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31°C/21°C

UPDATE ON ANISA AL RAISSI'S MUSANDAM TO MIRBAT JOURNEY
GO TO PAGE 20 FEATURES



Sayyid Shihab attends GCC Joint Defence Council meet



Muscat - H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, took part in deliberations of the 17th meeting of the Joint Defence Council of the GCC Ministers of Defence, held via video conferencing on Sunday. Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), also attended the meeting.

Topics listed on its agenda, which were raised by the Supreme Military Committee of the GCC Chiefs of Staff, were discussed in the meeting. It also reviewed the achievements and results of joint military efforts.

The meeting touched on several topics of common interest

that enhance military cooperation within the GCC framework in a manner that achieves the council's joint interests according to the Joint Defence Agreements among the member states.

At the end of the meeting, the GCC Ministers of Defence underscored the importance of continuing the joint effort in a manner that achieves military cooperation among the member states in realising the objectives of the council's leaders. Several decisions and recommendations were taken that will be submitted at the 41st Summit of the Supreme Council of the GCC Leaders scheduled in December.

ONA

OMANI PHOTOGRAPHER WINS TOP ARAB PRIZE



Majid Obaid al Amri's photograph 'Souq Nizwa' won the first place in a competition organised by the Arab Union For Culture on the theme 'Arab street pulse'. It aimed to encourage photographers exchange experiences and saw the participation of 400 shutterbugs from various Arab countries entering a total of 1,000 photographs. "My photo, shot in 2018, captures the mood in Nizwa Market. I am delighted with this victory, more so as it has come during our 50th National Day celebrations. Promoting Oman through my photographs is my biggest achievement," said Amri

Agreement inked to digitalise Oman's school curriculum



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education signed a financing agreement with British Petroleum (BP) Oman on Sunday to help digitalise Oman's school curriculum. Over 600,000 students and 55,000 teachers from Grade 1 to 12 will benefit from the initiative over the next five years.

"Today (Sunday) we signed an

agreement with Ministry of Education to digitalise the sultanate's educational curriculum. This is our gift to the nation as Oman celebrates its 50th National Day," the company stated.

A specialised Omani company will work to create interactive content, including smart apps, multimedia and virtual reality.

The project will ensure schools have the needed infrastructure to support future dis-

ance learning requirements. It is aligned with Oman Vision 2040 to provide inclusive education, the company further said in a video message.

"We are partnering with Oman towards a sustainable future by investing in the country's society and economy. We are pleased to support the development of education in Oman - a crucial pillar of the country's future ambitions."

Since its launch in 2014, BP Oman's Social Investment Programme (SIP) has helped around 33,000 people from across the country with over 70 initiatives.

SIP aims to support the sultanate's national priorities in the development of Omani people, economic diversification and job creation. It delivers projects under three main themes - enterprise development, education and energy sustainability.



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JOURNEY OF RESEARCH

AND INNOVATION CONTINUES

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The research and innovation activities in Oman are inspired with the Royal Speech delivered on February 23, 2020, in which His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stated, "On top of our national priorities is the education sector, with all its types and levels. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with the supporting environment, which motivates research and innovation. We will also provide it with all means of empowerment, since it is the base upon which our children will be able to participate in meeting the requirements of the coming phase of development."

In step with the other sectors, the research and innovation department in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MHRI) continues its efforts in building research and innovation capabilities. It contributed to the efforts exerted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic through the activation of links between various research and academic institutions. The main efforts in research and innovation in 2020 included -

RESEARCH SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

COVID-19 Research Programme

It was launched in March 2020 to cover both clinical and non-clinical aspects of the pandemic. The programme funded 28 research proposals at a total cost of RO280,000. Once completed, these research projects will provide scientific research information and facts, as well as innovative solutions for both clinical and non-clinical areas.

National Strategy for Research and Development 2040

Efforts towards the preparation of the National Strategy for Research and Development 2040 have been recently focused on the operational plans for the strategy, which are expected to come into effect beginning of next year.

MHRI has reaffirmed the harmony between the vision of the National Innovation Strategy (NIS) and Oman Vision 2040, reinforced by a political will and continuous institutional integration. This has resulted in various initiatives in several fields, and is evident through innovations, institutions and efforts.

Block Funding Programme

During 2020, MHRI funded 248 research projects through the Block Funding Programme, covering research support grants for holders of PhD, Master's and Bachelor's degrees, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students who are pursuing self-funded programmes abroad.

A total of 28 government and private institutions in the sultanate benefited from the support for this year, including various scientific research works in communications and information systems, environment and natural resources, health and community service, energy and the industry sector, and the education and

human resources sector.

The financial aid provided to support and finance the approved research projects amounted to RO1.2mn.

Strategic research programmes of national priority

There are currently nine strategic research programmes of national priority in progress in cooperation with the relevant institutions.

These long-term programmes include the Social Observatory Research Programme, Undergraduate Research Grant Programme, Strategic Research Programme on Smart Cities, Omani Cultural Heritage Strategic Research Programme, Integrated Pest Management for Dubas Bug Research Programme, Renewable Energy Research Programme, and Strategic Programme for Water Research.

The steering committee of the strategic grants programme approved the five-year plan for the strategic research programme on the phenomenon of harmful algae (red tide). It aims to create an integrated system for the effective management to monitor and control the phenomenon of red tide and forecast systems in the Omani waters, reduce economic losses, preserve fisheries and the marine environment, protect human health and spread public awareness with the participation of various governmental and private agencies and institutions.

The Steering Committee of the Omani Cultural Heritage Research Programme adopted the proposal for the 'Omani Medical Heritage' project that addresses the Omani doctors who made great contributions to the development of medicine. Work is also underway on the strategic research programme on the 'Omani Figures involved in Trade and Industry'. Meanwhile, the Smart Cities Ambassadors Initiative, one of the initiatives of the Strategic Research Programme for Smart Cities, made a remarkable achievement by winning the 2020 Innovation Challenges competition of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

National Innovation Strategy

The research and innovation field continues establishing indicators and initiatives of the National Innovation Strategy (NIS), which acts as the national observer for innovation in the sultanate by following up and guiding the country's institutions to place its initiatives atop all priorities in order to achieve Oman Vision 2040. This has led to the increase in the number of indicators of the sultanate on the Global Innovation Index (GII), despite a dip in the overall ranking of Oman on the GII.

Innovation Park Muscat

The Innovation Park Muscat (IPM) was officially approved as a science park in June 2019, following Royal Decree No 27/2019, concerning

the exemption and incentives offered by the Science Parks and Other Specialised Zones. More than 90 per cent of the construction of the IPM building has been completed.

The IPM is a larger initiative designed to nurture and develop research talent in order to power innovation and create economic benefit for Oman and to help ensure national prosperity and international competitiveness.

IPM seeks to create an enabling environment for researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs by providing them services that help them to develop their soft skills and focus on scientific research. It also strives to build on their ability to utilise knowledge, develop products based on scientific research, and turn ideas into commercial products. This will promote and contribute to the efforts made by the government to diversify sources of national economy.

IPM focuses on four specialisations that may contribute to achieving sustainable development. They are food and biotechnology, health, water and environment, and energy and renewable energy.

Makers Oman - The Prototyping Centre

This is a strategic partnership between MHRI, represented by Innovation Park Muscat and the former Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership, through cooperation with Bell Company.

Makers Oman is an integrated work environment that includes nearly 100 high-standard technologies and equipment, such as 3D printing of different sizes and equipment in the fields of metal and wood formation to transform ideas



spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Masader - Oman Virtual Science Library

Masader has recently joined the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and added the global publisher IEEE within its electronic research sources. It has members from various academic institutions.

Masader provides seamless and affordable access to a wealth of global research material to academics, university students and researchers.

Omren (Oman Research and Education Network)

Omren supports infrastructure for the research and education community in Oman.

The idea of the project is to create a high-speed and efficient electronic network, linking research and academic entities, helping to develop the level and efficiency of learning, research and electronic communication. The number of affiliated members of the network has grown to 50 members from various academic institutions.

In 2020, Omren has launched a new service called 'Mirsal' that allows authenticated users to securely and easily send arbitrarily large files to other users. The launch of this service aimed to provide a new space for researchers and members of the network in light of the

Shuaa - Oman Research Repository Project

Shuaa is a digital repository that helps in organising, managing and representing the outcome of Omani academic research innovations in order to increase the exposure and impact of Oman's scientific research contribution. The project is a collaborative agreement between the Research and Innovation Sector and Sultan Qaboos University.

In 2020, a cooperation agreement was signed with the Public Authority for Social Insurance to enhance the culture of social insurance and highlight its importance to individuals and the society as well as make reports and audio-visual materials available as scientific references in the field of social security for students and researchers.



Wise leadership, strategy behind Oman's progress: Sayyid Asaad

Muscat – Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, has said that the achievements of Oman over the past 50 years were the result of a comprehensive development strategy that was carried out in a number of stages and in line with exhaustive plans and studies. The most prominent of which is Oman Vision 2040, supervised by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Sayyid Asaad said that the sultanate is pressing ahead with its renewed renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan and in pursuance of Oman Vision 2040 which promises stability and



growth and, in particular, accords attention to innovation and research.

He added that the future dictates economic diversification to enhance the state's revenues

and back the sustainable development process.

Sayyid Asaad described the blessed Omani Renaissance march, which keeps making progress in full confidence during

The sultanate is pressing ahead with its renewed renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan and in pursuance of Oman Vision 2040

SAYYID ASAAD
BIN TARIK AL SAID

the reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and what was achieved during the reign of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said as "a lighthouse of accomplishments".

He stressed that the Omani Renaissance is based on principles of equality, justice, peace, tolerance, dialogue and fraternity with all.

Sayyid Asaad also spoke about the role of Omani civilisation in human heritage, testimony to which are Omani archaeological sites, manuscripts and arts listed in the world like the relics of civilisations of Majan and Mazoon, which relate to the civilisation of the whole of mankind.

The statement also touched on the interest of Omanis in rearing thoroughbred camels which take centre stage in many official and annual festivals and are accorded special facilities like Al Fulaij and Al Bashayer Arabian camel racing ranges.

ONA

REGIONAL WEATHER			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min	Fajr	5.08am
Abu Dhabi	28	21	Sunrise	6.27am
Doha	27	18	Duhr	11.58am
Kuwait City	24	13	Asr	3.04pm
Manama	25	18	Maghrib	5.25pm
Riyadh	25	10	Isha	6.39pm

7,689 expats register to leave sultanate under amnesty

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 7,689 expatriates registered in the period from November 15 to 19 to leave the country under the Ministry of Labour's amnesty scheme.

In a statement, the Ministry of Labour said, 'The ministry received 7,689 requests from expatriates who wish to leave the country without paying any fines or fees, since online registration began on November 15.'

Of the total, 3,263 expats have left their jobs, 408 have no work permits and 253 expats'

work permits have been cancelled. A total of 3,765 work permits are still active. From among all requests, 93 were with family visas, 87 with family joining visas, 147 visit visas, 12 tourist visas, 7,289 work visas, and 61 with no documents.

The Ministry of Labour said it would exempt employers and expatriate workers from all fees and fines registered against them for overstaying the residency period as a result of expiring residency cards and passports, provided they leave the sultanate between November 15 and December 31. According to the min-

istry, this is in line with a decision by the Supreme Committee tasked with addressing developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry informed that migrant workers whose passports have expired can go to their embassies to renew their travel documents and then visit the Ministry of Labour office at Muscat International Airport to finalise the departure procedures.

To speed up the process, they should carry their travel documents, tickets, and medical certificates proving that they are free of COVID-19 infection.

Tropical depression turns into storm

Muscat -The weather analysis of the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre stated that the tropical depression in the southwest of the Arabian Sea has evolved into a tropical

storm with estimated surface wind speed of 45-55 knots around the centre.

The tropical storm is heading west towards the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden.



'Around 100 people need to donate blood daily'

Muscat - About 100 to 120 people should come forward and donate blood daily to meet the sultanate's health institutions' need for blood units, the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) has stated, calling on people to donate blood at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

DBBS said it will not organise a blood donation campaign this week but people can donate at the bank.



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YOUR SAY

LOW-KEY AFFAIR

What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on your National Day celebrations?

Yahya al Hassani
Government employee

I am sad about celebrating the National Day this year without His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. I did not decorate my house or car. Also, COVID-19 has greatly affected the celebrations. We could not organise any gatherings. It was low-profile celebrations.



Prashant Shah
Private sector employee

We are in a pandemic, so celebrations were low key. But the lights and decorations in the streets and malls, and the fireworks, were amazing. I look forward to the National Day celebrations every year.



