

FIRST OMANI DESIGNED  
COMPUTER LAUNCHED

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Monday launched the first Omani computer, which was designed and manufactured by Al Onsor Company. The first Omani computer was designed and manufactured by young and talented capabilities and with the support of Sas Centre for Entrepreneurship at the ministry. The design of the computer is in line with the latest technologies in the market. **DETAILS ON P11**



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P8

'RED WARRIORS'  
CAMP IN EARLY  
NOVEMBER WITH  
TWO FRIENDLIES



P13

CATHAY PACIFIC  
TO OPERATE LESS  
THAN 50 PER CENT  
CAPACITY IN 2021



P15

MUD-BRICK PALACE  
IS YEMEN'S LATEST  
HERITAGE SITE  
FACING DISASTER



OMAN

Crude prices at  
\$42.22 a barrel

**MUSCAT:** Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) said that Oman oil price for December delivery reached \$42.22. The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil declined 3 cents from the price of last Friday, which was \$42.25. The average price of Oman oil for November delivery has stabilised at \$41.60, thus \$2.72 per barrel lower than October delivery. Brent crude futures slipped 10 cents to \$42.83 a barrel.

WORLD

Saeb Erekat in  
'critical' condition

**TEL AVIV:** Prominent Palestinian leader Saeb Erekat's health has deteriorated and he is in critical condition, the Israeli hospital where he is being treated for COVID-19-related complications said on Monday. Erekat, 65, was on Sunday transferred from his West Bank home town to Jerusalem's Hadassah hospital. "Mr Erekat passed a quiet night, but this morning there has been a deterioration in his condition, which is now defined as critical. And because of respiratory distress he is anaesthetised and on a respirator," said a statement from the hospital.

**DETAILS ON P5**

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INSIDE



JAPAN PM OPPOSES TENSIONS  
IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

P6



EUROPE WEIGHS RISK OF  
A DISPUTED US POLL RESULT

P7

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT  
MAX: 32°C  
MIN: 20°C

SALALAH  
MAX: 35°C  
MIN: 22°C

NIZWA  
MAX: 35°C  
MIN: 18°C

SUNRISE 06.06 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:51  
DHUHR: 11:57  
ASR: 15:15  
MAGHRIB: 17:42  
ISHA: 19:53





DAILY  
COVID-19  
DEATHS  
CONTINUE  
TO RISE

WORKING TEAM TO  
MONITOR HEALTH  
INDICATORS FOR  
LOCKDOWNS

**VINOD NAIR**  
@vinot\_nair

With the number of daily cases and deaths from COVID-19 continuing to be alarmingly high, the authorities seem to be weighing another round of strong restrictions.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday reported 641 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 110,594.

Over 50 deaths have been reported in the past few days, including 13 deaths on Monday, bringing the total number of deaths to 1,114.

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

On Sunday, he issued a ministerial decision No 155/2020 forming a working team to monitor health indicators for partial or complete night closures.

"A working group has been formed to monitor and follow up health indicators for partial or complete night closures in all governorates of the Sultanate headed by Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General of Disease Control," the decision added.

**TURN TO P2**

80 per cent of Europe's natural  
habitats in poor shape: Report

**COPENHAGEN:** More than 80 per cent of the European Union's natural habitats are in poor or bad condition and more must be done to protect them, the European Environment Agency (EEA) warned in a report on Monday.

The report, which covers the period 2013-2018, shows a deterioration from the 2007-2012 period when 77 per cent of natural habitats were in "unfavourable" condition.

"We clearly need a large-scale restoration in Europe," one of the

authors of the report, EEA expert Carlos Romao, told reporters.

"This is a must not only for biodiversity but also for the climate change agenda," he said.

Common farmland species such as the skylark, and habitats such as wet heaths, are declining across the continent.

Habitats and species are facing numerous pressures, including intensive agriculture, urban sprawl — coupled with tourism and recreation — unsustainable forestry activities, and pollution,

among others.

Climate change, with increasing drought and decreasing rainfall, also poses a challenge.

In the six-year study, the EEA registered over 67,000 types of human activities that harmed the environment in the 28 EU member states, including Britain.

Less than half of bird species in the EU, 47 per cent, have a "good" conservation status, five percentage points fewer than in the previous 2007-2012 reporting period.

— AFP

Children told to report  
online bullying

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
@kabeeryousef

Children spending time on the virtual world with studies going online were told to report any unusual approach from any corner to their parents immediately.

Be it a request for friendship or a solicit to an evening outing or to venture out on a new idea, keep your parents in the loop before you even think of it, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said.

"Also, all children on social media should report any unpleasant experience or strange approach from anyone immediately before even they are trapped," an official has said.

"This is applicable even if they are, by any chance, exposed to electronic blackmail or anything of that sort and no child should share his or family's private and personal photos over social media," he added.

This statement is based

on an incident in which the police arrested a person on charges of blackmailing a girl and violating the Telecommunications Law. The perpetrator befriended the girl who spends much of her time on social media as part of her studies. Later, he collected her photos and details of the family members and the like.

Statistics available with the official IT sources show that in six months, 35 to 40 children were victimised or bullied by cyber criminals in Oman last year.

Mostly, children between 13 to 16 years are vulnerable to cybercrimes during the period and 22 cases were reported the previous year, according to the Oman's IT statistical data. There were 27 extortion incidents, 3 fraud cases and 5 hacked accounts last year.



TURN TO P2

ARABIAN LEOPARD  
SPOTTED

The Environment Authority tweeted a photo of an Arabian Leopard in the mountains of Dhofar Governorate on Monday. "The image was taken by a camera trap installed to keep track of the behaviour of wildlife in the area." The Arabian Leopard is a critically endangered species and listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of animals. Fewer than 200 Arabian leopards are now roaming in the wild.





## In brief

## ■ MUSCAT

FOREIGN MINISTRY  
MARKS WOMEN'S DAY

He Foreign Ministry on Monday organised a ceremony to mark Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17. During the ceremony, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister gave a speech in which he praised the position that Omani women have attained in various fields and her contributions in building society. The Foreign Minister honoured the distinguished female employees in the ministry.

RO 1.2 M FOR  
RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation approved RO 1.2 million for 248 research projects as part of a programme for supporting efficiency-based researches at 28 establishments in the public and private sectors. The announcement followed signing of support and funding agreements for research proposals approved for the academic year 2020-2021. A total of 738 research projects were received before the June deadline for submission of researches. After the evaluation process 248 research projects qualified for the funding. The winning researches cover the fields of communications and information systems, environment and biotic resources, health and community service, culture and humanities, energy and industry and education and human resources.

OMAN TAKES PART IN  
GCC MEETING

The Sultanate, represented by the Public Prosecution Office, took part in the 12th meeting of the GCC Attorneys General and Public Prosecutors. The Sultanate was represented by Nasr bin Khamis bin Mohammed al Sawai, Public Prosecutor. The virtual meeting reviewed several topics, including a proposal to prepare a draft guide for procedural regulations for modern technology crimes, and presented the most successful experiences of member states in the field of investigation and alternative penalties.

GCC MEETING ON  
SECURITY

The Sultanate took part in the GCC Interior Undersecretaries' meeting held via video-conferencing on Monday. The Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Maj Gen Hamad bin Sulaiman al Hatmi, Assistant to the Inspector-General of Police and Customs for Operations. The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation related to the security fields among the GCC countries and other topics listed on the agenda of the meeting.

Sultanate and India  
ministers hold meeting

MUSCAT: The Oman-India Joint Committee held a virtual meeting on Monday. The meeting discussed ways to strengthen cooperation relations between the two friendly countries in various economic, trade, investment and service fields, and to raise the volume of trade exchange between them.

The Omani side was led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, while the Indian side was led by Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry.

They stressed the importance of holding such meetings to achieve the goals, implement agreements and follow up on them on an ongoing

basis. The committee called on Indian investors to invest in renewable energy, such as wind and solar energy, food security projects, cooperate in the field of space, invest in the tourism and the health sectors, cooperate in the field of information technology and support for small and medium enterprises. The committee also focused on facilitating the entry of goods into the Sultanate.

The meeting was attended by Asila bint Salim al Samsami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, Ridha bin Juma Al Salih, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and officials. – ONA

## ■ SAYYID BADR RECEIVES BRITISH MINISTER



Muscat: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received James Cleverly, British Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, at the ministry on Monday. They discussed relations between the two friendly countries and means of enhancing them. They also discussed the constructive cooperation between the two countries in various diplomatic, economic and cultural fields, which based on the comprehensive agreement of firm friendship and bilateral cooperation covering sectors of advanced technology, science, research and education. The meeting stressed the importance of encouraging the development of trade, economic and investment partnership for the interest of the two countries' friendly peoples. They also discussed COVID-19 pandemic, its economic implications and means of sharing information and promoting cooperation in this regard, as well as reviewing the importance of the international community's solidarity to support and generalize the benefit to all countries. The meeting was attended by Hamish Cowell, UK Ambassador to the Sultanate and officials. – ONA

Oman and Nepal  
sign visa agreement

Mohamed bin Nasser bin Mohamed al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of Mofa, and Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador of Nepal, after signing the agreement in Muscat on Monday. – ONA

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate and Nepal signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption for the holders of diplomatic, special, service and official passports at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on Monday.

Mohamed bin Nasser bin Mohamed al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of Mofa, and Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador of Nepal, signed the agreement.

They congratulated each other for achieving one more milestone in the diplomatic relations between two countries permitting easier movement of officials of two countries.

"This new step forward in

the bilateral relations will take the joint efforts in various matters to a new level," said Ambassador Dhakal. They also discussed several issues of mutual bilateral interest from tourism to investment promotion between the two countries.

Mutual visa waiver for officials and diplomats was one of the topics in the Visit Nepal Year (VNY) 2020 campaign organised by the Embassy of Nepal in Oman, in cooperation with the VNY secretariat, in the presence of the Ambassadors of Nepal to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Israel and Pakistan.

As a token of enhancing

bilateral relations between the two nations, the Embassy of Nepal was granted land to build its own diplomatic building which was aimed at serving the bilateral interests of both the countries.

"We have started the ground works of the construction of our new building, the agreement for which was signed on recently," Dhakal said.

Both countries have signed a number of MoUs on bilateral consultations, on air services, in the field of labour, avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion of taxes on income, tourism cooperation, and in cultural and museum fields recently.

Consumer Authority  
launches data centre

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority on Sunday launched the Data Centre which is overseen by the Information Technology Department, under the auspices of Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority. The Data Centre was launched after undergoing a modernisation process to meet the international

technological standards and to keep up with cybersecurity requirements. The director of the IT department said the modernisation of the data centre involved an introduction of high quality units that are capable of rapid cooling and they can withstand high temperatures. The unit also has a smart fire extinguishing system and a system for reading the centre's components.

## Announcement

**Sqoor Al Buraimi International Trading LLC**  
Registered with the Trade Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Under No. (1090245). The Company announces in the process of changing its commercial name to

## FADAK LLC

Therefore, everyone who has an interest in this should be announced.

