transmission network.

The project is expected to enhance the efficiency and integration of the national electricity transmission networks. The project will also play a key role in securing the electricity network and opening up new

horizons for the use of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar which are abundant in Al Wusta Governorate.

Additionally, the project will connect isolated areas from the main system such as Haima, Duqm and Mahoot with the national grid. It will also connect the national grid with PDO's network thus enhancing the reliability of the latter's network which currently operates on 132 kV voltage. Furthermore, it will contribute to a reduction in natural gas use for

electricity generation in PDO areas as the power plants operating in the National Grid are relatively new and highly efficient. Besides, 'Rabt' project will help in reducing the cost of energy produced in Duqm and Mahoot using diesel due to its high cost and its negative impact on the environment.

The first phase of the project consists of 660 km of 400 kV overhead lines, five main grid stations at Nihayda, Barik, Suwaihat, Duqm and Mahoot.

Importantly, the Rabt project will play a key role in achieving the government's ambitions to produce 15 per cent of the country's total energy from renewable energy sources by 2025. The interconnected network will enable the connection of future solar and wind farms in Al Wusta Governorate to the network. It will also provide secure, stable and reliable electricity to the SEZ in Duqm as it will connect the Duqm network with the 400 kV National Grid, ensuring that large projects in the SEZ get their electricity — a measure that will add to Duqm's international investment appeal.

Oman Electricity Transmission Company is responsible for the electricity transmission in the national grid in the north of Oman as well as in Dhofar Governorate. Electricity generated by various plants are transmitted to load dispatch centres and distributed across the Sultanate. The transmission network, based on 132 kV voltage and higher, covers most of the Sultanate's governorates from north to south. The company also manages the 220 kV electricity interconnection lines with the GCC Grid.

A'Saffa Foods boosts stake in Osool Poultry



MUSCAT: A'Saffa Food SAOG announced that it has raised its stake in Osool Poultry Company to 23.46 per cent.

Mohamed Suhail al Shanfari, CEO, A'Saffa Foods, stated that the deal is in line with the company's efforts in investing in different food sectors. He also said that Osool Poultry is the first integrated project in the Sultanate that aims to produce breeders to provide hatching eggs. This initiative will contribute to enhance the country's food security, and help Oman achieve a higher rate of self-sufficiency in this strategically vital field.

Annual output at full capacity is envisioned at a world-scale 150 million fertilised eggs per annum — a target set to be achieved by 2040. At this capacity, Oman is set to be more than self-sufficient in meeting its domestic requirement of hatching eggs, but in addition, will have surplus volumes to supply overseas regional markets as well.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

IMF lauds pandemic responses of Oman, GCC

MITIGATION MEASURES:
'(GCC states) have enhanced
already-strong public health
systems, and that has kept
fatality rates in the GCC
among the lowest in the world':
Kristalina Georgieva,
Managing Director

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Sultanate, along with its peers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have received warm praise from the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for their policy actions in response to the economic, fiscal and public health challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and the recession preceding it.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva nevertheless urged the bloc, on the one hand, to stay the course in continuing to provide sustenance to small businesses and vulnerable

communities impacted by the twin crisis, while on the other, to press ahead with long-term strategies to diversify national economies and income sources.

The outlook for the Gulf region will continue to be challenging, the official warned, noting that GDP is projected to contract six per cent in 2020, followed by growth of 2.3 per cent in 2021.

"It is very important to recognise that the region is likely to see, in the medium term, economic scars: unemployed workers, reduced business investment, students who have been out of school — which takes away from productivity in the future by harming the human capital of the region. As you know, we also have to brace for possibly prolonged low oil prices and prepare for advancement towards alternative sources of energy," she said.

Georgieva made the remarks during a virtual meeting with the ministers of finance and central bank governors of the GCC on Sunday. "We also, as you very well know, recognise that you face large



fiscal and external deficits. These projections reflect the combined impact of oil price declines, oil production cuts, and of course, as everywhere else, lockdowns. And they assume continued progress in fighting the virus," she stated.

The Managing Director hailed the bloc's "exemplary" efforts in responding to the pandemic. "You have enhanced already-strong public health systems, and that has

kept fatality rates in the GCC among the lowest in the world. And that is precious because this crisis is above all a human tragedy. You have taken as good care as possible of your people," she said.

Furthermore, fiscal packages and liquidity support extended by the Gulf states have helped protect incomes and livelihoods, and the financial sector as well, she said. These "timely and innovative

Fiscal packages and liquidity support extended by the Gulf states have helped protect incomes and livelihoods, and the financial sector as well. These 'timely and innovative measures' included tax exemptions and deferrals, cash transfers, and subsidies to SMEs

measures" included tax exemptions and deferrals, cash transfers, and subsidies to small and medium-sized enterprises, she noted.

The official stressed in this regard the need for sustained efforts to ease the distress caused by the pandemic and the economic slump. "Keep investing in health systems. Maintain supportive fiscal and

monetary policies until we are out of the woods of the health crisis. And increasingly target households and businesses most in need. Then start shifting support away to firms that are likely to succeed and to individuals most in need," she said.

In her interactions with the bloc's finance ministers and top bankers, Georgieva reiterated calls for accelerating structural reforms, diversifying revenue sources, and creating opportunities, especially for young people and women. In particular, she noted the Sultanate's efforts to cut some spending and implement a new Value Added Tax.

The Managing Director also welcomed initiatives by Gulf states to cut "inefficient" fuel subsidies. "All of this is very positive, and it needs to continue. And strengthening social safety nets, improving the management of government assets and liabilities, particularly given the increase in debt. And most important, putting in place robust medium-term fiscal frameworks so we can anchor expectations for stability," she added.

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

OIL & GAS

ENERGY GIANT CHEVRON BETS ON MIDDLE EAST GAS RICHES



Chevron CEO Michael Wirth's pivot away from home is underpinned by a bet that the Middle East is entering an era of reconciliation that will make it ideal for tapping natural gas, as demand for the cheaper and cleaner fuel is forecast to outstrip oil.

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LEADERSHIP

PANDEMIC PLUNGES LAGARDE INTO 'INTENSE' FIRST YEAR AT ECB



The former International Monetary Fund chief, who became the ECB's first female president last November, says the past 12 months have been "very intense" and at times "without much sleep" as policymakers confront an unprecedented economic shock.

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RETAIL

LULU HYPERMARKET OMAN OPENS 25TH BRANCH IN MARKAZ AL BAHJA



Lulu Hypermarket Oman opened its latest branch in Markaz Al Bahja yesterday, as part of its ongoing expansion strategy in the country. The new store was officially inaugurated by Dr Nasser bin Rashid bin Abdullah al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

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