Mir Waheed
Banker

There weren't any big events, so we had a mini celebration in office. It was a low-key affair. COVID-19 has made things difficult. We hope to make up for it next year.



Govind Arjan
Communications specialist

My celebrations were low key on account of the prevailing situation. I also missed the sight of many people in the evening in their cars, with children waving the flags of Oman. However, the significance of the momentous occasion did not diminish for me and I conveyed my greetings to Omani people on this special day in their lives.



Hamoud al Wahaibi
Adventurer

The celebrations this year were different. Everyone had to make his or her own plans. As for me, I went on a 12km hike alone to mark the day. It's the least I could do.



Sami Sarang
Filmmaker

We missed His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said this National Day. He was the founding father of the country and had a tremendous contribution in the development of Oman in every aspect. We are saddened by his absence and also because of the current situation. I decided to be at home. In the morning, however, I went to see the flags.



Mohan Anandan
Banker

COVID-19 has certainly restrained the extent of celebration in that one was required to follow the pandemic safety norms such as wearing mask, social distancing, avoiding social gathering, etc. However, the element of pride and patriotic fervour emanating from the glorious achievements of the Renaissance era has certainly remained high in every resident of this peaceful and beautiful country.



Bhaskara Rao
Attorney

I had to excuse myself from personally calling on my Omani friends to greet them or go out for dinner with them due to social distancing norms and other health safety measures. I couldn't go out to see the fireworks either, due to concerns of gatherings, or get my car decorated owing to fear of infection from garage workers.



Mohammed Ishtiyag
Finance manager

Having lived most of my working life here in Muscat and experiencing the joy of celebrating earlier National Days, there was an expectation for the 50th to be a mega event. But the passing away of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. Most of us stayed home and couldn't venture out for any celebrations.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

What preventive measures are you adopting this flu season amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue

50th National Day Celebrations

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The Royal Hospital receives modern cardiac simulators

Muscat - Al Jisr Foundation has handed over advanced cardiac simulation training devices to the National Heart Centre at The Royal Hospital, besides constructing a corridor connecting the outpatient clinics in the centre to the main building of the hospital.

The handover ceremony was held in the presence of Dr Qasim bin Ahmed al Salmi, director general of the Hospital, Dina al Khalili, head of Al Jisr Foundation, and a number of health and administrative staff of the centre.

Dr Faiza al Kindi, assistant director at the centre, informed that the equipment include advanced realistic training manikins that contain accurate sensors for the main vital signs of the body, including heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen concentration in the body.

The equipment will help train medical groups in dealing with critical and intermediate cardiac cases in a realistic yet simulated environment.

The manikins will be used to train health workers and patients' families on cardiovascular resuscitation.

The corridor connecting the outpatient clinics of the centre to the main building of the hospital will facilitate easy movement of medical staff and patients.

Dr Salmi praised the gesture saying it demonstrates the unified efforts between the public and private sectors for the advancement of society in various fields.

721 new COVID-19 cases, 15 deaths reported in last three days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced 721 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the last three days, taking the total to 122,081. There were 15 deaths and 863 recoveries in this period.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 113,269 while the number of deaths has reached 1,380,' an MoH statement said.

As of Sunday, a total of 256 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 121 in ICUs.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the room as instructed. It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus.



CASES FROM NOV 13 TO NOV 22

Nov 13 to 15 (Average of 315)	947
Nov 16	329
Nov 17, 18 (Average - 205)	411
Nov 19	231
Nov 20 to 22 (Average - 240)	721

MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and follow healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

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Pact inked to promote and innovate clay crafts industry

Muscat - Industrial Innovation Centre has signed an agreement with Al Mudar al Ahlia Foundation to establish an innovation unit to promote and invest in the clay crafts industry of the sultanate.

It is aimed at supporting entrepreneurs from among craftsmen and developing traditional crafts in line with the requirements of the times. This will help in the promotion of crafts in the country.

The agreement is meant for equipping and operating the clay crafts industries. The Industrial Innovation Centre will finance the project. Al Mudar al Ahlia Foundation will supervise the unit and support the craftsmen and entrepreneurs who want to make craft items.

On behalf of the Industrial Innovation Centre, Dr Abdullah bin Muhammad al Mahrouqi signed the agreement with chief executive officer of Al Mudar al Ahlia Foundation, Youssuf bin Abdullah al Jahwari.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr Mahrouqi expressed his pleasure on signing the agreement.



The agreement will help equip the clay crafts industries (Supplied photo)

"We are delighted to have this agreement of cooperation. The Industrial Innovation Centre believes that it is important to strengthen and invest in promising national sectors, which include clay crafts industries that are rooted in ancient Omani civilisation. The centre is presenting it in an innovative manner which matches the requirements of the time," he said.

He said that the Industrial Innovation Centre spares no ef-

forts to support local and promising industries with an innovative character which qualifies them to have a prominent position in the local, regional and global markets.

Jahwari said the agreement is considered a milestone in the activity of the foundation.

"It will help in the adoption of high-quality products with a unique innovative character which meets the requirements of individuals and institutions."

The first phase includes fi-

ancing the innovation project at Al Mudar al Ahlia Foundation and coordinating with the concerned authorities to provide Omani clay for the purpose of research and development.

This is in addition to the expansion of Al Mudar al Ahlia Foundation to increase production capacity and meet growing demand, undertake construction and civil expansion works, as well as the operation and management of the institution and marketing products in a manner that results in financial returns for both sides.

The second phase includes financing the setting up of the unit for clay crafts industries.

The unit will have a management room, space to display products and consumable items, an educational laboratory, a laboratory for development and designing, a modelling laboratory, a mini production line unit and a storage facility for raw materials.

The cost of the project will be determined on the basis of the outcome of the feasibility study and recommendations of the supervisory committee.

PASI board values initiatives to support Job Security Fund

Muscat - The board of directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has expressed appreciation for the efforts of establishments and individuals who made donations to the Job Security Fund.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the PASI board valued the noble initiative which, it said, was typical of Omani society's social collaboration and solidarity.

It noted that the contributions will alleviate the suffering of workers whose jobs were terminated.

PASI made the statement during its third meeting of the year, held under the chairmanship of H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, and Board Chairman of PASI.

The board also approved the final draft titled 'Approach to the

Third Stage' of PASI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, considered a roadmap of initiatives and projects for the next five years. It also looked into accounts submitted by the executive administration outlining expenditures and revenues of the approved budget.

PASI also reviewed proposals of opportunities for investment in the domestic arena.

ONA

National University of Science and Technology S.A.O.C

Invitation to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting of National University of Science and Technology S.A.O.C

The Board of Directors of National University of Science and Technology S.A.O.C invites all Shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), which will be held on Thursday 10th of December 2020 at 10 AM, at the headquarters of National University, Boushar. In the event that the quorum for the first EGM is not met, Wednesday, the 16th of December 2020, will be the date of the second meeting, at the same location and time set for the first EGM to consider the following agenda:

- To approve the increase in the authorized capital of the Company from RO 15,000,000 (Rials Omani Fifteen Million) to RO 26,635,073 (Rials Omani Twenty Six Million Six Hundred Thirty Five Thousand and Seventy Three), and the increase in the issued share capital of the Company from RO 500,000 (Rials Omani Five Hundred Thousand) to RO 26,635,073 (Rials Omani Twenty Six Million Six Hundred Thirty Five Thousand and Seventy Three) and amend Article (5) of the Articles of Association.
- To approve the allocation of shares resulting from the capital increase to Caledonian College of Engineering SAOC and Oman Medical College SAOC (the "Merged Entities") in accordance with the provisions of the merger agreement entered into by the Company and the Merged Entities.

Each Shareholder is entitled to give a written proxy to another person, who need not be a Shareholder, to attend the meeting and vote on his/her behalf at the EGM

For further information, please contact Mr. Juma Saleh Juma Al Mukhaini on telephone +968 99355270

Ministry calls on Omani farmers to cultivate lemon trees

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to diversify agricultural crops and increase the national income, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has urged Omani farmers to plant lemon trees.

Speaking to Muscat Daily an

official said the ministry will provide lemon seedlings free to farmers. The move is part of a project launched by the ministry to cultivate farms with various fruits such as lemons, dates and mangoes.

As per the ministry guidelines, the farmer must be an Omani and he should have a land not less than five acres and not more

than ten with modern irrigation systems.

The official said the farmer must adhere to the correct agricultural instructions for growing the target crops. The farmer must also allow the ministry's specialists to visit the site to ensure that it meets the stipulated conditions.

"The project will continue to

help farmers grow more diverse crops in the various governorates of the sultanate to support achieve self-sufficiency."

The ministry has produced 1,699,892 seedlings in the period from 2011 to 2018.

It is seeking to produce more seedlings to reduce the gap between local demand and supply, added the official.

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (RO)
1	62/2020 (Extend)	Supply and Installation of INFILL TYPE Gate at Dhofar Store Building	07/12/2020	05/01/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	38/=
2	63/2020 (Extend)	Design, Supply & Installation of Media Lab at Oman Electricity Transmission Company.	07/12/2020	05/01/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	123/=
3	67/2020 (Extend)	Consultancy Services for M of FF Drawing and to obtain Civil Defiance Approval from PADCA to Removal the Transformer Fire Fighting Sprinkler System	30/11/2020	29/12/2020	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	150/=

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender through the official working days of the hour from 8.00 am - 01.00 pm .
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document.(Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
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إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (ر.ع)
١	٢٠٢٠/١٢ (تجديد)	توريد وتركيب بوابة منزلقة أوتوماتيكية من المعدن المقاوم للصدأ بمخازن الشركة في محافظة ظفار.	٢٠٢٠/١٢/٠٧	٢٠٢١/٠١/٠٥	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول.	٣٨/=
٢	٢٠٢٠/١٣ (تجديد)	تصميم وتوريد وتركيب مختبر اعلامي للشركة العمانيه لنقل الكهرباء	٢٠٢٠/١٢/٠٧	٢٠٢١/٠١/٠٥	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول.	١٢٣/=
٣	٢٠٢٠/١٧ (تجديد)	الخدمات الاستشارية لازالة نظام مكافحة الحرائق (الرش) للمحطات القائمة مع الحصول على الموافقة من الهيئة العامة للدفاع المدني والاسعاف.	٢٠٢٠/١١/٣٠	٢٠٢٠/١٢/٢٩	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول.	١٥٠/=

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة ارسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب.
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني الى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك لتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ - ١:٠٠ م .
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد . (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريف مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط .
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٢١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - ومعنوناً بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٠ - هاتف - ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨, ٩٩١٠٥٤١٣
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com

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ص. ب. : ١٣٨٩, الخوض, الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢, سلطنة عمان
الهاتف : ٩١٢٤٢٨٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : ٩١٨٢٢٣٠٩٠٤٦
الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com



Ahli Islamic's National Day draw to reward 50 customers

As the 50th National Day celebrations continue, Ahli Islamic will mark the milestone celebrations with a special prize draw to reward 50 winners with RO2,000 each for a total prize money of RO100,000.

Offering unique savings opportunities with customer convenience, Qitaf's prime objective is to instill a culture of savings among its customers and reward them for their prudence. Qitaf account holders are eligible to participate in the draws if they maintain an average minimum balance of RO100. However, the minimum eligibility criteria for the quarterly draw is RO1,000.

Qitaf's weekly prize draws offer guaranteed cash prizes for two winners from each branch of Ahli Islamic; with each winner being rewarded with RO250. The monthly draws will be held in eight selected months of the year for a cash prize of RO20,000 for each of the eight winners throughout the network of branches spread across the sultanate. The quarterly draws, offer a prize money of RO100,000 each quarter, to one winner across the bank's branch



network. Additionally, a special prize draw will be held to mark the 50th National Day, rewarding 50 winners with RO2,000 each.

Ahli Islamic caters to all customer segments, including institutional, corporate, SME and retail, through its dedicated branches across the length and breadth of the sultanate.

Commenting on the special draw to mark the 50th National Day celebrations, Yousuf al

Rawahi, DGM and head of Ahli Islamic, said, "The 50th National Day celebrations is the most eagerly awaited event in Oman and marks the beginning a new renaissance under the dynamic leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. We intend to make this milestone event special for our customers with a special draw for a total prize money of RO100,000 rewarding 50 customers with

RO2000 each."

"Ahli Islamic is committed to reward all its loyal customers. The Qitaf prize scheme has totally transformed the lives of several account holders. We are confident that the various prize schemes will serve as an inspiration for others to save for the future," he added.