## FOR SALE

SEALED BIDS ARE INVITED FOR SALE OF USED VEHICLES  
(*"As is Where is Condition"*)  
Location: Rumais, Baraka, Oman

| Sr. No | Year of Manufacture | Registration No (Text) | Registration No (Number) | Make   | Model     |
|--------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------|
| 1      | 2011                | YR                     | 3833                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 2      | 2007                | HM                     | 9376                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 3      | 2009                | YD                     | 8402                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 4      | 2009                | YD                     | 8401                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 5      | 2010                | B                      | 66063                    | Toyota | Corolla   |
| 6      | 2013                | D                      | 13295                    | Toyota | Corolla   |
| 7      | 2013                | A                      | 94954                    | Toyota | Yaris     |
| 8      | 2013                | A                      | 94479                    | Toyota | Yaris     |
| 9      | 2010                | YR                     | 3461                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 10     | 2010                | YR                     | 1846                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 11     | 2012                | H                      | 81518                    | Toyota | Camry     |
| 12     | 2012                | H                      | 74537                    | Toyota | Corolla   |
| 13     | 2010                | B                      | 93053                    | Toyota | Yaris     |
| 14     | 2012                | YS                     | 7294                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 15     | 2009                | YD                     | 8403                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 16     | 2012                | D                      | 52766                    | Toyota | Corolla   |
| 17     | 2014                | WB                     | 8890                     | Toyota | Prado     |
| 18     | 2008                | YD                     | 9758                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 19     | 2008                | YD                     | 9791                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 20     | 2008                | YD                     | 9763                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 21     | 2008                | YD                     | 9762                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 22     | 2010                | YR                     | 8921                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 23     | 2014                | MK                     | 5896                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 24     | 2008                | YD                     | 9765                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 25     | 2008                | YD                     | 9759                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 26     | 2013                | YD                     | 9764                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |
| 27     | 2008                | YD                     | 9757                     | Pajero | AMBULANCE |

Bid in sealed envelope has to be submitted to KCA Deutag – Rumais Office by **MONDAY, 26 October 2020 before 15.00 hrs.** to the attention of  
"Tender Secretary, KCA Deutag Drilling, PO Box 74, Rumais, Sultanate of Oman.  
**Telephone: +968 26895200**

KCA Deutag Drilling Co., reserves the right to accept or reject any bid without explanation.

**KCA DEUTAG**  
Operating safely, succeeding globally.



MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority received separately Jassim bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to the Sultanate, and Laetitia Alexandra Pauline, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate, on Monday. The meetings reviewed bilateral relations binding the Sultanate with the two countries and ways to enhance and support existing cooperation in various environmental fields. – ONA





# Intellectual property laws promote investments

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that the regulatory laws of intellectual property rights help in attracting investments in innovation-based enterprises. The ministry has developed a competitive business environment for the private sector to contribute effectively to the development of the national economy. It also said that the transfer of inventions to the stage of industrialisation, production and then marketing will achieve good financial return for inventors and companies. This is by increasing the elements of production or innovation in boosting the efficiency of their productivity as these factors contribute in achieving economic growth.

Khalid bin Hamoud al Hinai, Head of Patents and Industrial Designs at the Intellectual Property Department of MoCIP, said: “The transition from the industrial age to the digital age brought many changes in the foundations of the economy. The importance of intangible intellectual assets such patents and trademarks show the quality of products and services in a knowledge-based economy.

“There has been an increase in the number of Omani inventors during last few years, as this is due to ministerial decision No 206/2018 regarding reducing service fees for industrial property rights for students of schools, colleges and universities, and researchers of research centres by 90 per cent and for small enterprises by 50 per cent. This has reflected positively on this segment and stimulated them leading to increased applications for patents. In the past few years, the dramatic increase in patents has been in entirely new areas such as cloud software, drones, self-driving cars, etc.”

The invention of something new is a scientific achievement, but it is not necessarily that this scientific achievement has a value or commercial benefit. The markets require products or services to solve their problem or fulfil its basic need. Therefore, inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs must learn



about the markets, analyze their data, identify various problems, whether they are in products, services, or production methods and techniques, and think about finding solutions and thus targeting the opportunities available in the markets, he said.

Al Hinai said the reason why many inventions did not succeed in many countries was that the inventor directly started with the idea of the invention and worked on the project without meeting the client and discussing problems and needs. Study of the aspirations of customers and the needs of consumers help in coming up with different innovative business ideas which makes the innovative entrepreneurs different from others. Their innovations have market value as well as additional scientific and technical importance. They get popular swiftly. Those who do not come up with out-of-the-box ideas have limited popularity and reach.

After collecting the information and data, the innovator begins

“  
**There has been an increase in the number of Omani inventors during last few years, as this is due to ministerial decision No 206/2018 regarding reducing service fees for industrial property rights for students of schools, colleges and universities, and researchers of research centres by 90 per cent and for small enterprises by 50 per cent**

**KHALID AL HINAI**  
*Head of Patents, MoCIP*

working on the idea, which takes the form of a distinct trademark for his project different from the rest of the products or services and a patent or industrial design. The inventor or innovator must not publish the idea or disclose details of the technical characteristics of the innovation before protecting it. It should get legal protection by submitting it with the competent authorities, said Al Hinai.

“In general, it can be said that the patent is the inherent link between the success of an invention at the laboratory level on the one hand and its transfer to the stage of production and manufacture for the benefit of its consumers or markets on the other. Innovation, which is part of the modern way of life, is also the basis of economic progress and the main engine of the successive industrial revolutions. However, there is another factor equally important for innovation. That is the protection of the inventor’s rights on his or her invention, as there is a strong positive relationship between

the development and protection of property rights. Intellectual property if protected help in escalating scientific, technological, industrial and artistic revolutions.”

This intellectual property rights protection helps in the protection of the interests of clients and consumers. It guarantees the high level of consumer satisfaction and saves them from any chances of fraud. It increases the competitive capabilities of the producers and supports them in achieving highest levels of returns and investment spending, he said.

Al Hinai said that a patent was a document, a certificate, given by the state or any officially authorised body, whether national or regional, for a specific period of time to one of the innovators on an invention he had done. Its purpose is to stimulate and encourage innovation for the sake of economic progress. He said that the innovation was the technical solution of any problem and issues faced by any markets. This can be in the form of improvement

in existing innovations, new formulations of the materials or new chemical compounds, and new uses of manufacturing process technologies.

Al Hinai said that many job-generating companies and factories relied on the information disclosed in the patents to keep pace with technological progress. These companies and factories have grown and developed strongly based on patented inventions made by emerging companies. They could thrive due to their easy access to information regarding innovations made in agreement with the innovators.

Al Hinai said that the patent has many features of personal ownership, as it may be sold to others, mortgaged, or may be transferred to the heirs of the deceased inventor. Since the patent grants the owner the right to exclude others from making, using or selling the invention, he may authorise others to do any of these things, and get returns or other compensation in exchange for this authorisation. He also said that after the invention is protected legally, the owner of the innovation has the freedom to use it as he or she wants. They themselves can decide how to develop it as products or consumer goods.

The inventors who believe that their inventions have commercial potential should strive to deliver that information through the channels used always by industrial companies. The innovators can start working as entrepreneurs, creating profit-oriented companies based on technologies being developed as it is an important step for a successful business.

“Protection of intellectual property leads to the achievement of economic gains. The protection for creativity means a greater ability to continuously develop human, industrial and commercial knowledge.”

He also said that countries which provide this protection have a greater ability to attract foreign direct investment supporting economic growth rates and providing more job opportunities. At the same time, it helps in competitiveness of the national economy.

## Webinar to discuss Oman GEM report

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

The launch of the first Oman Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) National report 2019-2020 is being marked by the University of Nizwa (UoN) GEM Oman National Team with an international Webinar on October 20 from 2 pm to 4 pm (Oman time) featuring a number of experts.

Dr Arockiasamy Soosaimanickam, Dean of CEMIS at the UoN; GEM Executive Director Professor Ionescu-Somers; Dr Abdullah al Shukaili; and Professor Ahmed Khalfan al Rawahi, Chancellor of UoN, will jointly inaugurate the event while the key findings of the report will be presented by Professor Norizan Mohd Kassim. A panel discussion moderated by Ibrahim al Hosni, a workshop by Professor Alicia Coduras, and an overview of the impact of COVID on entrepreneurship by Dr Swadhin Mondal will follow.

The Authority for Small & Medium Enterprises Development is the

Sultanate of Oman’s arm for the development of small and medium enterprises and strengthening their contribution to the local economy through a wide range of business advisory services, financial support, and training programs. Within the Ministerial framework GEM began in the USA and UK in 1999, and the consortium has become the richest resource of information on entrepreneurship and will assist in shaping the government’s policies and programs to support entrepreneurship in the Sultanate.

Professor Kassim said benefits of joining GEM are entrepreneurial education; the development of market regulations and commercial infrastructure; indications of the current level of Omani entrepreneurial activity, globally and nationally; assistance for post-graduate students in their studies; the creation of a process for nurturing small businesses; and the compilation of entrepreneurship profiles.

## Al Hassani to speak about Knowledge Oman success

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

Knowledge Oman President, Balqees al Hassani, is all set to share about the “secrets of Knowledge Oman success” as a keynote speaker at the impactful global event, the Positivity Summit 2020, scheduled to be broadcasted over a webinar on two consecutive days, 23rd and 24th of October 2020.

The Positivity Summit is an event conducted in the United States since 2018, gathering speakers from all over the world under one platform to share secrets, tips, and unique stories that bring societies forward. This year, the positivity summit will focus on ideas and presentations that will help to build positivity during and post COVID-19 under the theme, “Coming Together”.

“Our theme this year is on coming together and Knowledge Oman is a unique case that meets our event agenda. We look forward to hosting Balqees and learn about the secrets in a form of practical learning that



Balqees Positive Summit

led Knowledge Oman to form, run and lead a platform that is impacting the lives of people positively” said Cornell Thomas, the founder of Positivity Summit.

Balqees has been part of Knowledge Oman for 4 years. She has recently been appointed as the President of the platform, and

has since engaged in multimedia platforms locally and abroad to carry forward the positive impact of the award-winning platform. “I am honoured to be selected to represent the whole Knowledge Oman family at an international event, sharing all our secrets as a case study for others to learn, replicate and impact society in a positive way,” said Balqees.

Since 2008, Knowledge Oman has managed to launch society initiatives in the form of seminars, workshops, programs, and activities along with 35 partners locally and internationally attracting over 80,000 registrations and 700 volunteers across the years. Knowledge Oman received 4 awards that include an outstanding contribution to the cause of education from the World Human Resource Development (HRD) Congress. Members of the platform comprise a multinational group of both locals and expatriates living in the country with a passion for creating, sharing, and exchanging knowledge.

## OMREN takes part in future tech event

**MUSCAT:** Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation took part in a virtual exhibition about future technology themed ‘Future Tech Event’.

The first edition of the event attracted wide and local participation, with a recorded virtual attendance of more than 1,000 visitors from more than 25 countries.

Dr Abdulmonem al Kharousi, OMREN Director, gave a presentation during the virtual summit about the digital transformation in higher education in the Sultanate. The OMREN team included innovative proposals and solutions to link the research and scientific sectors and the private sector with a unified platform to facilitate access to knowledge and distance-learning. The OMREN team also presented during the two-day summit all the services provided to the beneficiaries and the progress they reached with the network.

The exhibition is considered as one of the most important virtual events in the Sultanate of Oman, which aims to exchange technology, communication and information experiences in various fields, such as education and smart cities in the Sultanate and all over the world.

—ONA

# Europe tightens virus curbs as global cases top 40m

**BRUSSELS:** A raft of European nations including Italy and Belgium took desperate new measures on Monday to try to combat a second wave of coronavirus infections as the worldwide caseload topped 40 million.

The latest global milestone came just hours after the number of people who have died from COVID-19 passed 250,000 in Europe as the pandemic rampages across much of the continent.

Many governments are seeking to avoid the full-on lockdowns imposed in the first wave as they battle to keep their economies going but in some countries, people are chafing against the new restrictions on daily life.

In Belgium, where hospitalisations rose 100 per cent in just the last week, bars and restaurants were closed on Monday for a month and a curfew will be reinforced overnight.

"Managers, chefs, dish-washers, everyone is suffering," Angelo Bussi said as he put the key in the lock of his Brussels restaurant late on Sunday.

"We don't feel like anyone cares. It breaks my heart," he said before shrugging and walking off into the night. "Ah, well there we are, see you in a month."

Belgium's second major lockdown comes after Prime Minister Alexander de Croo warned the situation was "much worse" than in March when there was an almost complete confinement.

Italy, the initial epicentre of Europe's outbreak, also announced fresh curbs including earlier closures for bars and restaurants and a push to increase working from home.



People from the hospitality industry protest against the government's new tougher coronavirus restrictions in central London. — AFP

"We cannot waste time," Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said, also flagging bans on amateur team sports and local festivals.

In Poland, where around half the country is now designated as a coronavirus "red zone", the government said the national stadium would double as a field hospital to help ease the strain on overwhelmed health care facilities.

Switzerland meanwhile made mask-wearing compulsory in indoor public

spaces and put limits on public gatherings after infections doubled over the last week.

"The second wave is here, earlier and stronger than we expected, but we are prepared," Swiss Health Minister Alain Berset said.

France imposed its own overnight curfew from the weekend in nine cities including Paris, affecting 20 million people, with a record 32,400 new infections reported on Saturday.

While European nations imposed

new restrictions, a lockdown as eased in Australia's second-biggest city of Melbourne on Monday, as residents flocked to reopened hair salons and golf courses that had been closed for more than 100 days.

The number of daily cases rose to 700 in August in the state of Victoria of which Melbourne is the capital, but following months of a strict lockdown it has fallen as low as one, with four recorded on Monday. — AFP

## Erekat on ventilator with COVID-19

**JERUSALEM:** Long-time chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat was in "critical" condition and in a medically induced coma on Monday, said the Israeli hospital in Jerusalem treating him for coronavirus complications.

The Palestine Liberation Organization said on Sunday that Erekat had been admitted to Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital's coronavirus intensive care unit due to "chronic health problems in the respiratory system".

The 65-year-old had tested positive for COVID-19 on October 9, the PLO said.

Erekat had "arrived in serious condition" and was receiving oxygen, the hospital said on Sunday, adding that his condition was "serious" but "stable".

On Monday morning, Hadassah said that after a "quiet night," his condition "deteriorated and is now defined critical and due to respiratory distress, he is anaesthetised and ventilated."

Erekat, who lives in the biblical town of Jericho in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, underwent lung-transplant surgery in the United States in 2017.

"Erekat is a challenge to treat for coronavirus since he had lung transplants, he is immunosuppressed, and has another bacterial infection in addition to coronavirus," Hadassah said on Monday.

Hadassah said it was "in contact with international medical authorities regarding the treatment policy of this complex patient". — AFP



# Trump official went to Syria seeking Americans' release

**DAMASCUS/WASHINGTON:** A White House official travelled to Damascus earlier this year for secret meetings with the Syrian government seeking the release of at least two US citizens thought to be held there, a Trump administration official said.

The official named the official as Kash Patel, a deputy assistant to President Donald Trump and the top White House counter terrorism official, saying he had flown to Damascus.

"It is emblematic of how President Trump has made it a major priority to bring Americans home who have been detained overseas," said the

official, who was confirming a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

The newspaper, citing Trump administration officials and others familiar with the negotiations, described Patel's trip as the first time such a high-level US official had met in Syria with the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in more than a decade.

The newspaper said US officials hoped a deal with Assad could free Austin Tice, a freelance journalist and former Marine officer who disappeared while reporting in Syria in 2012, and Majd Kamalmaz, a Syrian-American therapist who

disappeared after being stopped at a Syrian government checkpoint in 2017.

At least four other Americans are believed to be held by the Syrian government, the newspaper reported, but little is known about those cases.

The Journal reported that Trump wrote Assad a private letter in March, proposing a "direct dialogue" about Tice. It said that Lebanon's top security chief, Abbas Ibrahim, met last week at the White House with national security adviser Robert O'Brien to discuss the Americans held in Syria, according to people involved in the talks. — Reuters

## Electronic Tender(s)

**Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tenders**

| Tender No.        | Description                                                                                                                      | Grade       | Last date for buying | Submission date | Tender Price R.O. |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 65/2020 Re-Tender | EMERGENCY SERVICES FOR ELECTRICAL NETWORK 11KV & 0.415 KV AT NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE (LIWA & SHINAS) FOR 5 YEARS (2021 – 2025) | C           | 26/10/2020           | 3/11/2020       | 775/=             |
| 67/2020 Re-Tender | EMERGENCY SERVICES FOR ELECTRICAL NETWORK 11KV & 0.415 KV AT DHAIHRAH GOVERNORATE (IBRI & WADI AL AIN) FOR 5 YEARS (2021 – 2025) | C           | 26/10/2020           | 3/11/2020       | 434/=             |
| 85/2020           | PROVIDING CONSULTATION SERVICES FOR REVIEWING PRICE CONTROL SUBMISSION VI (2022-2026) TO AUTHORITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES REGULATION | Specialized | 28/10/2020           | 3/11/2020       | 57/=              |

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# Japan PM opposes heightening tensions in South China Sea



Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc (centre R) feed the fish at a pond at the Presidential Palace compound in Hanoi on Monday. – AFP

**HANOI:** Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said on Monday Tokyo opposes any steps to raise tension in the South China Sea, and that disputes should be resolved through peaceful means.

“Japan strongly opposes any behaviour that heightens tension in the South China Sea,” Suga said in his speech in Hanoi.

Vietnam and some other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) members have territorial feuds with China in vital South China Sea waterways.

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

Japan and Vietnam agreed to step up security and defence cooperation, reaching an agreement in principle for Tokyo to export defence equipment and technology to the Southeast Asian nation.

The pact would allow Japan to export equipment, likely including patrol planes and radar, to Vietnam, according to Japanese news agency Kyodo.

“It is a big step in the field of security and defence cooperation between the two countries that we reached an agreement in principle on the transfers of defence equipment and technology,” said Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in Hanoi during his first visit

overseas since taking office last month.

“And I believe that it will advance further.”

The resource-rich South China Sea is claimed in its entirety by Beijing but is also contested by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

China has reinforced its claim to the waterway by building up small shoals and reefs into military bases with airstrips and port facilities, and it launched ballistic missiles in the flashpoint waters in August as part of live-fire exercises.

“The two sides agreed to tighten cooperation before regional challenges including the issue of the South China Sea,” said Suga.

They would also work together on the issue of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korea, he said.

Japan suspects dozens of people who are still missing were abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s to train their own spies in the Japanese language and culture.

Japan and Vietnam also reached an agreement on starting “business track” flights after travel between the two nations was suspended in March.

This would allow executives and skilled workers to travel without a 14-day quarantine period provided they follow certain COVID-19 precautions, Kyodo said.

– Reuters/AFP



Thai protesters have copied many tactics employed by Hong Kong protesters there last year. – AFP

## Thai PM recalls parliament as protesters step up pressure

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's embattled premier called on Monday for a special session of parliament as protesters planned more rallies to demand his resignation, the release of jailed activists, and the reforms.

Tens of thousands of mostly young protesters have taken to the streets in the past week in defiance of an emergency decree banning gatherings of more than four people.

Police said around 20,000 people protested across the capital on Sunday. As they prepared to rally again, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said parliament — currently in recess — would be recalled to discuss how to reduce tensions.

“We support opening an extraordinary session to solve this conflict,” he told reporters, warning protesters not to break the law.

“I request protesters rally peacefully. The government has already compromised to some degree,” he said.

The largely leaderless movement is calling for the resignation of Prayut — a former army chief — as well as the re-writing of the military-drafted constitution.

The movement appeared to be gaining traction across the country with smaller protests taking place on Sunday from Phuket in the south to Khon Kaen in the northeast.

Apart from arrests by police, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society said it had flagged more than 325,000 messages on social media platforms that violated the Computer Crimes Act, which critics say is used to muzzle dissent.

Police also warned local media outlets that their coverage of the protests would be examined for possible illegal content.

By midday, #SaveFreePress was the latest hashtag trending on Thai Twitter, one of several platforms being used by tech-savvy protesters to coordinate their activity.

They have also copied many tactics employed by Hong Kong protesters during months of frequently violent clashes there last year, including using improvised protective clothing in case of confrontations with riot police.

– AFP

### ■ SPREADING AWARENESS



Passengers travel in a bus with a precautionary message pasted against the spread of coronavirus in Mumbai on Monday. An Indian scientific panel on Sunday said the country has crossed a COVID-19 peak and forecast that the epidemic could be brought under control by early next year provided all safety measures were followed. – AFP

## NZ's next parliament is set to be most diverse ever

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand's next parliament is set to be the most inclusive ever, with several people of colour, members from the rainbow communities and a high number of women.

The ruling Labour Party was handed a resounding mandate in the election over the weekend, as voters rewarded Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern for her decisive response to COVID-19.

Although Ardern has the numbers to govern alone, she is in talks with former ally the Green Party to build a wider consensus.

Labour won 64 of the 120 parliamentary seats, and more than half of those are female candidates. It also has 16 indigenous Maori MPs, the first leader of African origin,



Ibrahim Omar, and Vanushi Walters of Sri Lankan origin.

“This is the most diverse parliament we have ever had in terms of gender, and minority ethnic and indigenous representation,” said Professor Paul Spoonley from the College of Humanities and Social

Sciences at Massey University.

Its also expected to be the most rainbow representative parliament system in the world, with about 10 per cent of the members in the 120-seat house of rainbow communities. This includes prominent leaders like Finance Minister Grant Robertson.

The Greens surprisingly won as many as 10 seats in parliament and a majority of them are women and indigenous leaders.

The majority of the new MPs elected into parliament are also much younger and many of them are millennials, Spoonley said. “What we have seen is a departure of many of the older, male, white MPs including some who have been in parliament for over 30 years,” said Spoonley.

Ardern herself arrived onto the global scene in 2017 when she became the world's youngest female head of government at the age of 37. The 40-year-old leader is feted globally as a progressive leader, who is a champion for woman's rights, equality and inclusivity.

– Reuters

### SHORT TAKES

#### SINGAPORE

##### British inventor sells luxury penthouse

British billionaire inventor James Dyson is selling his luxurious Singapore penthouse atop the city-state's tallest building, his company said on Monday, about a year after buying it for a reported US\$54 million.

The tycoon snapped up the property, which has a rooftop terrace, private pool and jacuzzi, after his electric appliance firm announced it was shifting its global headquarters to the city-state from England.

The price tag was the highest ever for a penthouse in the affluent



financial hub.

But a Dyson spokesman said an offer had been accepted on the three-floor residence. – AFP

#### JAKARTA

##### Joko warns against rushing for vaccines

The president of Indonesia Joko Widodo called on Monday not to rush the rollout of vaccines, citing concerns over public awareness about whether they were halal.

With more than 365,000 coronavirus cases and 12,000 deaths, Indonesia has struggled to get its outbreak under control and the government has been racing to secure a supply of vaccines while still under development, drawing



criticism from some epidemiologists for seeking a “silver bullet” solution before full vaccine efficacy and safety is known.