The Qitaf Saving Account, which is based on the Islamic Mudaraba principle, awards a

whopping RO100,000 to one lucky winner every quarter, apart from several other weekly and monthly cash prizes. Qitaf account holders are eligible to participate in the monthly, weekly, and special occasion prize draws if they maintain an average minimum balance of RO100. However, the minimum eligibility criteria for the quarterly draw is RO1,000. The Qitaf cash prize draw is conducted through a draw system, subject to a criteria set by the bank including the Sharia'a terms and principles as decided by the Sharia'a Supervisory Board of the bank.

Ahli Islamic is committed to its vision to be a leading provider of Islamic banking and finance services in the sultanate. Where the objectives is to abide by the ethics and values of Islamic finance, and helping customers, communities and people to prosper and grow. Moreover, Ahli Islamic facilitates customers to operate their business under Sharia'a principles by way of providing wide array of Sharia'a-based financial products and also ensures highest level of service standards.

Balkees to deliver talk at women leadership meet

Knowledge Oman president, Balkees Sulieman al Hassani has been confirmed as a latest keynote speaker, among 25 professionals from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Kenya, to join the upcoming 'Women in Leadership 2020' seminar.

The seminar is scheduled to be broadcasted online on two consecutive days, on November 23 and 24.

"Women, like men, can lead and indeed transform an organisation positively. They only need the necessary support, guidance and trust in their capabilities in order for them to demonstrate their excellence. I look forward to share the secrets that made women at Knowledge Oman deliver successful projects over the past 13 years," said Balkees.

Under the theme of 'Unleashing the powers, potential and positivity of women in the work place', the seminar will see selected professionals and senior leaders across the region share practical knowledge and experience in the form of speaking engagement on how they have



managed to overcome various challenges at workplace.

Balkees will focus her talk around how Knowledge Oman engages, supports, develops and promotes women in leadership positions through its structure and organisation.

Since 2008, Knowledge Oman has managed to launch society initiatives in the form of seminars, workshops, programmes, and activities along with 35 partners locally and internationally attracting over 80,000 registrations and 700 volunteers across the years.

Knowledge Oman received four awards that include an outstanding contribution to the cause of education from the World Human Resource Development Congress.

Anantara Jabal Akhdar Resort wins at world spa and travel awards

Anantara al Jabal al Akhdar Resort recently celebrated big wins at the World Spa Awards 2020, the 27th annual World Travel Awards 2020 and the Conde Nast Johansens Luxury Spa Awards for Excellence, swooping the top spots in Oman and the entire Middle East region.

Worldwide, Anantara Hotels, Resorts and Spas received a total of 11 top accolades at the World Spa Awards 2020, with Anantara Spa recognised as the World's Best Hotel Spa Brand for the fourth consecutive year. Named the World's Best Hotel Spa Brand at the 2017, 2018, and 2019 World Spa Awards, Anantara Spa retained this title in 2020 and once again was named the World's Best Hotel Spa Brand.

Representing Anantara Spa in the Middle East, Anantara Spa at Anantara al Jabal al Akhdar Resort was voted as Oman's Best Resort Spa for the second year running. Its sister properties in



Qatar and the United Arab Emirates also saw strong results with Anantara Spa at Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara being crowned Qatar's Best Hotel Spa; while Anantara Spa at Desert Islands Resort & Spa by Anantara was announced as Abu Dhabi's Best Resort Spa.

Following the wins at the World Spa Awards, Anantara al

Jabal al Akhdar also had the honour of being voted as Oman's Leading Luxury Hotel Villa at the 27th annual World Travel Awards this year.

The winning Villa, the Three Bedroom Royal Mountain Villa at Anantara al Jabal al Akhdar Resort is a one-of-a-kind two-storey residence with cliff's edge infinity pool featuring three en-

suite bedrooms, indoor and outdoor dining, a jacuzzi and a rain shower as well as a sundeck and majlis-style living area.

The accolades continue to roll in with Anantara Spa at Anantara al Jabal al Akhdar being recognised by the Condé Nast Johansens Luxury Spa Awards of Excellence as the Best Wellness Program.

Golden babies: They arrived on sultanate's 50th National Day

NMC Hospital - Al Hail, had a very special guest arriving on Oman's 50th National Day.

A couple welcomed a baby boy, Hamad, born at 10.29am on the special occasion of 50th Oman National Day.

"It is a great pride for us that our little boy shares his birthday with the National Day of our great nation. This day has certainly started on the best note possible," said the cheerful father, Hamdan.

He thanked the Almighty for delivering their baby safely and in good health. "The medical and nursing staff at NMC Hospital has offered wonderful service, and we would like to thank them for safely delivering our precious gift," he added. The joy and excitement of the couple is uncontrollable because their baby has arrived on such an eventful date.

Dr Addiba, expert - Obstetrics and Gynecology at NMC Hospital - Al Hail, said the facility was very pleased to bring happiness

to the family on this significant occasion of the country's 50th National Day.

"Delivering a baby on such a proud occasion is an incredible feeling and we are very happy. We wish a happy and a healthy life for this little bundle of joy," she added.

NMC Hospital, Ghubra, welcomed baby of Najia Sadaf, who arrived on Oman's 50th National Day. The baby's parents, Azeez Rahman and Najia Sadaf, who are both from India, expressed their happiness at the arrival of their girl baby at such an important occasion. The baby was delivered at 11.28am.

"We are very happy that God has blessed us with a healthy baby girl and this is the most precious moment of our lives. Oman is our second home and we celebrate National Day with as much excitement as our festivals in India. We are very joyous to welcome our baby on this National Day," Rahman said.

"The prompt services and care provided to us at NMC Hospital Ghubra is incomparable. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we are very satisfied with the doctors and nurses who have taken utmost care in treating us and the baby. They made sure of following all the guidelines to keep us safe. We wish them best for the noble work they are doing.

"The National Day will be another significant day to look forward to."

Dr Maheswari, expert in Obstetrics and Gynecology - NMC Hospital Ghubra, said, "It is always a happy time when we bring new life into the world. Having a baby at any time is a joyous occasion, but to have a baby delivered on Oman National Day 2020 is extra special, and we are proud that it happened here at NMC Hospital. We at NMC Hospitals are truly honoured to be part of this special moment."

Safety, on-board technologies of Renault Koleos praised

Featuring powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies, Renault Koleos has been winning the hearts of customers in Oman. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too.

Long-time owner of Renault Koleos Ali al Zedjali from Ibri says, "With its sturdy and high-end design, comfort and outstanding performance, it feels wonderful to own the dynamic SUV."

Bolstering Renault's position in the Oman market, Renault Koleos impresses car enthusiasts who value distinctive design, advanced technology, high reliability, and superior performance.

Issam al Shaban from Muscat who recently bought Renault Koleos said, "With plenty of safety features, Koleos goes to great lengths to keep everyone in the car safe. It echoes the brand's expertise in terms of style, sophistication, and comfort."

The 2.5lt petrol engine in

Koleos is an atmospheric, four-cylinder, 16-valve powerplant with double overhead camshafts. Power is 170hp (126kW) at 6,000rpm, with a peak torque of 233Nm at 4,000rpm. Care has been taken to minimise friction for enhanced performance and optimised fuel consumption. With 233Nm torque available from as low as 1,800rpm, it is extremely responsive at low and mid-range engine speeds and is particularly suited to towing (up to two tonnes). It can be specified with either two or four-wheel drive and is exclusively coupled to the X-Tronic automatic transmission.

Hasan al Lawati from Nizwa likes Renault Koleos for its optimised fuel consumption.

"Buying a Renault Koleos with high fuel economy has led to lower running costs for me. In addition, the Koleos' all mode 4x4-i system not only increases off-road capabilities but also improves roadholding to offer greater stability and safety,"



Hasan says.

Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort.

Mohammed Ibrahim from Quriyat likes the comprehensive

suite of driver-assistance systems and infotainment options, it offers.

"The infotainment options it offers the best in the segment. It is of high-end range and impresses all drivers," he says.

A spokesperson for Renault

Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "With a robust and high-end design, comfort and outstanding performance, Renault Koleos has found a place in the heart of customers. It is not surprising because Koleos offers a range of

features that are among the most efficient in the market."

Renault Koleos LE model has LED fog lamps with chrome borders, new 19-inch Kavea alloy wheels and resplendent new front grill.

The Renault Koleos SE has been augmented with Sand Grey leather seats, tilt adjustment front headrests, one touch easy folding rear seats with two step reclining and power seats, electric power seats for driver and passenger, 18-inch Argonaute two tone alloy wheels, auto folding rear view mirrors with door lock, auto-dimming rear view mirror. It also supports Apple car play and android auto.

The 2,705mm wheelbase - for a total vehicle length of 4,673mm - counts amongst the longest in the class and allows Koleos to boast record-breaking interior space to position itself as a D-segment SUV.

At the rear, Renault's trademark style is again prominently on display. The wide, horizontal

tail lights amplify the impression of width (1,843mm) and draw the eye to the Renault logo on the tailgate. Chrome inserts set into the lower part of the rear bumper take the shape of twin exhaust tail pipes, a detail that is complementary with Koleos' overall exterior design.

Powerful and efficient

Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies, Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.

Its high-performance attributes, assertive design and sophisticated interior, makes it one of the most popular vehicles ever. Its elegant appearance, muscular shoulders and stylish bodywork fully meets its customers' expectations and requirements.

For more local information, you can visit <https://www.renault.com.om/> or call our Toll Free number on 80050011.

OAB launches online workshops to hone youth, entrepreneurs' skills



Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the launch of its second series of educational workshops.

The Learning Hub platform specialises in accelerating the skills and knowledge of entrepreneurs and the youth, to ensure their readiness to meet the demands of the future.

The workshops commenced on November 22, and will run until February 2021.

They comprise of several topics of interest, presented by local and international experts. Speakers will be announced every month on OAB's social

media platforms.

Commenting on the upcoming workshops, Adil al Rahbi, head of Human Resources Division at OAB, said, "Fresh graduates and budding entrepreneurs require a wider set of skills, in addition to what was taught during their academic studies, for them to be able to achieve success.

"As a leading local financial institution, and in line with our social responsibility strategy, we have taken it upon ourselves to provide these specialised educational workshops, free-of-cost, to aspiring youths and

entrepreneurs within the sultanate. The upcoming workshops will shed light on several interesting topics, innovation, modern technological trends and programmes, paving their way in a world that is becoming increasingly competitive day-by-day."

The new workshops follow the incredible success of the first comprehensive set of Learning Hub workshops, launched earlier this year alongside the digital learning hub.

The platform saw over 700 participants taking part in over 20 specialised workshops that

were organised over the course of two months.

Leen al Atassi, head of Innovation at OAB, stated, "The second series of workshops will introduce new concepts and programmes that are used to develop innovative solutions and platforms.

"The workshops will discuss topics such as how to apply the principles of design thinking to build a business strategy and develop innovative proof of concepts, an introduction to deep learning, how to build an Artificial Intelligence/Computer Vision MVP and take it to the

market, among others. Each workshop will be presented by experts and consultants in their respective fields, and is aimed at enhancing participants' knowledge."

"We are delighted to be collaborating with key strategic partners to deliver these workshops. These include GBM, Phazero, ProgressSoft, and NNTC, which are specialised in digital solutions, alongside The Shifting Point and Pentapramid. I am confident that all participants will be able to benefit from the experience and interaction with experts," Leen added.

Oman Arab Bank is one of the local financial institutions that support innovation in the banking sector. The bank also saw the launch of its unique Innovation Lab in the first quarter of this year, which is the first-of-its-kind facility in the sultanate.

This initiative is in line with the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik - may the Almighty preserve him - and the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040, to promote innovation, establish an innovative culture and support the development of young talents in this field. The Innovation Lab will provide a range of services that include specialised workshops and direct guidance from experts.

This will be catered towards students and Fintechs based locally, regionally and globally, as well as to the Bank's staff, to develop and enhance their skillsets and knowledge, enabling them to turn their innovative ideas into value-added solutions.



Share your pride towards Oman with JCDecaux

In celebration of Oman's 50th year of renaissance, growth and prosperity, JCDecaux Oman has launched an innovative campaign along the streets of Muscat - in Shatti Beach road and Jawahart al Shatti in Qurm for residents and locals to share their significant moments as they celebrate the country's festivity.

By simply scanning the QR code, people can share their pride for Oman on Twitter along with the trending national day hashtag. Celebrating the 50th National Day has been a greatly anticipated event and JCDecaux Oman came together with the people of Oman and share the pride of this glorious country.