Senior ministers have indicated that emergency vaccine authorisation could be granted as early as November. But the president signalled a more cautious approach, warning against haste and urging clear public messaging about whether vaccines were halal. – Reuters

#### ISLAMABAD

##### Alliance builds momentum against PTI

Tens of thousands of people gathered in the port city of Karachi on Sunday evening in support of an opposition alliance vying to dislodge the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. It marks the second rally organised by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) — an alliance of 11 opposition parties — with the first having taken place in north-eastern city of Gurjranwala on Friday. Local media showed images of people streaming into Karachi from small villages and towns in order to join the



protest. Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of former premier Nawaz Sharif whose Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is a member of the alliance, told reporters that turnout showed the level of public support for the opposition movement. – dpa

# Precious treasures – traditional knowledge

If you are from South India and especially Kerala where the coconut trees are in abundance then you are also one way or the other entangled with this marvellous tree and its fruit referred to as a nut or as a drupe.

It all depends whether you are a farmer who wants to enhance his land with more coconuts so accordingly his revenue, a hawker selling coconut water to tourists or the one at home making the chutney or the curry.

Coconut trees have definitely caught the fancy of children and the imagination of artists. The reason could be that the tree towers above everything around it, the way the leaves sway in the wind like a woman with open hair enjoying the wind drift through it – a relief when its humid. Other factors could be the different products that are made out of this humble tree, which is today competing with concrete building lest it falls on the structure. Man continues to deceive himself from the reality as these trees are also home to many.

Not that it is all innocent – once I just barely missed a coconut falling on my head, thank God the little me was running and the coconut was half a second late to respond to the gravity that I was spared to turn around in response to the ‘thud’. I continued to run towards my stunned family hardly realising the



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COCONUT TREES  
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FANCY OF  
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OF ARTISTS.  
THE REASON  
COULD BE  
THAT THE TREE  
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EVERYTHING  
AROUND IT

significance of what I just missed. It’s fascination for the artists must be the grace it portrays, its silhouette against the sunset sky and the way it bents across the back waters. Whatever the reasons are this tree had been part of the economy and lifestyle.

Grandmother never measured it in a teaspoon, no, not for cooking, but to apply on hair and skin. The coconut oil she used was never from a commercial outlet. It was freshly milled from coconuts grown in her property, which was the case on all the households. She prepared it with small onions and once the preparation was cooled she would cup the oil in her hand and pour on to the head. When she was done with the hair she would pour more into her palm and this time I shut my eyes even before she moves her hand as I know it is heading towards my face. All this happens so quickly leaving you wondering, “What do I do now?”

She packed bottles when I went to boarding school too. After so many years I read it on social media how coconut is used to fight wrinkles and for skincare in general. It is a modern day and we learn more from social media platforms. While grandmothers in the homes throughout the world would have tried to impart to us the traditional knowledge they inherited from their grandmothers.

While we ignore what the elders have to say when it comes to know

their knowledge based on their practice and experience we are more than eager to hear it from the social media.

What was brushed aside as old fashion and old customs are now being recorded and reaching a level of understanding and beginning to get a new status under traditional knowledge.

Traditional knowledge what is practiced and handed over from one generation to the other often pushed aside because there might not have scientific studies to prove it. What people often fail to understand is if it had not been working knowledge would not have been preserved and would have gone obsolete long time ago.

But coexisting implies harmony between opposing entities as simple as old and young, ancient and new age so forth.

It would be nice if all of us could reflect on what our families practiced before the era of technology when the world became a global village. Traditional knowledge also indicates what each community did to live and thrive. These little treasures might be useful in the future not for science but history as well. Many of the traditional knowledge might have been already lost due to war and conflicts.

The traditional knowledge might be yet another way to preserve the earth the way it used be with nature’s bounties.

## OVERSEAS DEBUT

# Japan, Vietnam agree broadly on defence transfer

KHANH VU AND KIYOSHI TAKENAKA

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

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

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

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

In a speech later on Monday, Suga said Japan opposed any steps to heighten tensions in the South China Sea, where Vietnam and other Asean members have territorial disputes with China. “Regarding the South China Sea issue, it is important for all countries concerned not to rely on force or threat but to work towards peaceful resolution based on international law,” Suga said, avoiding harsh rhetoric. Back in Tokyo, Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi told reporters that Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force will conduct a joint drill with US and Australian navies around the South China Sea on Monday, Kyodo news agency reported.

NGUYEN XUAN PHUC  
Vietnam Prime Minister

Kishi also agreed with visiting Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds to start talks to make it possible for Japan’s Self Defence Forces to protect Australian military assets such as warships and aircraft, Kyodo said. Japan already has similar arrangements with the United States. Japan must balance its deep economic ties to China with security concerns, including Beijing’s claims over disputed isles in the East China Sea. Asean members remain wary of losing access to China’s economy, and are reluctant to become entrapped in an intense confrontation between Washington and Beijing, Japan, which ended a decades-old ban on overseas arms sales in 2014 to help strengthen the nation’s military and lower the cost of home-built military equipment, has been in talks with Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand on deals to allow such exports. — Reuters

## SPLIT VOTE

# As US election looms, Europe weighs risk of a disputed result

ROBIN EMMOTT & ANDREAS RINKE

With less than three weeks until the US presidential election, European capitals are concerned about the risk of a disputed outcome and the impact it would have in the United States and abroad.

While Democrat candidate Joe Biden leads in opinion polls, the 2016 election produced a split between the popular vote and the Electoral College. Analysts say that remains possible on November 3. With Trump equivocating on whether he would accept a peaceful transfer of power if he loses, and suggesting the Supreme Court may have to decide the winner, the risk of a contested result is significant.

One British bookmaker is offering 9/4 that Trump will lose the popular vote but be re-elected, odds that imply a 69 per cent probability. A poll of global fund managers by Bank of America found 60 per cent expected the result to be disputed. In major European capitals, where many quietly hope the election will produce a change of president and a shift in US policy on issues from climate to trade, Nato and the Iran nuclear deal, caution prevails. “The majority of EU governments hope for a Biden victory, although no one would say that,” said one EU diplomat.



US President Donald Trump holds a campaign rally in Carson City, Nevada, on Sunday. — Reuters

WHILE BIDEN LEADS  
IN OPINION POLLS,  
THE 2016 ELECTION  
PRODUCED A SPLIT  
BETWEEN THE  
POPULAR VOTE AND  
THE ELECTORAL  
COLLEGE

“Governments are looking at scenarios, contingency plans, although it remains to be seen what could be done in the case of Trump contesting the result.”

German officials have been thinking through the implications for months - since Trump raised doubts about whether he would accept the outcome.

“We analyse what could happen, different scenarios,” one said. Presidential elections have been

disputed in the past, as in 2000, when lawyers for Al Gore and George W Bush spent a month arguing over a Florida recount that the Supreme Court ultimately decided in Bush’s favour. But a dispute this time could last longer and be more unpredictable, officials say, including the risk of violence on the streets, legal challenges and the chance Trump refuses to vacate the White House. — Reuters

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## ‘RED WARRIORS’ CAMP IN EARLY NOVEMBER WITH TWO FRIENDLIES

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

Oman national football team head coach Branko Ivankovic affirmed that the technical preparatory schedule for the team will begin in November with some slight changes.

The Croatian coach added in his exclusive statements to *Oman Daily Observer* the scheduled overseas camp in Dubai in November is cancelled due to the mandatory quarantine period of 14 days after each travel.

“This period will impact negatively on player’s participation with their domestic teams and participation at the local competitions after completion of the camp. Therefore, we decided to swap Dubai camp with a local camp which will start on November 2 in Muscat. Al Nahdha and Dhofar’s players will join the camp after the semifinal matches of the HM Cup. We may not get the national players who are playing abroad in the forthcoming camp due to the restriction after travel and home quarantine procedures,” he said.



The 65-year-old, who arrived in Muscat on October 7 and will complete his quarantine period on coming Wednesday, stated the list

of players who will take part at the warm up camp will be announced after completion of the next two rounds of the existing 2019/2020

Omantel League. “I will prepare a plan that will ensure attendance of all technical staff of the national team in most of the league matches,” the



coach added.

Commenting on the cancelled friendly games, the head coach of “Red Warrior” said that most of the

friendly matches were supposed to be played in Dubai during the camp but all of them were cancelled.

“I had communicated with the Iraq head coach and he informed the difficulty of having the friendly matches due to blocking of players with quarantine period after the camp in case of travel. Despite all the challenges, we will have two friendly matches locally against the Olympic national team. We will implement the tactical strategies and evaluate the player’s performance,” he said.

**DIFFERENT PLAN FOR NEXT YEAR**

The Croatian coach stated that next year’s plan is under confirmation yet. “Due to the lack of clarity of the new dates by the AFC for the joint qualification of Fifa World Cup and AFC Asian Cup which shifted to 2021, the preparatory plan for the next year is not confirmed yet. We hope things will be back to better status by next year and will benefit from Fifa days for best preparation to the top assignment,” the head coach concluded.



Tottenham Hotspur's Gareth Bale in action with West Ham United's Aaron Cresswell. – Reuters

# WEST HAM STUN SPURS WITH LATE COMEBACK

ANDY JALIL

**LONDON:** In an astonishing game which ended in a 3-3 draw, Tottenham lost control after totally dominating for all but the last 12 minutes to allow a West Ham comeback. The Hammers manager, David Moyes, amazed at his side's fightback said: "As a manager at times it is hard to use the word proud, but tonight was a really proud moment. Hopefully the supporters would have enjoyed it. We are building a very strong team spirit, and our performances in

recent weeks have been very good." He added: "It's one of the moments in football you don't get very often, to be 3-0 down, to get back to 3-3 in the last 10 minutes. The key was not to do anything stupid at half-time, make changes as everyone thinks that's what you do when you're 3-0 down. Trying to win is really difficult, then when you get something from nowhere it gives you the emotions." He went on to add: "We never gave up, it was a really proud performance. We're proud of what the players have done

for West Ham". Spurs opened the scoring as early as the first minute. Harry Kane beat Fabian Balbuena half-way in Tottenham's half to send a long pass to Heung-Min Son who raced on to curl the ball inside the far post. Just seven minutes later, the lead was doubled. Son picked up a pass from Emile Højbjerg and found Kane who nutmegged Declan Rice and hit a low shot into the corner. Spurs kept the momentum going and were 3 nil up within 16 minutes. Left-back Sergio Reguilón

put over a deep cross for Kane, at the back post, to head home his ninth goal of the season. Spurs brought on Gareth Bale, on loan from Real Madrid, in the 72nd minute but it only made the Hammers more determined and in the 82nd minute Balbuena headed in a free-kick delivered by Manuel Lanzini. Within three minutes after that, Davinson Sanchez headed a cross from Vladimir Coufal into his own net and the Hammers were fully back in the game. In injury time Bale missed a

golden chance for a fourth Spurs goal when he raced ahead, beating Angelo Ogbonna but steered his shot wide. Finally, with what proved to be the last kick, Hammers produced a sensational finish to the match, equalising with an absolute stunning shot from 25 yards out, from Lanzini. It was the first time in the history of Premier League that a team has avoided defeat having trailed by three goals or more as late as the 81st minute. Spurs shocked manager, Jose Mourinho said: "We had 3 points

in the pocket and threw them away. You can imagine how frustrated I am and the players. I don't think we believed that it could ever happen, what happened, and we were punished by that and punished by their belief." He added: "It's easier for me to praise them than criticise us. It's easier for me to analyse internally and discuss with the players than speak about it and my feelings now. We were not good enough to cope with the last 10 minutes. My guys were not strong enough to cope with it psychologically."

# Challenging GT Open second race for Al Harthy, Oman Racing

**MUSCAT:** Race one Pro-Am class winners Ahmad Al Harthy and Tom Canning experienced a challenging conclusion to their debut weekend in the International GT Open at Spa-Francorchamps on Sunday, 18th October, when early delays in the second contest restricted them to a top six Pro-Am finish. Having enjoyed a spectacular Saturday at the Belgian track, with an overall third place and Pro-Am victory in the No.97 Aston Martin Vantage GT3, the Oman Racing drivers had to settle for a less satisfying sixth in class and 10th overall after Al Harthy was badly held-up during his stint. Added to that, the duo had to contend with a 10 second 'success' penalty in the Starting Sunday's 60-minute race fifth in Pro-Am and ninth overall, the Omani was edged back a place off the rolling start at the beginning

and spent the entirety of the first half hour stuck behind Brendan Iribe's McLaren. Despite being visibly faster than Iribe lap after lap, significantly so through the more technical parts of the track, the greater straight-line speed of the McLaren meant Al Harthy was staring at the car's gearbox throughout his stint. Without taking an unnecessary risk, there was no way to pass safely. "It was to be expected race two was always going to be much more difficult for us after the success penalty given to us from race one", said the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, National Bank of Oman, Omantel and Barr Al Jissah sponsored racer, "After getting stuck behind the McLaren from the start, there was nothing we could do without taking any big risks. "It was very fast on the straights so even though we were much



quicker over the lap, it was able to stay ahead. There was no point risking anything, we were here this weekend to gain experience and we showed in the first race on Saturday what we were capable of. It's been a very positive weekend for Oman Racing, going home with a Pro-Am win and a double podium from Spa is fantastic."

Al Harthy contested the qualifying session to determine the race two grid at an overcast Spa on Sunday morning and prior to a mid-session red flag stoppage he was third in Pro-Am and sixth overall. After the resumption, the Omani improved his time with a best lap of 2 minutes 16.511 seconds on the penultimate tour but ended the

session fifth in Pro-Am and ninth overall. Taking The opening stint of Sunday afternoon's 60-minute race, Al Harthy got away cleanly at the rolling start but was edged back to 10th overall and sixth in class through La Source. Bottled up behind Iribe's McLaren, with the Oman Racing driver clearly capable of lapping much faster, Al Harthy lost significant time over the first few laps – almost 10 seconds by the end of lap four. Swarming all over the back of the McLaren, consistently just 0.2 seconds shy, the Oman Racing driver pressured hard and tried everything to get ahead. Some overtly defensive driving from Iribe resulted in questionable lines, making Al Harthy's task infinitely harder. As the first half an hour neared its conclusion, Al Harthy pitted at the earliest opportunity and handed over

the Aston Martin to Canning at the end of lap 11. After serving an extra-long stop due to the success penalty from race one, he joined the race with around 32 minutes remaining and was fifth of the entries to have pitted, before passing Jens Liebhauser. When all pit-stops had been completed, with less than 25 minutes left in the race, Canning was 10th overall and sixth in Pro-Am some 10 seconds shy of the car ahead. With the large gap, any likelihood of gaining places was realistically down to whether any retirements or issues for others would occur. During the last 10 minutes some rain started to fall and Canning was able to close as a result on the car of Marcelo Hahn, just 0.1 seconds shy at the chequered flag. When in clear air, the pace of the No.97 Aston Martin was clear with the fifth fastest lap of the race — a time of 2 minutes 18.067 seconds.



# PUNJAB BEAT MUMBAI IN IPL'S FIRST- EVER SECOND SUPER OVER

**DUBAI:** Kings XI Punjab beat holders Mumbai Indians as the Indian Premier League witnessed a second super over for the first time after skipper KL Rahul's heroics on Sunday.

Rahul smashed 77 off 51 deliveries as Punjab equalled Mumbai's score of 176 in the second match of the day after the opening game also ended in a tie.

Kolkata Knight Riders edged out Sunrisers Hyderabad in Abu Dhabi with New Zealand quick Lockie Ferguson making an impact in his first IPL outing this season.

Punjab and Mumbai remained level after the first super over with paceman Mohammed Shami keeping down Rohit Sharma-led Mumbai to five runs.

Chris Gayle and Mayank Agarwal then combined to get their team's 12-run target after Mumbai managed 11 for one in the second super over of the match and the third of the day.

"It was a dream come true to play the IPL and to have exciting games like this is amazing. This kind of a match will go down in history," Agarwal, who hit the winning runs, said after the tense win.

"Having an opportunity to learn from the game's greats is quite incredible. KL is a wonderful player and the kind of performance he's put forth as a captain so consistently is incredible."

The International Cricket Council changed the super over rules in limited-overs matches after England beat New Zealand on boundary count in the final of last year's 50-over World Cup.

England was awarded the cup as they scored more boundaries during their innings despite New Zealand matching their score at the end of 50

overs and in the super over at Lord's.

Punjab have improved to sixth in the eight-team table and are level with four teams on six points with three wins and six losses from nine matches.

Mumbai's Indian speedster Jasprit Bumrah returned figures of 3-24 and West Indies batsman Kieron Pollard smashed an unbeaten 34 off 12 deliveries.

**'OUTSTANDING' FERGUSON**

Earlier in game one, Ferguson returned figures of 3-15 in the Hyderabad innings and then claimed two wickets including Hyderabad

skipper David Warner in the super over.

Warner became the fastest to 5,000 IPL runs in 135 innings as he hit an unbeaten 47 but Hyderabad could only equal Kolkata's score of 163 and the match ended in a tie.

Ferguson then bowled a superb super over to send Warner back on the first ball and took another wicket to keep down Hyderabad to two, a score Eoin Morgan's Kolkata surpassed in four balls.

"For Lockie to come in and perform in both phases was outstanding," Morgan said.

"We've been sort of striving to get wins out of the last couple of games, it didn't happen against Mumbai (Indians); today we were competitive."

It was disappointment for Warner who came into bat at number four instead of his usual opening position and went quicker to 5,000 runs than Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli who reached the mark in 157 IPL innings.

The left-hand batsman became the first overseas player and fourth overall to join the 5,000-run IPL club. Kohli leads the batting chart with 5,759 runs in 186 matches. — **AFP**

## Fiery Ferguson shines in maiden outing in IPL

**MUMBAI:** Playing his first match in this year's Indian Premier League on Sunday, New Zealand fast bowler Lockie Ferguson showed the Kolkata Knight Riders what they've been missing with a fiery match-winning performance against the Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Eoin Morgan's Kolkata finally handed an opportunity to the previously overlooked paceman in their ninth match of this year's tournament, which is being played in the United Arab Emirates due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

The 29-year-old Ferguson made full use of the chance, bowling fast and mixing his slower deliveries intelligently on a sluggish pitch to pick up three for 15 in his four overs. Morgan then called on him ahead of Australian pace spearhead Pat Cummins to bowl the Super Over after Hyderabad skipper David Warner scored 17 off the final over but left the match tied, with each team scoring 163 from their 20 overs.

In just three balls, Ferguson claimed two scalps for two runs, including the wicket of Warner.



Kolkata comfortably chased down the target to complete their fifth victory. "It was a pleasure to get an opportunity, I am really happy to get away with a win today,"

Ferguson said in the post-match presentation, adding that the wicket of Warner on the first delivery of the Super Over was most pleasing for him.

"I had my plan which was working right throughout the game." England's limited-overs captain Morgan said man-of-the-match Ferguson was "outstanding". "The hunger and drive that he's shown off the field and waiting for an opportunity will really spur the guys on," Morgan said.

Kolkata are fourth in the eight-team standings after the win. Cummins, the world's top-ranked test bowler, said it was an easy decision to hand the white ball to Ferguson for the Super Over.

"Personally being a fast bowler as well, I always love seeing a bit of pace out there and he's certainly fiery," Cummins said. "He was brilliant, glad he got a chance and I'm sure we will see more of him." — **Reuters**

Salalah achieves 100 per cent growth in RO-RO business



BUSINESS REPORTER  
SALALAH, OCT 19

Port of Salalah achieved 100 per cent growth in its roll-on / roll-off (RO-RO) business and made a significant progress in diverting Yemen-bound shipments through Salalah.

One of the commodity segments that stands out is the volume of cars being imported into Salalah in transit to Yemen. Volume of cars imported through RO-RO carriers have more than doubled in the last six months, as Port of Salalah imported about 18000 units in 2020 Year-to-date August, compared to 7000 units in 2019.

Securing this new source of business has resulted in an increase of “In Country Logistics value” of close to RO 1 million by way of direct employment and business generation by Omani service providers.

“The Port of Salalah continues exploring new opportunities and businesses; leveraging its infrastructure; and to its existing portfolio of services. We are delighted to support the growing RO-RO trade, which not only generates incremental economic activity in its hinterland, but also stimulates the local logistics ecosystem,” commented Sunil Joseph, Chief Commercial officer. “This step towards

Securing this new source of business has resulted in an increase of “In Country Logistics value” of close to RO 1 million by way of direct employment and business generation by Omani service providers

diversification of cargo by Port of Salalah is another milestone in promoting Oman’s ideal position as a global logistics hub; connecting directly with major international ports, then distributing and serving neighbouring markets, thanks to the Sultanate’s strategic location, world-class facilities and globally-competitive trade facilitation initiatives,” commented Muna al Subhi, Senior Strategist — Port Cluster, ASYAD Group

The Port of Salalah is recognised for not only being a fast-growing regional container hub but also for one of the world’s biggest exporter of gypsum, in addition to handling liquids and bagged cargo. The port continues on its long-term strategy for diversification of cargo to cater to the evolving and growing economic activity in the immediate and extended hinterland.

Oman ICT Group to fund expansion of maiden Omani computer brand

First locally designed, manufactured and branded laptop unveiled

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) launched yesterday, at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), the first Omani computer designed and manufactured by Al Onsor Company.

The event was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of MTCIT, and a number of high-level officials from the public sector, along with senior representatives of Al Onsor Company who worked on the computer project.

The first Omani computer was designed and manufactured by young Omani with the support of Sas Center for Entrepreneurship at MTCIT.

The design of the computer is in line with the latest technologies in the market. In addition to being lightweight, the laptop features: an ID card reader, option for mobile (nano SIM card, to connect to the Internet via 3G or 4G network, and the option to convert it into a touch-enabled tablet device.

Furthermore, it has a smart fingerprint reader and Arabic inscriptions that give a modern and authentic touch to the device.

The laptop is equipped with the latest tenth-generation Intel processors. It comes in various versions based on the speed of the processor with different options of storage memory and random access memory.

Additionally, the basic computers come with a high-quality FHD touch screen that can be folded at a 360-degree angle to be used as a tablet or keep it as normal and use it as a



The design of the computer is in line with the latest technologies in the market. In addition to being lightweight, the laptop features: an ID card reader, option for mobile (nano SIM card, to connect to the Internet via 3G or 4G network, and the option to convert it into a touch-enabled tablet device

regular laptop. The processor options are: Intel Celeron, Intel Pentium, Intel core i3, Intel core i5 and Intel core i7.

Al Onsor’s engineers have designed three types of computers, namely: desktop, all-in-one and portable multi-use computer (2-in-notebook), and the company decided to start manufacturing laptops due to coronavirus pandemic conditions in the world and the institutions’ direction to work and study remotely.