Bechir Chehab, managing director, said, "Despite the exceptional circumstances that the world is going through, here at

JCDecaux Oman we believe that innovation is important in communication. In this golden jubilee celebration, JCDecaux Oman celebrated with the nation in an innovative manner in line with Oman's 2040 Vision. I am delighted with the ability of our operational team in executing this creative concept. I am also proud of the capability in introducing innovation and creativity that blends with the traditional and local environment of Oman."

Adding some character to the streets of Muscat as well as the airports of Oman, JCDecaux is known to be the largest outdoor advertising specialist in the world and the only international player in the Middle East and a key partner of Muscat Municipality and Oman Airports in the sultanate.

data2cloud achieves accreditation

Supporting the sultanate in its digital transformation, data2cloud has been granted accreditation from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which enables it to deliver cloud services to the government's administrative units.

It's a welcome move for the Ooredoo subsidiary, which offers a variety of cloud-based ICT solutions that are locally-hosted at its world-class data centres in Oman.

Using Ooredoo's reliable network and advanced cloud services, data2cloud has been helping government institutions, large organisations and Small and Medium Enterprises all over the sultanate to be digital.

Monther bin Hamad al Mamari, chief executive officer at data2cloud, said, "We are proud to have achieved our official accreditation, a testament of our ability to deliver world-class solutions that at the same time in-



crease profitability and protect infrastructure.

"Already trusted by some government organisations in Oman as well as large corporates, data2cloud is also scalable to integrate with local mail servers, offering a comprehen-

sive and centralised account administration.

"As the sultanate continues to pursue its digital transformation, we are prepared to serve their present hosting and security needs, while partnering with them on their journey in an effi-

cient and cost-effective way."

Launched in 2015, data2cloud offers cutting-edge cloud computing services across Oman.

A virtual 'office in the sky', it uses Ooredoo's reliable network and world-class infrastructure to give businesses the chance to further elevate their cloud operations with cost-effective solutions and flexible consumption-based payment plans, backed by world-class Service Level Agreements.

Other services include Bridge Video Conferencing, Cloud Drive, infrastructure, backup, monitoring, security, IoT, containers, email collaboration, and Backup and Disaster Recovery Service. D2C is committed to delivering best in class services to its customers, and to helping them succeed in their digitisation journey.

To find out more about data2cloud, visit www.data2cloud.om.

VISIT TO SAS NAQVI MUSEUM



Chitra Narayan, principal, Middle East Nurseries, and winner of the Women Award 2020, and columnist Lakhshmi with her son visited the SAS Naqvi, Sports, Olympics and Hockey Museum in Ruwi on the eve of the National Day

Madayn conducts training programmes on practical leadership, e-learning

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised three training programmes on practical leadership, e-learning and geotechnical engineering. These programmes come along the lines of the constant efforts undertaken by Madayn to develop the capabilities of the human cadres in the various industrial cities.

The virtual practical leadership programme, which targeted the directors general at Madayn, aimed at equipping the participants with the advanced leadership methods through

theory and practical approaches. The programme represents an intro to a further advanced and comprehensive programme for leadership development in the institutions.

Moreover, the e-learning programme, which was also conducted remotely, emphasised on the significance of remote training opportunities especially in light of the current coronavirus pandemic circumstances. The programme also outlined the benefits of e-learning which include speed and accuracy of programme implementation, cost effective-



ness, possibility of participating in remote local and international training programmes, and easiness of attracting trainers from inside and outside the sultanate.

The third training programme highlighted 'Geotechnical Engineering and Soil Improvement', which was moderated by Dr Mohammed al Aghbari, associate professor at College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University.

The programme elaborated on geotechnical investigation, geotechnical laboratory tests, soil-related problems, and soil

improvement methods. This programme presents an opportunity to exchange and transfer scientific and practical expertise from the academics from various higher education institutions in Oman.

Madayn Industrial Academy was established in 2019 to offer training opportunities for the national cadres to enhance administrative, financial and technical skills, boost their skills and raise their productivity, provide value adding services to the investors in the industrial cities, provide new job opportunities for the national cadres. Madayn

Industrial Academy organises a series of training programmes and events that address the trending topics and challenges locally and globally.

The academy also organises training for employment in co-operation with the concerned bodies in this field. Madayn aims through the academy to develop the skills of the national cadres and complement the efforts made by the sultanate to support training and Omanisation by providing scientific and practical training to the cadres in order to meet the needs of the industrial sector.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

ATLETICO EDGE PAST BARCA



Atletico Madrid's Yannick Carrasco scores past Barcelona's goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen during the Spanish League match at the Wanda Metropolitano in Madrid on Saturday (AFP)

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid delivered a major boost to their hopes of winning La Liga on

Saturday by beating Barcelona 1-0 and consigning their opponents to their worst start to a league season in 29 years.

Yannick Carrasco finished brilliantly from range after mistakes from Gerard Pique and Marc-Andre ter Stegen left the

goal gaping but Barca, and a below-par Lionel Messi, failed to respond at the Wanda Metropolitano.

Instead, Atletico recorded their first league victory over Barcelona in ten years, which puts them three points ahead of

Real Madrid, with a game in hand, and second in the table, level on points with early leaders Real Sociedad.

It also leaves their opponents languishing in tenth, with Barcelona's 11 points from their first eight games their worst tally at this stage since the 1991-92 season.

"Like any coach, I am responsible," said coach Ronald Koeman. "We know we have to improve the results. I continue to trust the players I have."

Real Madrid had earlier been held to a draw by Villarreal, another slip-up for the reigning champions to enforce the sense that this could be Atletico's year.

And beating Barcelona in La Liga for the first time since 2010 - before Simeone arrived as coach - will do wonders for the team's belief and extends what is now a considerable advantage in the table.

It also extends Atletico's unbeaten run in the league to 24 matches. "Today we were able to win but it absolutely doesn't change anything," said Simeone. "We're working well and I'm excited about this team."

Another disappointing day for Barca was soured further by the

sight of Pique hobbling off in tears with what the club said was a 'sprained right knee'.

Pique was hurt during a collision with Angel Correa and was in distress as he departed.

"I am worried," said Koeman. "A lot of damage has been done."

Antoine Griezmann almost put Barca in front against his old club while Marcos Llorente went closest for Atletico, skimming the crossbar after a neat exchange between Kieran Trippier and Correa down the right.

Messi might have scored but was uncharacteristically hesitant, with an even half about to finish goalless until two errors gifted Atletico the lead.

Pique was caught out of position after a heavy touch and Mario Hermoso did well to free Carrasco. Ter Stegen, already upfield, rushed out to fill the gap Pique had left but Carrasco's first touch feathered the ball through the goalkeeper's legs before a curling finish from 50 yards sent the ball into the open net.

OTHER RESULTS:

Saturday: Levante 1 Elche 1, Sevilla 4 Celta Vigo 2. Sunday: Eibar 0 Getafe 0. AFP

Ronaldo double lifts Juve



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring against Cagliari at the Juventus stadium in Turin on Saturday

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Cristiano Ronaldo scored his third brace in five games as champions Juventus moved up to second place in Serie A on Saturday with a 2-0 win over Cagliari in Turin.

Andrea Pirlo's side are one point behind leaders AC Milan, who travel to fourth-placed Napoli on Sunday. Atalanta were held 0-0 at promoted Spezia days before their Champions League trip to Liverpool.

Juventus had been held 1-1 at Lazio last time out - one of four stalemates this season for the nine-time reigning champions - but quickly took charge against the Sardinians.

"We needed a match like

this," said Pirlo. "There were excellent performances, even from those returning from national teams. A lot of them arrived two days ago and did their first training yesterday and were also tired from the trip."

"Tonight they also had fun, performances like this allow the players to gain confidence."

Federico Bernardeschi had an early goal ruled out for offside before Ronaldo struck twice in a four-minute spell before the break.

The Portuguese striker blasted in an Alvaro Morata cross on 38 minutes, before latching onto a Merih Demiral header for the second from close range minutes later.

Ronaldo, 35, has come back strong after his coronavirus layoff, scoring eight goals in five games to join Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic at the top of the Serie A scorers' chart.

Dutch defender Matthijs de Ligt played the entire game in his first match since shoulder surgery in August, a boost for Pirlo's side without injured duo Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini before Tuesday's Champions League game against Hungarian side Ferencvaros.

OTHER RESULTS:

Sunday: Fiorentina 0 Benevento 1, Hellas Verona 0 Sassuolo 2, Inter Milan 4 Torino 2, Roma 3 Parma 0, Sampdoria 1 Bologna 2.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP:

Sunday: Rangers 4 Aberdeen 0. AFP



Tottenham's Giovani Lo Celso (second from left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Manchester City

Spurs show title credentials against toothless Man City

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Pep Guardiola admitted Manchester City played perfectly into Tottenham's hands as Spurs shot to the top of the table with a 2-0 win thanks to goals on the counter-attack from Son Heung-min and Giovani Lo Celso.

Spurs have not won an English top-flight title in 60 years, but showed their title credentials with a defensive resilience to frustrate City's domination of possession and ruthlessly take their chances as they scored with their only two shots on target.

Defeat leaves City already eight points off the leaders, albeit with a game in hand, down in tenth with just three wins from their opening eight games.

The writing was on the wall for the visitors after just five minutes when one simple ball over the top from Tanguy Ndombele caught Joao Cancelo sleeping and Son had the pace and precise finish under Ederson to register his sixth goal in 11 games against City.

Victory ensured Tottenham will finish the day on top of the table for the first time in six years. Jose Mourinho's men move two points ahead of Chelsea, who they face next weekend at Stamford Bridge.

"I prefer to be top but it is not an obsession," said Mourinho. I don't care about the table,

Everton end losing streak

London, UK - Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored after just 42 seconds as Everton ended their losing run with a 3-2 win at Fulham on Sunday.

Calvert-Lewin maintained his fine form to put Carlo Ancelotti's side ahead inside a minute at Craven Cottage.

Bobby Decordova-Reid equalised for Fulham, but England striker Calvert-Lewin netted again and Abdoulaye Doucoure got Everton's third before half-time. Ruben Loftus-Cheek reduced the deficit

in the second half, but Everton held on to win for the first time in five league games. After a three-game losing streak, Everton are up to sixth.

Bottom of the table Sheffield United's wait for their first win this season goes on after they were beaten 1-0 by West Ham at Bramall Lane. Chris Wilder's side have lost eight of their nine league games. Sebastien Haller broke the deadlock in the 56th minute.

AFP

the opponent, the competition. I want to go to the next game believing we can win the game."

Guardiola ended speculation over his future by committing to a new contract as City boss until 2023 this week.

Man United 'must do better'

Manchester, UK - Bruno Fernandes said Manchester United have the quality to do 'much better' after his twice-taken penalty saw off lowly West Brom 1-0 to end a run of six games without a Premier League win at Old Trafford.

The Portuguese midfielder got a second chance after Sam Johnstone had saved his first

spot-kick, but came off his line in doing so.

United also got a break at the other end moments earlier when a penalty given for a foul by Fernandes on Conor Gallagher was overturned after a VAR review.

"First it was very important to win the game, not because it's the first win at Old Trafford, but because we need the points," Fernandes told *BT Sport*.

"We can do much better, we have the qualities to do much better."

Victory moves Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men up to ninth and within seven points of early pace-setters Tottenham with a game in hand.

AFP

Moukoko, 16, makes history

GERMAN LEAGUE

Berlin, Germany - At 16 years and one day, Borussia Dortmund striker Youssoufa Moukoko became the youngest player in Bundesliga history on Saturday when he made his German league debut in the 5-2 romp at Hertha Berlin.

Moukoko's late cameo off the bench at Berlin's Olympic Stadium broke the previous record set by Nuri Sahin, who

was 16 years, 335 days when he made his league debut for Dortmund in 2005.

Moukoko came on after 85 minutes to replace Erling Braut Haaland, who scored four second-half goals in a stunning display.

OTHER RESULTS:

Saturday: Borussia Moenchengladbach 1 Augsburg 1, Hoffenheim 3 Stuttgart 3,

Schalke 0 Wolfsburg 2, Arminia Bielefeld 1 Bayer Leverkusen 2, Eintracht Frankfurt 1 RB Leipzig 1. Sunday: Freiburg 1 Mainz 3.

FRENCH LEAGUE: Saturday:

Brest 4 Saint-Etienne 1. Sunday: Nantes 1 Metz 1, Dijon 0 Lens 1, Montpellier 4 Strasbourg 3, Reims 0 Nimes 1.

AFP



Oman’s Riyami, Toqi named in Asian volleyball committees

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman’s experienced coach Shihab Ahmed Al Din al Riyami and well-known referee Amur Humaid al Toqi have been nominated to the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) coaches committee and referees committees respectively.

The appointments of the duo comes close on the heels of the election of Oman Volleyball

Association (OVA) chairman Sheikh Badar al Rawas as a board member of the continental volleyball body.

The AVC announced the composition of its technical committees and council following the AVC board of administration’s approval during its first meeting via video conference, chaired by AVC president Ms Rita Subowo recently.

Subowo from Indonesia is the first woman to become the



Shihab Ahmed Al Din al Riyami

president of the Asian Volleyball Confederation.

Riyami is one of the eight



Amur Humaid al Toqi

members in the AVC coaches committee, which is chaired by Mr Park Kiwon from South

Korea. Mohamed Ahmed al Thawadi from Bahrain has been named as secretary.

Riyami is an experienced and widely-travelled coach and has had stints as Oman national team and Seeb Club coach. Riyami is one of the coaches who is part of the ongoing EuroAsia Coaches Cooperation Programme, jointly run by AVC and European federation. He was named as the official team member of AVC experts for the project in August this year.

Speaking after receiving the letter from AVC on his appointment as a member of coaches’ committee recently, Riyami said, “It is a matter of pride for me and Oman sports. My appointment underlines the progress made by Oman volleyball and its officials in recent times. Oman has now three officials in the AVC set-up. I would like to thank Sheikh Badar al Rawas for his continuous support over the past many years.”

Riyami added that he would ‘give his best and help develop coaches in Oman and Asia’.

Songsak Chareonpong from Thailand was retained as the chairman of AVC referees committee, with Takashi Shimoyama from Japan was appointed as secretary.

Toqi is among the ten members in the committee and Adel Hussein al Harbi from Kuwait is likely to be endorsed as the 11th member soon.

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TENNIS ROUND-UP

Australian Open decision soon: Tournament chief



A file photo of Rod Laver Arena during the 2019 men’s singles final match between Novak Djokovic of Serbia and Rafael Nadal of Spain in Melbourne, Australia (AFP)

Sydney, Australia - Australian Open chief Craig Tiley said on Sunday he expected ‘decisions soon’ on arrangements for the tournament after reports said it could be shifted from its usual January slot, while Rafael Nadal urged players to be patient.

Tiley had originally wanted players to start arriving in Australia from mid-December so they could undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine before playing traditional warm-up events before the Grand Slam.

But that plan was thrown into doubt by Victoria state Premier Dan Andrews, particularly since Melbourne only recently emerged from a months-long

lockdown to eliminate a second wave of COVID-19.

Andrews reportedly only wants players to arrive from early January, which would make it all but impossible to hold the high-profile ATP Cup and other tournaments before the scheduled start of the Open on January 18.

It also remains unclear whether players will be allowed to train during quarantine.

“Tennis Australia is doing everything we can to finalise the summer of tennis as soon as possible,” Tiley said in a statement on Sunday.

“We are working closely with the Victorian government on a

plan that takes into account the needs of the players, fans, our partners and staff, and is of major benefit to the Victorian and Australian economy.

The *Melbourne Age* newspaper said it understood the Australian Open would likely be delayed by one or two weeks, with February 1 emerging as a

but also conscious of reaching a solution with the state government that ensures the safety of the entire community,” said Tiley.

Twenty-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal said it was an unprecedented situation and urged patience from players.

“We just need to be patient and accept the situation that we are facing. That is difficult for everyone,” he said at the ATP Finals in London on Saturday.

“We need to be flexible to understand the situation and to find a way to play as many tournaments as possible next year.”

AFP

Tennis Australia is doing everything we can to finalise the summer of tennis as soon as possible

CRAIG TILEY, AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHIEF



“We are continuing our urgent talks with local health authorities regarding quarantining and bio-security requirements and are confident we will have decisions soon.”

possible start date. But the *Melbourne Herald Sun* said it could be pushed back as far as early March.

“Tennis Australia is acutely aware of the need for certainty,



Russia’s Daniil Medvedev returns to Spain’s Rafael Nadal during their semifinal match at the O2 Arena in London on Saturday

Medvedev defeats Nadal to set up Thiem title match

ATP FINALS

London, UK - Daniil Medvedev sent Rafael Nadal packing after a gruelling slugfest at the ATP Finals in London on Saturday to set up a title match against Novak Djokovic’s conqueror Dominic Thiem.

The Spanish world No 2, who has never won the elite event in his illustrious career, faltered when serving for the match in the second set and was beaten 3-6, 7-6 (7-4), 6-3.

Russian giant Medvedev - who has won nine matches in a row - put Nadal’s serve under intense pressure in the early stages of their evening match at the empty O2 Arena.

But he was unable to make his chances count and a drop in his level allowed the Spaniard to break to love to lead 5-3 before he served out for the set.

Medvedev immediately found his focus at the start of the second set, winning his first service game to love before Nadal, a two-time finalist at the event, double-faulted to give the Russian a 2-0 lead.

Just when it seemed as though Medvedev was cruising, Nadal, 34, broke back twice to take total control and stepped up to serve for the match.

But in another astonishing twist, the 20-time Grand Slam

champion played a sloppy game, allowing the Russian back into the match, and Medvedev won the eventual tie-break. The deciding set hinged on the seventh game - the Russian produced an overhead winner on his third break point, breaking again to beat Nadal for the first time.

The Spaniard entered the match on a 71-match winning streak after taking the opening set, but 24 year old snapped that run with a gritty mental and physical performance over two hours and 36 minutes.

“I felt really strange until 5-4 for him in the second set, when he was serving for the match,” said the fourth seed, who lost all three of his matches on his debut at the tournament last year.

“It felt like I was doing great shots but there was no link in my game and that was why I was losing. He was better in the important moments. I couldn’t return in the important moments, I couldn’t make a good shot in the important moments.

“I decided to change some small things. Just being closer, going for it a little bit more. I felt like I had the chances to win before (in) some games, a set maybe, but it didn’t work, so I had to change and it worked really well. I am really happy about it.”

AFP

France down Scotland

AUTUMN NATIONS CUP

Edinburgh, UK - Virimi Vakatawa scored the only try of the match as France beat Scotland 22-15 in an Autumn Nations Cup international at Murrayfield on Sunday.

Victory saw France gain revenge for a 28-17 Six Nations loss to Scotland in Edinburgh in March - Les Bleus’ only defeat this year. France’s win left them top of Pool B and on course for a place in the showpiece match of next month’s Nations Cup finals weekend.

Earlier on Saturday, Wales ended their six-Test losing streak with an unimpressive 18-0 win over Georgia in their Nations Cup

match at Llanelli, UK.

The host scored two tries through the lively Louis Rees-Zammit on his first Test start and scrum-half Rhys Webb, with Calum Sheedy scoring the rest of the points with the boot.

The laboured manner of the victory will not have eased pressure on head coach Wayne Pivac whose side face a far tougher task in the final pool match against unbeaten England next weekend.

Pivac had given three players their Test debuts in the starting line-up, including James Botham, the grandson of England cricket legend Ian Botham.

AFP



Red Bull KTM Tech 3’s Miguel Oliveira celebrates on the podium after winning the Portuguese MotoGP race in Portimao on Sunday (AFP)

Oliveira claims home victory

PORTUGUESE MOTOGP

Portimao, Portugal - Miguel Oliveira said it was ‘extra special’ to win his home MotoGP race in Portugal on Sunday for a dream finish to the season.

Jack Miller’s second place in the Algarve ensured that Ducati sealed the constructors’ title.

Oliveira followed up his maiden victory in Styria in August by taking the title under bright blue skies at Portimao in what was his first race in the premier class in his home country. “It’s unreal,” said Oliveira afterwards. “You dream about these kinds of races and to finally be able to do it is incredi-

ble. I have no words to describe it, just my thanks to all the people and the crowd watching at home that couldn’t be here today. To them I say thank you and to my team as well.”

The KTM Tech 3 rider’s win means there was no record-breaking tenth race winner, with Fabio Quartararo, Brad Binder, Andrea Dovizioso, Franco Morbidelli, Maverick Vinales, Danilo Petrucci, Alex Rins and already-crowned champion Joan Mir making it nine victors at the end of an unpredictable World Championship.

Morbidelli came out on top of a six-way battle for the runners-

up spot, despite being pipped to second place on the last lap by Australian Miller.

Italian Morbidelli finishes in the overall standings 13 points behind Mir, who had confirmed his first world title in Valencia last weekend.

Miller’s strong finish meanwhile ensured Ducati claimed the constructors’ title for the first time since 2007 at the expense of Suzuki, whose hopes were dashed after a disappointing weekend for Mir.

Portimao was hosting the country’s first race in the championship since 2012.

AFP

Sailing Arabia-The Tour postponed

COVID-19 forces Oman Sail to defer the 11th edition, likely to host the regatta in October-November, 2021



A file photo of teams participating during the EFG Sailing Arabia-The Tour regatta

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The coronavirus pandemic has caused disruptions to sports activities around the world and with the situation worsening in Europe in recent times, Oman Sail, the organisers of the EFG Sailing Arabia-The Tour (SATT), have decided to postpone the 2021 edition.

The 11th edition of the region's most popular regatta was scheduled to be held from January 24-February 6, 2021, and the organisers had already received confirmation of eight teams.

However, the growing concerns over air travel restrictions and with Europe witnessing a fresh spike in COVID-19 cases, the organisers

have decided to postpone SATT to the last quarter of the year.

Though the fresh dates are yet to be announced, an Oman Sail official confirmed that it would likely be held in October-November, 2021.

The regatta is an attempt to showcase the natural beauty of Oman and takes the teams and spectators on a journey from Salalah to Muscat.

Teams are challenged at five venues with a coastal raid at each venue, three in-port races and one off-shore leg to test the teamwork, tactics and endurance of each crew.

SATT also provides a perfect opportunity for talented local sailors to compete against a strong international fleet.

The blend of short sprints and longer campaigns require a variety of strategies, leading to intense racing at the five diverse locations along the coast of Oman.

Over the years, the Tour has become one of Oman Sail's most anticipated events, attracting a wide variety of sailing talent from across the globe.

The Tour also creates avenues for vital community engagement and the 11th edition

is the third to be held only in Oman.

SATT is expected to significantly boost domestic tourism, empower local communities all along the coast and demonstrate the sultanate's deep-rooted maritime traditions to a growing audience.

Each team competes on identical Diam24 boats in a pure test of preparation and racing skill.

Since its debut in 2011, EFG Sailing Arabia-The Tour has attracted some of the biggest names in sailing.

As per the initial schedule for the 2021 edition, teams were to begin racing in Salalah with the first coastal raid at Mirbat and the first in-port race at the Hawana Salalah Marina. The itinerary then takes the teams to Duqm, Masirah Island, Sur, Ras al Hadd before reaching Muscat.

Oman Sail official confirmed on Sunday that the only change in the itinerary for the 2021 edition will be the fresh dates. "The race plan, venues will remain the same as we had announced earlier. The only change will be the new dates for next October-November," he said.

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A file photo of all-women team participating in SATT

Oman Sail's Kindi elected to World Sailing Council

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Experienced sports administrator and Oman Sail's director of sailing, Rashid al Kindi, has been elected to the World Sailing Council (WSC), the apex body of world sailing.

Kindi was elected from Group I, which constitutes West Asia and has ten nations as members. Kindi polled six votes to defeat his rival Jamal Zaal Krishan Almuhairei from the UAE, who received just one vote. Kindi is one of the 28 Group representatives and will serve on the World Sailing Council for the period of 2021-2024.

Among the other Asians elected to the WSC were Qu Chan of China and Abdur Rehman Arshad of Pakistan.

Speaking after being elected to WSC, Kindi said, "This is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to represent my country. It is a reflection of Oman Sail's standing in the global sailing community."

"I thank the World Sailing Council for placing their trust in me and I am looking forward to taking up the role and helping to shape the future of sailing for the next four years and beyond."

"I look forward to working closely with the sailing's governing body and gaining a new perspective on international sailing to help Oman sailing continue to progress."

Mohammed al Amri, Oman's Maritime Sports Committee chief said, "I have great confidence in Rashid's

ability to contribute to the international sailing scene. He possesses vast experience gained with Oman Sail in organising events, designing sailing programmes and coaching young sailors to maximise their potential. We're incredibly proud that he has been elected and



This is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to represent my country

RASHID AL KINDI

recognised on the world stage."