On the sidelines of the launch, an investment agreement was signed by Oman ICT Group, the body responsible for driving the ICT sector and Al Onsor company, to invest in Al Onsor Company by enhancing the current production line of the computers with the new technologies such as, the Internet of things and

robotics.

The group will cover all the capital and operational costs and the large portion of the company’s shares will be owned by the founders. The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of Oman ICT Group and Eng Muaath bin Ahmed al Hinai, one of the founders of Al Onsor Company.

On this occasion, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaitani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, affirmed that the Ministry is committed to encouraging and supporting Omani companies specialised in communications and information technology to move forward towards

innovation and development in its various fields, which in turn can contribute to the transfer of technology in the Sultanate, and the incubation of the Ministry for

This emerging company to design a computer motherboard is an example for the Ministry efforts to incubate the small and medium enterprises in the field of technology and communications, through Sas Center for Entrepreneurship, which provides these emerging startups with an equipped environment to start their commercial businesses, and provides them with the necessary guidance and consultancy.”

“The Ministry also seeks to transfer the advanced technologies in the information technology industry, and to cooperate with international technology companies and attract them to the Sultanate. The ministry is also working on putting plans to promote free and open source software technologies by 1 providing advanced training for young people on these technologies to enable them to produce programs and solutions to benefit the local market, as well as pushing them to expand to external markets,” Al Shaitani added.

AIR LOGISTICS

Oman Aviation Group outlines strategic FDI opportunities

AIR LOGISTICS: Webinar sets stage for further collaboration between Oman Aviation Group and aerospace ecosystem in the Netherlands

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

In an exploratory webinar held at Oman Aviation Group on Monday and attended by the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Oman, Laetitia Van Asch-Pieters, Oman Aviation Group Strategic Chief Financial Officer Hussain al Balushi, Oman Aviation Group Chief Sector Development and Promotion Shabib al Maamari, and senior representatives from both countries’ aviation sectors, the case was made for more collaboration

between Oman and the Netherlands in view of increasing Dutch foreign direct investment to Oman and prioritising in-country value creation across the aviation sector and broader economy.

“Developing Oman’s air logistics ecosystem remains a top priority for us,” explained Shabib al Maamari, Group Chief Sector Development and Promotion at Oman Aviation Group.

“Previous high-level discussions and meetings with potential investors around the world, including Dutch logistics experts, have been part of our push to attract new business and FDI from key global markets.

Our objective now is to solidify investment and develop lasting partnerships for a perishables centre, bonded warehouses, and specialised maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities, which will



strengthen our position as an air cargo hub in the region. Global investors who can help us create a competitive advantage in these areas with the latest innovation and cutting-edge technology is what we are looking for.

We have a goal of 730,000 tonnes of air cargo by 2030 and recognise the expertise that Dutch aviation brings to the table — Webinars like this are vital for identifying the right partners

to help us get there.”

Strategic infrastructure FDI in Oman’s aviation sector continues to gain momentum, as affirmed in July this year with a strategic partnership between Oman Aviation Group and DHL for a new storage facility in Logistics Gate at Muscat International Airport.

The partnership is part of DHL’s plans to expand its network in the

region to take advantage of a shift in global trade; Oman’s location continues to boost its attractiveness as a strategic air logistics and ecommerce hub on East-West trade corridors.

Oman Aviation Group’s National Aviation Strategy 2030 provides a road map for the aviation sector’s role in the development of infrastructure projects which hold the promise of significant economic potential.

The webinar was also an opportunity to present the Group’s Airport Cities development plans—specialised economic clusters in an around Sultanate airports offering investment opportunities across a wide range of activities from fisheries and light industry to e-commerce and pharmaceuticals — and to underscore Oman’s investment-friendly regulatory environment and mounting reputation as a world-class

destination for trade and investment.

Oman’s regulatory framework continues to improve for faster, smoother, easier growth, with strong and stable governance structures and economic planning in place; in 2018 Oman was ranked 7th out of 140 for ‘future orientation of government’.

Laetitia Van Asch-Pieters, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Oman, remarked, “The aviation sector’s resilience during this difficult time has been truly remarkable. As a pillar of economic growth and connectivity for countries around the world, it is vital that aviation keeps innovating and working towards collaboration and partnerships. Aviation in the Netherlands has played an important role in developing regional economies and is a key enabler of national economic activity.”

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

ENERGY

KREMLIN SIGNALS NEW OPEC+ OIL TALKS AMID WEAK DEMAND OUTLOOK



The Kremlin signalled a new round of oil talks with Saudi Arabia as producer group Opec+ meets on Monday to discuss the weakening demand outlook in the face of rising coronavirus infections. Opec+ sources said the group was unlikely to recommend immediate action. <

ECONOMY

CHINA’S ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACCELERATES IN THIRD QUARTER



China’s economic recovery accelerated in the third quarter as consumers shook off their coronavirus caution, although the weaker-than-expected headline growth suggested persistent risks for one of the few drivers of global demand. GDP grew 4.9 per cent in July-September from a year earlier. < Page 13

AVIATION

CATHAY PACIFIC TO OPERATE LESS THAN 50 PER CENT CAPACITY IN 2021



Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said it expects to operate less than 50 per cent of its pre-pandemic passenger flight capacity in 2021 as it nears completion of a strategic review that could lead to major job losses. It planned to operate around 10 per cent of its capacity for the remainder of 2020. < Page 13



# A short history of VAT and indirect taxes

2020 has certainly been the year of Tax Reform in Oman with several significant enhancements being announced to the fiscal tools available to the government. The most impactful of these announcements will certainly be the introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) starting from April 2021 at a rate of 5 per cent.

The concept of VAT is relatively new within the GCC region, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates implementing VAT on January 1, 2018, with the Kingdom of Bahrain adopting VAT the following year. Though we are less than 3 years into the GCC

VAT regime we have already seen a VAT rate increase in the KSA from 5 per cent to 15 per cent which is indicative of the pace of change we are currently seeing in the regional tax landscape.

Beyond the borders of the GCC, VAT has been levied for decades having first been introduced by the French in the 1950s. Today at a 20 per cent standard rate, VAT collections account for around 50 per cent of the tax collection in France (approx. EUR 170bn) with similar figures reflecting across Europe. Since its first introduction, VAT has proved to be a very popular revenue raising tool for governments having been adopted in approximately 160 countries with rates ranging from



ALKESH JOSHI

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY RATE OF 5 PER CENT AND A BROAD LIST OF EXEMPTIONS AND ZERO RATES THE VAT SYSTEM TO BE ADOPTED IN OMAN WOULD SEEM FAVOURABLE

1.5 per cent in Aruba to 27 per cent in Hungary. The most significant omission from the list of countries that have adopted VAT would be the United States of America though they do apply a sales tax.

VAT, along with Excise Tax and Customs Duty, belongs to a family of taxes which fall under the heading of Indirect Tax as they are a tax on consumption and not income. History has provided us with many examples dating back centuries of these indirect taxes some of which may seem difficult to believe today.

For example, in the 17th Century, Russia had introduced a Beard Tax whereby the individual would need to pay tax if they wanted to retain their beard. Oddly, this was not

the first instance of a Beard Tax which had previously been levied in England under the reign of Henry VIII in the 16th Century.

In the 18th Century, a Window Tax was also introduced in England whereby you would need to pay tax in accordance to the number of windows you had in your house. This led many to build houses without windows however, the Window Tax did not last and was eventually repealed.

These examples show us that indirect taxes have stood the test of time and have become more sophisticated in supporting both developed and developing economies. Thankfully, over that period, governments have moved

away from Beard and Window Taxes with a view instead to tax the consumption of goods and services which is a lot easier to administer.

It will take some time for the consumers to get familiar with the proposed VAT system in Oman. However, with an introductory rate of 5 per cent and a broad list of exemptions and zero rates the VAT system to be adopted in Oman would seem favourable as compared to indirect systems elsewhere in world as well as those adopted historically.

*[The writer is a Partner, Oman Tax Leader and MENA Energy Tax Leader at EY. Stay tuned to this space for more articles and insights on VAT from EY Oman]*

CUSTOMER SERVICE

## MEDC call centre elicits positive response

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 19

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company registered a 9 per cent increase in the number of customers utilising the services of its toll free call centre 80070008 until September 2020 compared to the same period of last year totalling 455,360 calls.

The automated voice response system answered 139,498 calls



registering an increase of 7.49 per cent compared to the same period in 2019, which proved to be a smart, efficient and fast way to enable customers to receive the company's services. Customers' queries were also attended to via the various social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Whatsapp.

In line with its vision "to be amongst the top performers in

Electricity services in the MENA region by 2022", and its mission aiming to "empower Muscat through safe, reliable, economic and customer focused electricity services", Muscat Electricity Distribution Company is keen to empower its contact centre with the aim to provide its customers a range of innovative services and answer their queries in a timely manner.

## Ethiopia's economy grew 6.1 per cent in 2019/20 fiscal year

**ADDIS ABABA:** Ethiopia's economy grew 6.1 per cent in the 2019/20 fiscal year to July, less than originally projected because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Monday.

In January, two months before Ethiopia's first reported case of the new coronavirus, the central bank had forecast the economy would expand by 10.8 per cent this fiscal year, up from 9 per cent in the previous year.

"For eight months we registered a healthy economic growth but after that, then coronavirus came and for the remaining four months we faced challenges," Abiy told lawmakers.

Under Ethiopia's demonitisation process launched last month, at least 1.3 million Ethiopian adults who previously did not have bank accounts have handed in their old banknotes and opened accounts, Abiy said.

Abiy took office in 2018 and promised sweeping economic reforms. Some changes are beginning to be implemented.

The government says demonitisation will discourage cash hoarding which facilitates corruption, tax avoidance and other damage to the economy. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

### ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK ORGANISES THE BUSHRA PRIZE SAVINGS ACCOUNT QUARTERLY DRAW

Alizz Islamic Bank organised the latest quarterly draw event for Oman's first Sharia-compliant Prize Savings Account, 'Bushra' recently.



As a precautionary measure during the ongoing pandemic the draw event was held at the Alizz Islamic Bank, Head Office, with a livestream for the public shared via Instagram Live.

10 Female winners received RO 1,000 each. 10 Winners received RO 2,500 each and the quarterly draw winner won RO 100,000

Alizz Islamic Bank launched the Bushra Prize Savings Account in 2016 as Oman's first fully Sharia compliant prize savings account offering daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual cash prizes as hiba (gift) from the shareholders. The account, which comes with the approval of the Sharia Supervisory Board, reflects the bank's efforts to deliver innovative and high-quality products and ensure a premium customer experience

MUSCAT

### HOMEGROWN OMANI START-UP RAFAEEQ.OM SAVES MORE THAN 100,000 PLASTIC BAGS

Rafeeq.om, a homegrown Omani e-commerce start-up, has saved more than 100,000 plastic bags since the launch of its operations in Muscat in March 2020. Rafeeq's product deliveries are made directly to the shopper's home, in sanitised reusable crates and insulated boxes, saving dozens of plastics bags with each order.



Launched just as the country was implementing social-distancing norms, Rafeeq has proved to be a savior for close shoppers in Muscat, who prefer to shop from the comfort and safety of their own home. With over 30 categories, spanning fresh fruits and vegetables to stationery and mobile phones, Rafeeq has successfully managed to bring a department store into the homes of the consumers.

Payam Ashori, the founder of Rafeeq.om, said, "We aimed to be eco-friendly from the outset. We see so many plastic bags being used in department stores and grocery stores. Sometimes, the baggers pack just one item per bag. Most of the bags end up in the trash, and in our oceans. At Rafeeq, we limit the use of plastic to only fresh fruits and vegetables. Everything else is delivered to the customers in reusable, sanitised crates."

PRODUCER GROUP

## Kremlin signals new Opec+ oil talks amid weak demand outlook

**LONDON:** The Kremlin signalled on Monday a new round of oil talks with Saudi Arabia as producer group Opec+ meets on Monday to discuss the weakening demand outlook in the face of rising coronavirus infections.

"Those markets are volatile and we are at an active stage of cooperation, exchange of opinions. That is why it requires regular contacts," the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held two phone calls last week to discuss oil markets.

Opec+ sources said the group was



A man fixes the logo of Opec in Vienna, in this file photo. — Reuters

unlikely to recommend immediate action on Monday. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies including Russia, collectively known as Opec+, have been reducing output since January

2017 in an effort to balance the market, support prices and reduce inventories.

They are currently curbing production by 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd), down from 9.7 million bpd, and are due to taper cuts by 2 million bpd in January.

Several Opec watchers, including analysts from US investment bank J P Morgan, have suggested that a bearish demand outlook could prompt Opec+ to delay any easing of the reductions. The United Arab Emirates and Russia, however, have said that cuts would be eased as planned. The group will meet again on November 30. — Reuters



employees are women.

Speaking about the importance of the special draw, Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid, Deputy General Manager — Large Corporates, Bank Muscat, said: "We congratulate all women on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day.

The bank is very happy to reward 50 lucky winners on this special occasion as we celebrate their achievements in the Renaissance of Oman and encourage them to realise their professional dreams and aspirations. By achieving their full potential, Omani women are contributing greatly to economic progress and development of the Sultanate. We are very happy to showcase the fine achievements of Omani women on this very special day."

# China's economic recovery accelerates in Q3

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 4.9 per cent in July-September from a year earlier, official data showed on Monday, faster than the second quarter's 3.2 per cent growth

**BEIJING:** China's economic recovery accelerated in the third quarter as consumers shook off their coronavirus caution, although the weaker-than-expected headline growth suggested persistent risks for one of the few drivers of global demand.

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 4.9 per cent in July-September from a year earlier, official data showed on Monday, slower than the 5.2 per cent forecast by analysts in a poll but faster than the second quarter's 3.2 per cent growth.

"China's economy remains on the recovery path, driven by a rebound in exports. Consumer spending is also headed in the right direction, but we cannot say it has completely shaken off the drag caused by the coronavirus," said Yoshikiyo Shimamine, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute in Tokyo.

"There is a risk that the return of lockdowns in Europe and another wave of infections in the United States will hurt consumer spending



Workers wearing masks rope a container ship at a port in Qingdao, Shandong province, China. — Reuters

and trigger more job losses, which would be a negative for China's economy."

The weaker-than-expected headline figures weighed on China's yuan and mainland stock benchmarks and capped broader market gains in Asia. The world's second-largest economy grew 0.7 per cent in the first nine months from a year earlier, the National

Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

Policymakers globally are pinning their hopes on a robust recovery in China to help restart demand as economies struggle with heavy lockdowns and a second wave of coronavirus infections. China has partially emerged from a record slump caused by coronavirus shutdowns in the first months of the year.

NBS spokeswoman Liu Aihua warned that growth remained patchy. "Internally, the economy is still in the process of recovery," she told a briefing in Beijing. "Some or most of the indicators have not returned to the normal growth level, and some of the cumulative growth rate has also declined."

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, GDP rose 2.7 per cent in the third

quarter, the NBS said, compared with expectations for a 3.2 per cent rise and an 11.5 per cent rise in the previous quarter. But despite the headline disappointment, analysts were encouraged by a broader upturn in consumption and continued factory strength.

Retail sales grew 3.3 per cent in September from a year earlier, speeding up from a modest 0.5 per cent rise in August and posting the fastest growth since December 2019. Industrial output grew 6.9 per cent after a 5.6 per cent rise in August, showing the factory sector's recovery was gaining momentum.

Fixed-asset investment rose 0.8 per cent in the first nine months from a year earlier, returning to year-to-date growth for the first time this year. In the property sector, investment rose 12 per cent in September from a year earlier, the fastest pace in nearly 1½ years, providing a key support for broader investment.

The government has rolled out a raft of measures including more fiscal spending, tax relief and cuts in lending rates and banks' reserve requirements to revive the coronavirus-hit economy and support employment.

While the central bank stepped up policy support after widespread travel restrictions choked economic activity, it has more recently held off

on further easing. The International Monetary Fund has forecast an expansion of 1.9 per cent for China for 2020, which is close to the central bank's own projection of 2 per cent.

That would make China the only major economy expected to report growth in 2020, albeit at the slowest annual pace since 1976, the final year of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution.

China's retail spending has lagged the comeback in factory activity this year as heavy job losses and persistent worries about infections kept consumers at home, even as restrictions lifted.

However, recent indicators suggest consumer activity is now turning around. In the travel sector, domestic passenger flights in September beat their COVID-19 levels, a sign that segment of the market is approaching a full recovery, even as international borders remain largely shut. Auto sales marked a sixth straight month of gains in September while Ford Motor Co's China vehicle sales jumped 25 per cent in the third quarter from a year earlier.

The breakdown of GDP showed final consumption accounted for 1.7 percentage points growth, while capital formation accounted for 2.6 percentage points and net exports contributed 0.6 percentage points, NBS said. — Reuters

## Gold prices firm on US stimulus hopes

**NEW YORK:** Gold prices rose on Monday underpinned by concerns of a worsening COVID-19 pandemic, while hopes for a new US stimulus package before the presidential election also supported prices of the precious metal.

Spot gold gained 0.6 per cent to \$1,909.90 per ounce by 07:25 GMT, while US gold futures were up 0.3 per cent at \$1,912.40.

"The resurgence of COVID-19 in Europe has increased the possibility of a double dip recession and a protracted economic slowdown," said Harshal Barot, a consultant for South Asia at Metals Focus.

"Slowing economic growth will mean that we would see more monetary and fiscal stimulus down the line."



An employee sorts gold bars in Vienna, Austria. — Reuters

Gold has risen about 25 per cent this year as governments and central banks unleashed a wave of stimulus measures to limit economic damage from the pandemic.

"We expect gold to trade cautiously around \$1,900 level for now, the game changer being whether we can get (US) fiscal stimulus in the next 48 hours," said Howie Lee, an economist at OCBC Bank. — Reuters

## Cathay Pacific to operate less than 50 per cent capacity in 2021

**SYDNEY:** Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said on Monday it expects to operate less than 50 per cent of its pre-pandemic passenger flight capacity in 2021 as it nears completion of a strategic review that could lead to major job losses.

The airline said it planned to operate around 10 per cent of its pre-pandemic capacity for the remainder of 2020, with most borders remaining closed.

The airline industry has been hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic as many countries imposed travel restrictions to contain its spread. Many of the curbs still remain in place. "Among the multiple scenarios studied, this one is already the most optimistic that we can responsibly adopt at this moment," Cathay said in the release of its monthly traffic figures to the stock exchange.

The airline said it assumed it would be operating well below 25 per cent of pre-pandemic capacity in the first half of 2021 but that there would be a recovery in the second half if vaccines currently under development proved effective and are widely adopted in its key markets by the middle of 2021.

In September, the airline's passenger numbers fell by 98.1 per cent compared with a year earlier, though cargo carriage was down by a smaller 36.6 per cent.



Cathay Pacific Airways Airbus A330-300 plane flies above Hong Kong national flag. — Reuters

Cathay had in June said it was reviewing its strategy in light of the travel downturn, with "tough decisions" to be announced during the fourth quarter.

The *South China Morning Post* reported on Monday the Cathay board was expected to back a restructuring plan this week that included staff redundancies and pay cuts, citing unnamed sources. Cathay has sent around 40 per cent of its passenger fleet to less humid locations outside Hong Kong for storage. — Reuters

## Alibaba pays \$3.6 billion to take over hypermarket giant SunArt

**PARIS:** China's e-commerce behemoth Alibaba has bought a controlling \$3.6 billion stake in SunArt which runs hundreds of hypermarkets on the mainland for French shopping giant Auchan.

The move to take a 72 per cent holding in SunArt tightens Alibaba's grip on China's vast e-commerce sector as it looks to soak up the new customers pushed online to buy groceries, fresh food and healthcare products by the coronavirus.

It also hands over control of 13 million square metres (140 million square feet) of retail space in scores of cities across the country.

SunArt was created by Auchan in 2000 with Ruentex Group and joined in an "alliance" with Alibaba in 2017.

That tie-in gave the Chinese firm ownership of around a third of the hypermarket company.

Alibaba quickly set about transforming SunArt from a traditional bricks-and-mortar hypermarket to an online groceries hub, matching its wider e-commerce goods business.

"Sun Art has made significant progress in the digital transformation," Alibaba said in a statement on Monday announcing its \$3.6 billion investment. — AFP



A man pushes shopping carts into Sun Art hypermarket store in Beijing. — Reuters

### DIGITAL PLATFORM

## Japan prepares to regulate Big Tech companies

**TOKYO:** Japan will join forces with the United States and Europe to take on any market abuses by the four Big Tech companies, the new head of its antitrust watchdog said on Monday, a sign Tokyo will join global efforts to regulate digital platform operators.

Kazuyuki Furuya, chairman of Japan's Fair Trade Commission (FTC), also said Tokyo could open a probe into any merger or business tie-up involving fitness tracker maker Fitbit if the size of such deals are big enough.

"If the size of any merger or business-tie up is big, we can launch an anti-monopoly investigation into the buyer's process of acquiring a start-up (like Fitbit)," he said.

"We're closely watching developments including in Europe," he added.

EU antitrust regulators in August launched an investigation into a \$2.1 billion deal by Alphabet unit Google's bid to buy Fitbit that aimed to take on Apple and Samsung in the wearable technology market.

Japan is laying the groundwork to regulate platform operators. Among them are big tech giants dubbed 'GAFA' — Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook — that face various antitrust probes in western nations.



Fitbit Blaze watch is seen in front of a displayed Google logo in this photo illustration. — Reuters

Multi-national companies like GAFA have similar business practices across the globe, which makes global coordination crucial, Furuya said.

"We'll work closely with our US and European counterparts, and respond if to any moves that hamper competition," he said.

"This is an area I will push through

aggressively," he said, adding the FTC was ready to open probes if digital platformers abuse their dominant market positions against consumers.

Furuya, who assumed the post in September, also said the FTC would conduct research into Japan's mobile phone market to see whether there is any room for improvement to spur

Japan is laying the groundwork to regulate platform operators. Among them are big tech giants dubbed 'GAFA' — Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook — that face various antitrust probes in western nations

competition.

Any such move would help Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's push to slash Japan's mobile phone charges, which he has repeatedly criticised as too high.

Furuya countered the view that helping the government meet its policy priorities could undermine the FTC's position as a body mandated to act independently from political meddling.

"If there's a policy priority for the government, there's no doubt the FTC should think about what it can do on that front," Furuya said.

"By participating in the government's debate on policy issues, we have been reflecting our thinking in the process. This is something our organisation should do." — Reuters



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■ LOST

Hussain Ahmed Jawesh has lost Syrian passport No N 011373854. Finder please handover to ROP.