In a statement, Oman Sail said, "Kindi's appointment strengthens our commitment to empowering the youth of Oman and unlocking development opportunities to build competencies and skill-sets through sailing."

"By hosting and participating high-profile world-class events and international competitions, Oman Sail is also able to showcase the sultanate to a worldwide audience in line with the goals set forth by Vision 2040."

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WALMART PROFITS JUMP

Walmart reported a net income of US\$5.1bn in the third quarter, up 56.2 per cent from the year ago period, following a 5.2 per cent increase in sales to US\$134.7bn as it focuses on e-commerce growth

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BRIEFS

Boeing says more freighters needed to support global supply chains

Boeing recently released its biennial World Air Cargo Forecast (WACF), predicting demand for 2,430 freighters over the next 20 years, including 930 new production freighters and 1,500 freighters converted from passenger airplanes.

The forecast reflected COVID-19 impacts and opportunities as well as substantial long-term demand for freighters over the next two decades enabled by a rebound in global trade and long-term growth, the WACF said.

According to the new forecast, world air cargo traffic will grow at 4 per cent per year over the next 20 years. This growth is influenced by trade and growing express shipments to support expanding e-commerce operations. With these developments and the proven need for dedicated freighter capacity to support the world's transportation system, the global air cargo fleet is expected to grow by more than 60 per cent through 2039.

Apple agrees to pay \$113mn over iPhone battery complaints

Apple has agreed to pay US\$113mn to settle litigation with more than 30 US states over its slowdown in performance of older iPhones to manage battery power.

The latest 'batterygate' settlement will divide the settlement among California and 33 other states, according to a statement by state Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

The settlement resolves complaints that the tech giant made misrepresentations about iPhone batteries and software updates that throttled processing performance to manage insufficient battery power, according to the state official.

"Apple withheld information about their batteries that slowed down iPhone performance, all while passing it off as an update," said Becerra.

The settlement resolves complaints about Apple's iPhone 6 and 7 generation phones which according to the states' complaint were susceptible to performance loss.

China sees rise in steel imports in Sept

China's import of steel hit a new high in September, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).

The country had imported 2.89mn tonnes of steel in September, with the import price averaging US\$689 per tonne, data from the MIIT showed.

In the first nine months, China imported 15.07mn tonnes of steel, up 72.2 per cent year on year and exported 40.39mn tonnes, down 19.6 per cent year on year, the data showed.

China's steel market witnessed hot demand in 2019 thanks to the steady operation of infrastructure building, real estate and other downstream industries.

Investment at Sohar Port and Freezone reaches R010.4bn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone, one of the largest industrial and logistics projects in the sultanate, has been able to attract a total investment of more than R010.4bn since the inception.

'Since the establishment of the port 16 years ago, and the establishment of the adjacent freezone 10 years ago, Sohar Port and Freezone has attracted a total of over US\$27bn (or R010.4bn) worth of investments, valued as of mid-2020. This was a positive reflection of Sohar's contribution towards achieving the sultanate's development goals and economic diversification efforts within the industrial and logistics sectors,' Sohar Port and Freezone said in a statement issued on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day.

Sohar Port facilitates quick and easy transportation of goods to serve the demands of fast-growing markets across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The existing road network links Sohar Port and Freezone to the neighbouring countries, including the UAE, and will soon provide direct connectivity to Saudi Arabia.



The port receives over 3,000 vessels annually and handles estimated 1.5mn tonnes of cargo each week, with the capacity to handle more than 2mn TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) per year.

Since its establishment, Sohar Port and Freezone have been able to provide over 24,000 direct and indirect job opportunities. The contribution of Sohar Port and Freezone to Oman's national GDP was estimated to be over 2.8 per cent and valued at R0773mn in 2017, as per the latest statistics from

the National Center for Statistics and Information.

"Oman has established itself as a modern and stable nation in only five decades, making the 50th National Day of the Renaissance a truly significant milestone. The efforts of the people of Oman, under a wise leader, deserve to be commended and recognised. On behalf of Sohar Port and Port of Rotterdam, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik - may the Almighty preserve him - and all the Omani people we have built

strong bonds of friendship with over the years," Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port said.

Sohar Port and Freezone has established itself as a key national project, successfully attracting foreign investments and industries, while simultaneously contributing towards the economic development of the sultanate.

As per the statement, Sohar Port is the main gateway for import-export in the sultanate, with over 60 per cent of Oman's imports entering through the port.

This is in addition to over 40 per cent and 80 per cent of exported and re-exported goods, respectively.

Sohar Port and Freezone aims to position itself as an integrated logistics hub that offers the latest global technologies while maintaining the highest standards of sustainability for all its activities. This makes it aligned with Oman's Vision 2040 and the Oman Logistics Strategy 2040, which is supervised and implemented by Asyad Group, Oman's integrated logistics provider.

Abu Dhabi announces new oil discoveries

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi's Supreme Petroleum Council on Sunday announced new onshore discoveries of non-conventional, recoverable oil resources estimated at 22bn barrels and an increase of conventional oil reserves by 2bn barrels in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

The Supreme Petroleum Council announced the new discoveries during a virtual meeting headed by Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, and deputy chairman of the Supreme Petroleum Council.

The meeting approved Abu Dhabi National Oil Company's (Adnoc) action plan to increase its capital investment to AED448bn over the next five years, which will reinject AED160bn into local economy. WAM



Majlis A'Shura discusses 2021 budget, five-year plan reports

Muscat - Majlis A'Shura on Sunday discussed two reports drafted by the Majlis Economic and Financial Committee. The reports - one on State Budget 2021 and the other on the Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) draft project - were forwarded to the Majlis by the government.

The deliberations took place live during Majlis A'Shura's second ordinary session of the second annual sitting (2020-2021) of the ninth term, held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Ma'awali, chairman of Majlis A'Shura.

In an opening speech, Ma'awali stressed the need to



exert maximum efforts and provide the best means of upgrading performance in a manner that meets the expectations of citizens.

Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi,

head of the Economic and Financial Committee, reviewed the two draft reports and the Majlis members exchanged views on them.

ONA

Mercedes-Benz Oman appoints Shaun Michael as new CEO

Muscat - Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced the appointment of Shaun Michael as its new chief executive officer.

An industry veteran, Michael is set to add further momentum to the company's journey of transformation. Navigating the new normal, he succeeds Lawrence Good to continue to drive the focus on customer experience and lead Mercedes-Benz Oman into the next phase of its strategic direction, a press release said.

Michael said, "I am delighted to be joining Mercedes-Benz Oman and honoured to be leading a great team that has been the driving force behind the com-



Shaun Michael

pany's unprecedented growth over almost five decades. Although these are difficult times, there is much to look forward

to and I am confident of a promising future, as we continue to push digital innovation, trendsetting vehicles, and customer service second to none in the market."

With over 28 years of premium brand automotive retail experience in Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi, Michael has held a variety of senior roles throughout the industry. Prior to joining Mercedes-Benz Oman, he was the chief operating officer at Sandown Motors Mercedes-Benz in South Africa.

Michael's diverse experience and track record of success well-position him for this key role at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

Switch to electric vehicles could 'end oil era': Analysis

Paris, France - Emerging markets switching from petrol to diesel engines to electric vehicles (EVs) could save US\$250bn annually and slash expected growth in global oil demand by as much as 70 per cent, an industry analysis showed.

As more and more nations such as China and India look to grow their electric fleet, they are in turn reducing reliance on imported oil, with EVs forecasted to soon be cheaper to make and run than their fossil-fuel-fired cousins.

An analysis of EV cost trends by industry watchdog Carbon Tracker found that a switch to EVs could save China - a world leader in the technology - US\$80bn each year by 2030.

Increased EV production would drastically reduce the cost of oil imports, which account for 1.5 per cent of China's GDP and 2.6 per cent of India's.

The analysis found that the EV revolution could essentially fund itself as component costs fall over time and governments turn away from fossil fuel infrastructure such as pipelines and refineries which risk becoming stranded assets as transportation gets greener.

"This is a simple choice between growing dependency on what has been expensive oil produced by a foreign cartel, or domestic electricity produced by renewable sources whose prices fall over time," said Kingsmill Bond, Carbon Tracker energy strategy and lead report author.

"Emerging market importers will bring the oil era to an end."

Transport in emerging markets accounts for more than 80 per cent of all expected growth in oil demand by 2033.

Analysing the International Energy Agency's (IEA) business



as usual emissions scenario, the report found that half of that growth is forecast to come from

China and India.

It calculated that by switching to the IEA's Sustainable Develop-

ment Scenario - under which EVs account for 40 per cent of car sales in China and 30 per cent in

India - oil demand growth would be slashed by 70 per cent this decade.

The authors said a fall of 20 per cent in battery costs in a decade had driven 'huge new markets' for EV growth.

Using industry baseline figures, the analysis calculated that the cost of importing oil to run an average car over its 15-year lifetime (US\$10,000) is already ten times higher than the cost of the solar equipment needed to power an equivalent EV.

Last year, EVs accounted for 61 per cent of China's two-wheeler sales and 59 per cent of bus sales.

"Factor in the war on plastics hitting petrochemical demand and rising EV penetration in developed markets, it becomes ever more likely that we have seen peak oil demand in 2019," said Bond.

AFF

MSM falls 0.41%, volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.41 per cent to close at 3,612.62 points on Sunday.

While turnover rose 10.99 per cent to RO660,836, volumes fell 20.94 per cent to 3.06mn shares.

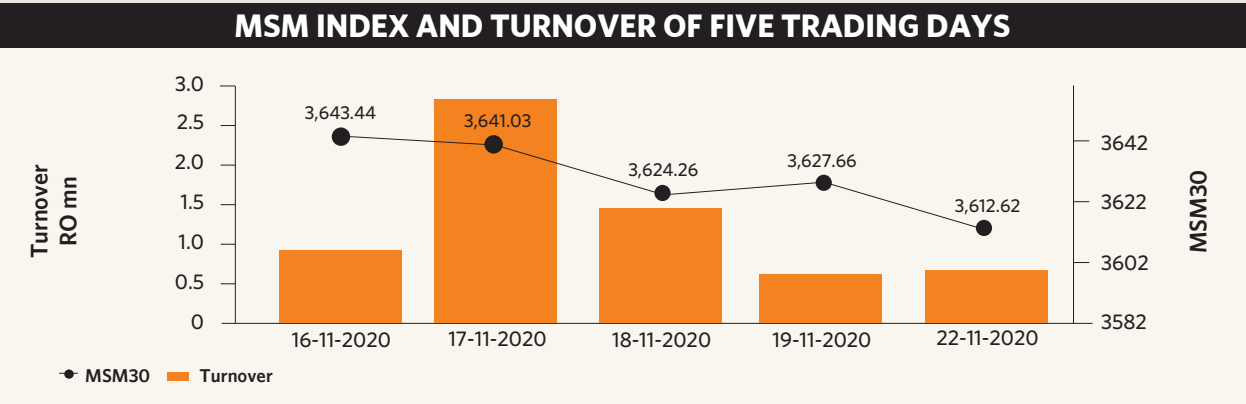
While Services index rose 0.13 per cent, Financial and Industrial indices fell 0.52 per cent and 0.38 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 0.05 per cent at 516.42 points.

Market breadth remained negative as seven companies closed up, while ten companies closed down. The rest 22 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Phoenix Power (1.85 per cent), National Life & General Insurance (1.68 per cent), Oman Fisheries (1.19 per cent) and HSBC Bank Oman (1.09 per



cent). Top losers were BankDhofar (-3.77 per cent), Oman United Insurance (-2.56 per cent), Galfar Engineering & Contracting (-2.44 per cent) and Bank Muscat (-2.09 per cent).



Coronavirus has put 'enormous strain' on Britain's economy

London, UK - Britain's Finance Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday warned that the British economy was under 'enormous strain' because of the coronavirus, ahead of a government spending review.

But he ruled out a return to austerity measures.

Economic forecasts to be released alongside his Wednesday spending review would show 'the enormous strain and stress that our economy is experiencing', Sunak told Sky News.

The findings of independent forecasters the Office for Budget Responsibility - as well as the 750,000 job losses from coronavirus - would have to be taken 'in the round as we consider the best way to fight the virus', he said.

Despite the profound impact of the coronavirus on Sunak's spending review, he rejected a possible return to austerity measures on the economy.

Government spending would continue to increase on last year's day-to-day public spending, he said. "There's absolutely no way in which anyone can say that's austerity."

However, he refused to rule out a widely expected public-sector pay freeze.

It was fair to 'think about what is happening with wages, with jobs, with hours, across the economy when we think about what the right thing to do in the public sector is', he said.

Britain has suffered more than any other country in Europe from the coronavirus, recording more than 54,000 deaths from



Britain's Finance Minister Rishi Sunak

Britain's Finance Minister Rishi Sunak's department On Saturday unveiled a £3bn package to support the National Health Service (NHS) in tackling the impact of the coronavirus pandemic

families could spend time with each other over Christmas' but refused to pre-empt an announcement on the UK's winter virus strategy by Prime Minister Boris Johnson due on Monday.

The government has said the England-wide lockdown will be replaced by the tier system that had previously operated across the country

On Saturday, ahead of the spending review, Sunak's department unveiled a £3bn package to support the National Health Service (NHS) in tackling the impact of the coronavirus.

As part of the package, £1bn will be spent on addressing backlogs in the health service - paying for up to 1mn extra checks, scans and additional operations for those who have had their treatment delayed since the start of the pandemic.

AFP

European firms put off payments on €900bn loans

Paris, France - European firms made considerable use of facilities to put off loan payments during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, delaying payment on nearly €900bn of loans, according to the European Banking Authority (EBA).

As of June, a total of €871bn in loans were concerned by a payment moratorium, about 6 per cent of the total, according to

a study conducted by the EBA.

Sixteen per cent of loans to small and medium-sized businesses were in a payment moratorium, 12 per cent of those given to commercial real estate firms and 7 per cent for housing loans.

The EBA said that repayment moratoria were one type of measures EU countries adopted 'in order to mitigate the immediate

impact of the sudden freeze in economic activity, support new lending and provide breathing space to borrowers' as coronavirus lockdowns were imposed.

If the details vary by country and bank, a payment moratorium gives a borrower a chance to temporarily suspend or delay loan repayments.

'The use of moratoria was

widely dispersed across countries and banks, with a few banks reporting that almost 50 per cent of their total loans to non-financial companies and households were subject to moratoria,' said the EBA.

Cypriot, Hungarian and Portuguese banks had the highest proportion of loans subject to moratoria.

AFP

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Investcorp invests in India's leading logistics platform Xpressbees

Manama, Bahrain - Investcorp, a Bahrain-based leading global provider and manager of alternative investment products, announced its investment in Xpressbees, a leading end-to-end e-commerce logistics platform in India. The investment was made as part of a Series E funding with participation from a consortium of local and global investors, according to a press release.

Founded in 2015 by serial entrepreneurs Amitava Saha and Supam Maheshwari, Xpressbees is amongst the market leaders in e-commerce logistics in India and offers services including first



Varun Lall

and last-mile delivery, reverse logistics, real-time tracking, and multiple payment collection and processing options.

Xpressbees is in the process of transforming itself into a fully-

fledged supply chain company with Express Cargo, 3PL and Cross Border Logistics.

"Xpressbees is in our view at the strategic sweet spot of the consumption shift to digital and e-commerce, and the significant growth potential of the US\$200bn plus logistics industry in India. Investcorp strongly believes in the digital transformation of the Indian consumer and enterprises, and hence we are excited to partner with Amitava and the Xpressbees' management team in their journey to build a technology-first market defining business," said Varun Lall from

Investcorp India.

"We deeply value the support and trust of our employees, customers, investors and partners who have been instrumental to our success. I am delighted to see the impact we are making in the logistics ecosystem in the country. We will use this investment for further automating our hubs and sort centres, increased investments in technology and to expand our delivery footprint to cover the entire country," said Amitava Saha, CEO of Xpressbees.

Xpressbees has a presence across more than 2,000 towns and cities in India.

UBGCCF Inception Date*	17-Nov-09
NAV Date	Nov 19, 2020
NAV (OMR)	1.024
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)	1.349
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)	0.03
Unit Dividend paid since inception	28%
YTD Performance	1.00%
Performance since inception	40.69%

* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010
** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends

For more information please contact:
Tel: 00968 24 949 031030, Email: ubhargocfund@u-capital.net

South Pars resumes production

Bushehr, Iran - The offshore platform of Phase 16 of southern Iranian South Pars Field has come back to production, according to Alireza Ebadi, an official with Pars Oil and Gas Field.

The platform stopped gas excavation a year ago due to damages to parts of its pipelines stretching 110km on the seabed.

Ebadi said that the damaged pipelines have been repaired and the platform came back to production with a capacity of 500mn cubic feet.

Now 23 years after the South Pars inauguration, the field has turned into the biggest gas refinery complex of the world.

IRNA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

and the people of Oman on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

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US jobless claims surge on rising COVID-19 cases

Washington, US - The United States saw a sharp increase in new filings for jobless benefits in recent weeks, a sign that the unemployment crisis could be intensifying again as the world's largest economy endures a surge in COVID-19 infections.

The worrying increase comes as lawmakers in Washington made a tentative restart to talks on enacting another stimulus spending measure, after extra payments to the unemployed and loans and grants to small businesses that helped the economy through the early months of the pandemic expired earlier this year.

The Labor Department reported a seasonally adjusted 742,000 new claims for unemployment benefits filed in the week ended November 14, and 320,237 claims, not seasonally adjusted, made separately under a programme for workers not normally eligible for jobless aid.

The worse-than-expected data marked the 35th straight week that new jobless claim applications have remained above the worst single week of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis, and analysts fear the latest increase is just the beginning.

"Given the trajectory of the pandemic, we may be stuck in the 1mn a week range of Americans claiming benefits (both state and federal) for some time, and we'll be lucky if that level doesn't rise by 100,000 to 200,000 additional claims per week," Robert Frick of Navy Federal Credit Union said in a note. The US is home to the world's



A waiter wearing personal protective equipment returns a credit card to a customer dining outdoors in California, US on Saturday (AFP)

largest outbreak of COVID-19, which has accelerated in recent weeks.

The country saw 157,950 new infections over the 24 hours prior to Wednesday, the same day total deaths from the disease climbed above 250,000.

Biden backs stimulus

A senior Democratic aide confirmed to AFP that the staff to top congressional leaders was meeting to see if there was a way forward on passing a successor to the massive US\$2.2tn CARES Act passed in March.

That bill helped keep the economy afloat through the spring and summer but many of its provisions have since lapsed, and a study from The

The US Labor Department reported a seasonally adjusted 742,000 new claims for unemployment benefits filed in the week ended November 14

Century Foundation progressive thinktank released last week said nearly 12mn unemployed people will be relying on aid programmes under the bill that expire on December

26, 2020.

President-elect Joe Biden on Thursday again reiterated his call for lawmakers to approve stimulus, warning states could cut services and layoff teachers, police officers and other public employees without it.

"The federal government has to deliver this relief sooner rather than later," Biden said.

But Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has thus far rejected the Democrats' latest proposal costing US\$2.2tn, preferring to approve smaller measures - which Democrats say they have no interest in.

Some employers say they're already feeling the pain from the rise in cases.

Air carriers have been struggling amid a sharp fall in travel demand, and major airlines laid off 32,000 workers in October when CARES Act funds to keep staff on payroll expired.

United Airlines said it was seeing more travelers cancel plans and new bookings decline, projecting total capacity in the fourth quarter to decrease 'at least' 55 per cent compared with a year ago.

"The company does not currently expect the recovery from COVID-19 to follow a linear path," United said in a securities filing, adding it 'continues to see a significant impact in demand for air travel'.

In an interview with Bloomberg, Dallas Federal Reserve Bank president Robert Kaplan warned the renewed virus surge could cause another contraction in economic growth in the fourth quarter.

US growth cratered by a record 31.4 per cent annualised in the second quarter as business shutdowns to stop the virus's spread took their toll, but rebounded 33.1 per cent as states moved to ease the shutdowns.

However, the economic pain has not been distributed evenly, with some sectors booming amid the gloom. The Philadelphia Federal Reserve reported more manufacturing firms seeing their activity increase than decrease this month, but its regional index for the sector declined by six points as new orders and shipments decreased.

AFP



A file photo of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) and his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau

Britain, Canada rollover EU trade terms for Brexit

London, UK - Britain and Canada agreed to continue trading together under existing EU terms when the current Brexit transition period ends shortly, the UK government said.

The Department of International Trade said the deal 'locked in' the two countries' existing £20bn trading relationship and set the stage for further negotiations.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau agreed in the Saturday video call to rollover current EU-Canada trading arrangements and begin negotiations on a new, UK-Canada trade deal in 2021.

Johnson said in a statement the 'fantastic agreement' ensured trade with one of Britain's closest allies would go 'from strength to strength'.

"Our negotiators have been working flat out to secure trade deals for the UK, and from as early next year we have agreed to start work on a new, bespoke trade deal with Canada that will go even further in meeting the needs of our economy," he

added.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said the agreement created 'certainty for thousands of jobs'.

"The UK is bonded by history, culture and transatlantic trade with our friends and allies in Canada," she said.

The UK has said the agreement with Canada will avoid £42mn in tariffs on British exports.

Last week, Trudeau said Ottawa and London should be able to agree an 'easy' trade deal by the end of the year but added that Britain's 'bandwidth' for negotiations was a challenge as it holds talks with several major trade partners at the same time.

Britain is currently locked in fraught talks with the European Union to set the terms of their future trading relationship for when the post-Brexit transition period ends on December 31.

Following its referendum vote in 2016 to leave the EU, Britain can now strike trade deals of its own.

AFP

Britain's consumer spending falls sharply in 2020: Study

London, UK - The average British household spending is set to fall by £6,600 in 2020, with total consumer spending not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2023, the London-based market research firm Mintel has said in a report.

Total British consumer spending this year is expected to decrease by 14.9 per cent year-on-year, or £183.6bn as the COVID-19 pandemic has been significantly affecting the economic activities, said Mintel in its 'British Lifestyles' report.

"The COVID-19 lockdowns have had a profound impact on consumer spending, decimating the transport industry, and broader travel and leisure sectors," said Jack Duckett, Mintel associate director of consumer lifestyles research.

The report revealed that the biggest drops occurring in the transport, foodservice, and holiday industries, with consumer spending in these three categories falling by more than £5,000 per household - representing around 77 per cent of the overall decline in consumer



Pedestrians wearing face masks carry shopping bags as they pass a shuttered Christmas shop in central Glasgow, UK on Saturday (AFP)

spending this year.

By comparison, the biggest increases this year are in food, alcoholic, and non-alcoholic drinks, growing by 8.1 per cent, 16.3 per cent and 5.7 per cent respectively year-on-year.

"Some sectors have benefited from the lockdown, with retail sales of food and drink boosted as all eating and drinking occasions moved into the home," said Duckett.

In the meantime, Britain's retail sales recorded the sixth consecutive month of growth in October as consumers stocked

up ahead of national lockdowns, the British Office for National Statistics (ONS) said Friday.

In October, retail sales volumes increased by 1.2 per cent compared with September, up by 6.7 per cent from the pre-pandemic level in February, said the ONS, adding that the volume of retail sales saw a surge of 5.8 per cent year-on-year.

Notably, online shopping in October saw a strong jump, with sales value growing across all sectors year-on-year, said the ONS.

Xinhua

Booming US real estate market highlights rich-poor divide

Delphine Toutitou

The US real estate market is booming even as the coronavirus crisis intensifies, and the seemingly insatiable appetite for new and older homes has sent prices soaring - meaning more and more families with modest incomes are seeing their dreams of owning property shattered.

"It very much is a tale of haves and have nots," said Dana Scanlon, a property agent in the Washington area.

In a bid to mitigate the economic crisis provoked by the pandemic, the US Federal Reserve slashed interest rates in March to near-zero.

As Scanlon explains, "That gives a very big boost to buying power for those people who still have jobs... where they can work from home."

For some, it has, perhaps counterintuitively, even meant a 'little uptick in savings' as commuting and other costs have been cut due to restrictions on travel and dining out, she says.

That means some families have more money to spend on upgrading to a bigger home - or even considering buying a second home.

With many white-collar employees contemplating a long-term shift to telework, and children still going to school over Zoom, the pandemic is still fueling demand.

That soaring increase in home purchases has surprised industry experts, who still remember how the market bottomed out during the financial crisis of 2008-2009.

But all is not rosy for all Amer-



A real estate 'For Sale' sign is seen in front of a home in Arlington, Virginia, US on Thursday (AFP)

icans seeking to buy.

"There's a kind of a pyramid, or a ladder, of buyers," says Scanlon, who works in the US capital, Maryland and Virginia.

Those living in studios are looking for one-bedroom apartments, people in the one-bedroom places are looking to move to a townhouse in the suburbs, and so it proceeds.