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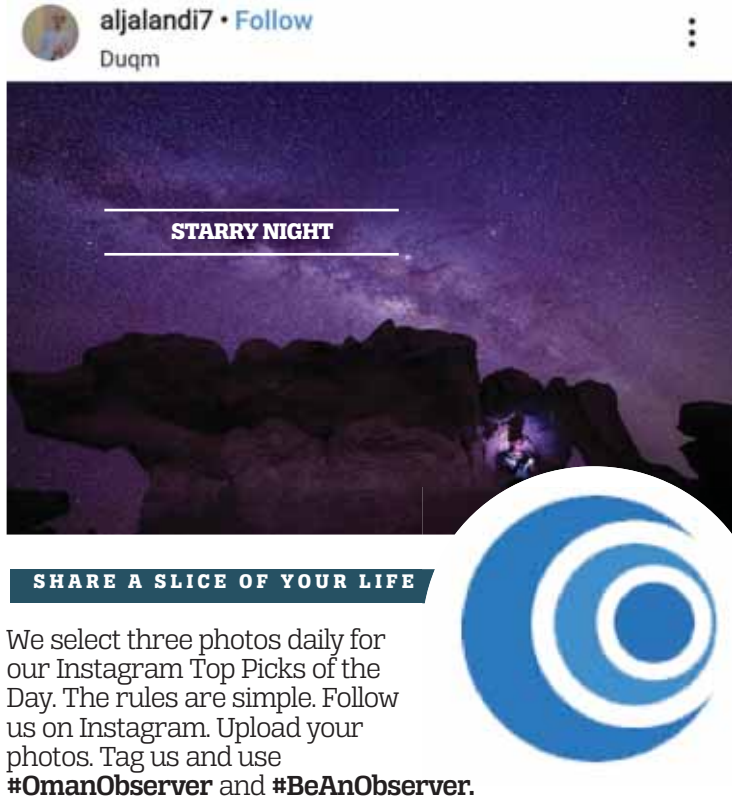
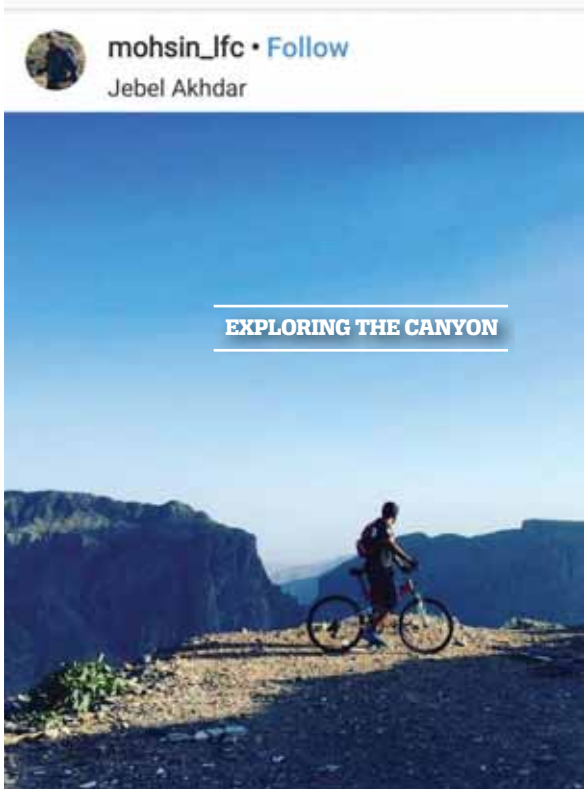


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Mud-brick palace is Yemen's latest heritage site facing disaster

Yemen's Seiyun Palace, one of the world's largest mud-brick structures, has become the war-torn country's latest heritage site facing the risk of collapse as heavy rains and years of neglect take their toll.

The deterioration of the bright white building, reminiscent of a giant sandcastle with rounded turrets on its corners, reflects Yemen's downward spiral since 2014, when Iran-backed Ansar Allah rebels began battling the government.

A Saudi-led coalition intervened in support of the government in 2015.

Authorities have struggled to secure funds to maintain important sites such as the palace, now a museum, in the city of Seiyun in central Hadramawt province.

The building has fallen into disrepair, making it vulnerable to floods that have hit the country in recent months.

Abdullah Barmada, an engineer who specialises in the restoration of historical buildings, appealed for international assistance to save the structure.

"It is dangerous and, if not

quickly restored, it is at risk of collapsing," Barmada said.

"There is damage to the base of the structure, the walls, the roofs, and it needs to be fixed and then routinely maintained," he said.

The floods have killed scores of people and damaged UNESCO-listed World Heritage sites including high-rise mud-brick "skyscrapers" further west in Shibam.

In Yemen's third city of Taez, the newly restored National Museum was a major casualty last month, with parts of the former Ottoman palace reduced to rubble.

**'SECRET PLACES'**

The Seiyun Palace, once home to the sultan of the Kathiris who ruled much of the region from the 1500s until the 20th century, opened its doors to the public in 1984.

Hussein Aidarous, head of the department of antiquities and museums in Hadramawt, said that even though the palace had sustained a lot of damage, it remained one of the few of its kind still standing.

"This large building is considered one of the most important mud-brick build-

The deterioration of the bright white building, reminiscent of a giant sandcastle with rounded turrets on its corners, reflects Yemen's downward spiral since 2014, when Iran-backed Ansar Allah rebels began battling the government.

ings in Yemen and maybe even in the Arabian Peninsula," he added.

The facade of the seven-story edifice still retains its original grandeur.

Its imposing lines feature on Yemen's 1,000-riyal banknote, the highest denomi-

nation, worth around \$4.

With regular rows of windows that overlook a busy street, from outside the palace seems to be in solid condition.

But the interior shows clear signs of damage, with cracks in the walls and a partially collapsed roof.

It shut after the war broke out but partially reopened last year, receiving a steady stream of visitors, museum officials said.

Director Said Baychout said the museum showcases items excavated in the province, including tombstones that date back to the Stone Age and the dawn of civilisation in Yemen.

There are also Bronze Age statues, and pottery and ancient manuscripts from the pre-Islamic period.

But its most prized possessions, he said, are stashed away, for fear that one of Yemen's warring groups could target them.

"The museum was closed at the start of the conflict, when Al Qaeda entered Hadramawt, and artefacts were hidden, over fears of looting, pillaging and damage," Baychout said.

"Until now, the important and rare artefacts are hidden in secret places." — AFP

GLOBAL TRENDS

British artist Banksy claims hula-hooping girl street art



**NOTTINGHAM**, England: The elusive British street artist Banksy confirmed on Saturday that a new artwork that appeared on a wall in Nottingham, central England, depicting a young girl using a bicycle tyre as a hula-hoop is his work.

The work appeared on Tuesday on the red brick wall of a beauty salon, next to a bicycle that was locked to a metal signpost and missing its back wheel.

A picture of the work in the student area of the city

was posted on Banksy's Instagram feed and website on Saturday.

Banksy is known for witty artworks that often make powerful references to world affairs.

His works this year have alluded to the coronavirus crisis and Black Lives Matter movement.

In August, he funded a boat crewed by volunteers to rescue refugees in the Mediterranean attempting to reach Europe from Africa. — Reuters

GASTRONOMY

Hungarian restaurant reinvents the wheel for social distancing

**BUDAPEST**: Hit by a plunge in turnover after foreign tourists vanished, Michelin-starred Hungarian restaurant Costes has staged a skyline dining event on the Budapest Eye ferris wheel to generate sales in a coronavirus-proof environment.

Costes owner Karoly Gerendai said that turnover at one of his reopened restaurants is down to about a tenth of pre-lockdown levels, forcing him to look for new ways to do business.

"Now that there are not many people either on the wheel or in the restaurant because there are no tourists, the opportunity arose that we could do this," he said of the event at the landmark attraction in central Budapest.

"It is now especially important for people to be able to be separate from other guests to be safe, and the ferris wheel is ideal with its separate cabins."

As of Sunday, Hungary had reported 46,290 COVID-19 cases with 1,142 deaths and the economy is heading towards a 5-7 per cent contraction this year.

Tickets for the novel Costes dining experience cost up to 48,000 forints (\$154.40) each for a four-course meal and sold out within days, Gerendai said, as affluent local clients sought a rare escape from the constraints of coronavirus restrictions.

Gerendai is planning to repeat the event when warmer weather arrives in the spring, though the cooler October night was no deterrent for customers on Saturday.

"We wanted to get out a bit and enjoy an experience again because we have been living quite closed in," said Szabolcs Balazs, who took the meal with his wife and two children.

"We used to go to restaurants quite often, we have been to two Michelin-starred ones, but because of COVID we stopped going. So this is the only chance for us now because here we are really separated." — Reuters

# features

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## A step into preserving Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's natural treasures

BY YERU EBUEN  
@yeru\_here

It's easy to mistake them for furry goats and perhaps it is for this reason that they've become an endangered species. There was a time when they grazed freely in the rocky slopes of the Al Hajar mountains but to see them in their natural habitat today is just as accidental or unexpected as rain in the desert.

The Arabian Tahr can only be found in Oman and the mountains of the United Arab Emirates including Jabal Hafeet. The smallest amongst the Tahr species,

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is home to many animal species including a unique variety of flora like the juniper tree, Ja'aada, the purple hop-bush and Christ Thorn or locally known as Sidr.

In celebration of Arab Environment Day, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), and Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Resort have jointly published an infographic on the wildlife of the Sultanate's Western Hajar mountains.

Available online for free, the infographic illustrates the main terrestrial biodiversity of the mountain range, which is Eastern Arabia's highest, aiming to increase knowledge and raise awareness about the most common

and plants inspire many elements of the resort and are a great example of our connection with the environment around us," said Rami Farhat, Acting General Manager of Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Resort.

"As part of our commitment to promote sustainable hospitality, we're happy to support ESO on this and other projects, so that we can safeguard our unique surroundings for visitors to continue to enjoy," he added.

Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Resort works on a number of projects as part of the hotel's sustainability commitment, including, Dollars for Deeds, where it



they are stockily built with backwards-arching horns. Their rubber-like hooves allowed them to navigate steep slopes easily. But while they are good at hiding, faced with the challenges of overgrazing, poaching and habitat destruction, they became aloft and their numbers continue to dwindle. It's been a while since the last Arabian Tahr was spotted even in Jabal Akhdhar.

In a similar manner, the Arabian vulture is also just as endangered as the Arabian Tahr and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the places they can be spotted. At over 3,000 metres above sea level, the

species found there. Various species of birds, mammals and flora are included, along with their listing under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

It's part of an ongoing relationship between ESO and the resort, as together they continue to highlight the unique diversity of Oman's wildlife while promoting environmentally sustainable behaviour.

"In line with our commitment to preserving Oman's natural heritage, we have been working on a range of content for informational booklets, infographics and videos, developing

"Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the Sultanate's most popular tourist sites so, working in partnership with Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Resort, we have created an infographic which we hope will serve to educate visitors about the rich variety of plants and animals they might find there. At the same time, it serves to highlight the various threats facing these species, among which is, unfortunately, unregulated tourism."

"Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is not only a beautiful location but home to so many of Oman's most incredible natural resources. These animals

matches guests' donations to ESO rial-for-rial. The infographic is part of a wider campaign from ESO to highlight and protect Oman's environment through education, awareness and conservation. As the country's only non-profit organisation dedicated to the environment, ESO has spent the last 16 years working to secure Oman's natural health for the coming generations.

The infographic can be viewed at the resort's grounds near the Chef's organic garden or online at [http://eso.org.om/index/images/file/2020-10/Jabal\\_Akhdhar\\_Poster\\_Digital.pdf](http://eso.org.om/index/images/file/2020-10/Jabal_Akhdhar_Poster_Digital.pdf).