In October, sales of existing homes hit their highest level since early 2006, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

But a dip in the number of available homes for sale has sent prices skyrocketing.

According to NAR data, the median price for individual houses rose to US\$313,500 in the third quarter, up 12 per cent year-on-year.

The country's four main regions saw double-digit increases

- 13.7 per cent in the West, 13 per cent in the Northeast, 11.4 per cent in the South and 11.1 per cent in the central US.

At this rate, the NAR said, house prices are rising four times faster than median household income.

As a result, more and more potential first-time home buyers are finding themselves unable to enter the market.

Indeed, the percentage of first-time buyers has dropped to 31 per cent of the total in 2020, from 33 per cent a year ago, according to the NAR's chief economist Lawrence Yun.

"Because of the strong price gain, it is increasingly becoming more difficult for renters to save up for a down payment," Yun said.

However, in April and May, households with more modest incomes were able to take ad-

vantage of low interest rates, said Tracey Scott, a real estate agent in West Virginia.

But since the summer, Scott admits more and more of her clients have been well-off families from the greater Washington area.

"We are probably two hours from Washington, DC," Scott told AFP. "But we still have a lot of land, mountain, rivers. The landscape is very beautiful in the mountains."

Some of Scott's clients are looking for a second home as an investment, but others are hoping to leave the city behind, now that offices are a vestige of the Before Times. Scott said she 'absolutely' did not expect to see such demand - her agency has seen at least a 25 to 30 per cent increase in the number of clients seeking second homes.

AFP

Russia extends food imports embargo

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday extended an embargo on Western food imports introduced in 2014 until the end of 2021, an economic measure that mainly affects EU imports.

The Russian embargo was in response to EU sanctions introduced after Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula, sanc-

tions that Brussels renewed for another six months at the end of June. The EU has refused recognise Russian's March 2014 annexation of Crimea and has condemned Moscow's support for separatists that control parts of eastern Ukraine that border Russia as a violation of international law.

Western sanctions have hit all

parts of the Russian economy and that, combined with the fall in oil prices, helped push the country into the longest recession since Putin took power in 2000. Russian authorities have insisted that the sanctions have allowed it to develop its domestic industries including farming, thanks to substantial subsidies.

AFP



This file photo on the left shows Popular Mobilization Units fighters advancing through a street in Tal Afar city in the Nineveh Governorate of northwestern Iraq; while on the right, Iraq's rapid response forces are seen preparing to storm a house in the Tarmiyah district, north of Baghdad, in search of wanted Islamic State group suspects on July 21, 2019 (AFP)

Mourning after deadly IS attack in Iraq

The attack in the north of Baghdad killed at least six Iraqi security personnel and four civilians: Medics

Samarra, Iraq - Iraq's Salahaddin province declared three days of mourning from Sunday over a deadly attack blamed on the Islamic State group, as some criticised authorities for failing to fight back extremists.

Late on Saturday, a roadside bomb hit a civilian car on an open road near Mt. Makhoul, about 200km north of Baghdad, police and a local official said.

When security forces arrived at the scene, extremists opened

fire on them, police said.

The attack killed at least six Iraqi security personnel and four civilians, including one who died of his wounds overnight, according to local medics.

There was no claim by IS, but both the local mayor and police blamed the group, which Iraq's government said in late 2017 it had defeated. That victory came after three years of brutal fighting to wrench back the one-third of Iraqi territory that had been

The Islamic State extremist group has claimed more attacks in Iraq than in any other country where it is active over the period December 2018 to May this year

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM

captured by IS. Although the extremists no longer hold territory, sleeper cells wage hit-and-run attacks on state infrastructure, particularly in desert areas north

of the capital. Two weeks ago, 11 people were killed in an IS attack on a lookout post at Al-Radwaniyah on Baghdad's outskirts.

According to a study published this month by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague, the extremist group has claimed more attacks in Iraq than in any other country where it is active over the period December 2018 to May this year.

The study said that IS activity in Iraq 'accelerated precipitously from February 2020 onwards', reaching levels that are 'worryingly close' to those preceding its sweep across a third of Iraq in 2014.

Still, death tolls remain low.

IS in Iraq 'generally appears to be moving from a (re) building phase into one that is characterised by brazen guerrilla-style attacks', the study noted.

The attacks have coincided with a new campaign by Iraq's security forces to arrest extremists hiding out in rugged terrain in the country's north and west.

In fact, just a day before the attack, the head of Iraq's federal police Jaafar al Batat told state

media that the area around Mt Makhoul had been cleared.

"The incidents carried out by IS in some remote areas are isolated cases and now under control," he said.

That outraged local figures.

'Iraqi security forces just assured us this area had been cleaned,' wrote Mashaan al-Jabouri, a Sunni lawmaker representing Salahaddin, on Twitter after the violence on Saturday.

AFP

Karabakh peace deal fuels anxiety, confusion over new borders

Askeran, Azerbaijan - An Armenian fighter in camouflage with a Kalashnikov assault rifle slung over his shoulder peers through binoculars over towards an encampment of Azerbaijan troops.

The rugged valley in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region delineates the new and ambiguous border that separates the Armenian fighters and Azerbaijan forces after a recent peace deal ended weeks of fierce clashes.

But wedged in the no man's land between the soldiers is the pomegranate farm planted a decade ago by Vardges Harutyunyan, who is nervous he will not be able to harvest the fruit this year.

"Now Azerbaijani soldiers are standing there," Harutyunyan (64) tells AFP, looking toward the rows of carefully tended trees in the distance. "If this is theirs, what can we do?"

Clashes erupted in late September between separatists backed by Armenia who had held the territory for some 30 years and Azerbaijan's army determined to wrest the mountain-



Vardges Harutyunyan, a former deputy police chief of Askeran district, looks towards the border outside Askeran on Saturday (AFP)

ous region back under its control.

Several thousand were killed and many more displaced in the six weeks of fighting that was brought to a halt by a Russia-brokered peace agreement that saw the Armenians cede swathes of territory captured by Azerbaijan.

The new geography of Nagorno-Karabakh and several surrounding districts that were held by the separatists is now being overseen by a force of some 2,000 Russian peacekeep-

ers, many of whom previously served in Syria.

But until they arrive to mark out land in the valley near the town of Askeran, Harutyunyan and the future of his fruit trees hangs in limbo.

'We gave half the country'

Standing around the smouldering remains of a fire burning in rugged terrain, the former deputy head of the district's police con-

ceded that the end of the war had ushered in new uncertainty.

"We gave away half of the country," Harutyunyan said.

In the hopes of finding clarity over access to his plot of land, Harutyunyan appeals to Arvid Gulyan, deputy head of agriculture in the district whose offices are in Askeran.

In Gulyan's office, Harutyunyan traces a finger over a map of the region on the wall to locate his farm. The local official is sympathetic but unable to offer a solution.

"He wanted to know if the garden is on our side or on the side of the Azerbaijani side. But it's not clear," he told AFP.

"The borders haven't been established yet."

The poor town nestled between steep slopes is decorated with Christian crosses, war memorials and flags of the province that declared autonomy in the 1990s but was never recognised internationally. The separatists announced self rule in a post-Soviet war that claimed 30,000 lives and saw Azerbaijani residents flee the region en masse.

AFP



Flames are seen following an Israeli airstrike in the town of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, early on Sunday (AFP)

Israel strikes Hamas targets in Gaza Strip

Jerusalem - Israel said on Sunday its military struck Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a rocket attack launched from the Palestinian enclave.

The Israeli air force struck two rocket ammunition manufacturing sites, a military compound and 'underground' infrastructures', the Israel Defence Forces said. A rocket was fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip on Saturday evening, according to the army, shortly after warning sirens sounded in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon.

The army statement gave no further details, but emergency services said they had no noti-

cation of anyone wounded and Israeli media said the projectile fell on open ground.

The latest reported fire from the Hamas-ruled Palestinian enclave came after two rockets were fired from the coastal strip into neighbouring Israel in the early hours of last Sunday.

There were no casualties or damage in that attack. Israel struck back with fighter planes, helicopters and tanks, hitting what the army said were Hamas targets.

There was no claim of responsibility for the November 15 rocket fire.

AFP

Dealings possible with US despite crimes: Iran

Tehran, Iran - The 'crimes' committed by the United States against Iran do not prevent 'carefully considered' exchanges from taking place, Iran's Foreign ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

"The future of relations between Iran and the United States is not simple," Saeed Khatibzadeh acknowledged at a press conference in Tehran, as President Hassan Rouhani's government makes signs of apparent overtures to US president-elect Joe Biden.

"The United States has committed repeated crimes against the Iranian people," added Khatibzadeh, citing a long list.

They included Washington's support for Baghdad during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the 'series of sanctions' against Tehran, and the US drone strike that killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in January.

Biden promised a return to diplomacy with Iran after four hawkish years under Trump. Iran offered a cautious welcome to Biden's victory.

AFP



This file photo shows the mother of the two year old girl of Kurdish origin who died in Belgium, at a press conference in Brussels (AFP)

Belgian policeman tried over death of Kurdish toddler

Brussels, Belgium - Belgium's approach to policing undocumented migration will be in the dock on Monday when an officer goes on trial over the shooting death of a two-year-old Kurdish girl.

Mawda Shawri was fatally wounded in May 2018 when a policeman opened fire on a van being driven across Belgium by traffickers taking migrants from the continent to Britain.

The officer said he had intended to shoot out a tyre to halt the suspect vehicle during a high speed chase, but his car swerved violently and the bullet went astray.

The tragedy caused a scandal in Belgium and, for rights activists, became a symbol of the dangers posed by the 'criminalisation' of irregular migration.

The officer who fired the fatal shot, reportedly a 40-some-

thing father-of-two with eight years experience in the police, has not been publicly named.

But he faces an involuntary homicide charge and will appear in court in the city of Mons alongside two Iraqi Kurds, the driver of the van and the alleged people smuggler. The officer does not deny he drew and fired his gun to halt the fleeing vehicle, but insists he did not know migrants were on board.

He says he felt "wiped out" when he discovered little Mawda had received a fatal head wound, crouched with her parents behind the driver.

"It's a horror to carry the image of someone responsible for the death of a child," his lawyer Laurent Kennes told AFP.

"He feels that everything has fallen on him, that he has to carry the errors of the state prosecutors, of migration policy."

Mawda's parents, who left Iraq in 2015 and had intended to head to Britain, settled in Belgium after her death, granted leave to remain on humanitarian grounds.

They will be represented at the two-day hearing by three lawyers and backed by a citizen activist group that has mobilised international celebrity support.

AFP

Saudi confident of ‘friendly’ ties with Joe Biden: Saudi Minister

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia expects no major change in its relationship with the US under Joe Biden, a senior official told CNN, despite the president-elect pledging to turn the kingdom into a ‘pariah’.

OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia, a close ally of US President Donald Trump, has appeared wary of Biden after he promised a stern stance against the kingdom for its human rights failings.

But Adel al Jubeir, the Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, dismissed the notion.

“We deal with the president of the United States as a friend, whether he’s Republican or Democrat,” Jubeir told CNN.

“President-elect Biden has been in the (US) Senate for 35 years, he has tremendous experience... I don’t expect that there’s going to be major change in terms of America’s foreign policy.”

The comment comes as Saudi Arabia hosts the G20 leaders’ summit this weekend, a first for an Arab nation, while global campaigners seek to draw attention to the kingdom’s human rights record.

Saudi Arabia has largely escaped US censure under Trump, who along with his son-in-law Jared Kushner, has enjoyed a personal rapport with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom’s de facto ruler.

Trump’s defeat leaves Prince Mohammed vulnerable to renewed scrutiny from the kingdom’s closest Western ally.

That could leave the crown prince isolated amid economic



President-elect Joe Biden leaves after attending mass at a church, in Wilmington on Saturday (AFP)



President-elect Biden has been in the Senate for 35 years, he has tremendous experience... I don’t expect that there’s going to be major change in terms of America’s foreign policy

ADEL AL JUBEIR

Trump hit with new blow in bid to overturn vote results

Washington, US - A Pennsylvania judge on Saturday threw out Donald Trump’s claims of widespread electoral fraud there, dealing a new blow to the Republican’s bid to overturn his loss in the US presidential election.

The decision - announced in a scathing judgment which excoriated the Trump team’s legal strategy - paves the way for Pennsylvania to certify Democrat Joe Biden’s victory there, which is scheduled to take place Monday.

With the clock ticking down to Biden’s January 20 inauguration, Trump’s team has focused on trying to stop battleground states from certifying results, in addition to his numerous legal challenges that have so far failed.

Judge Matthew Brann wrote in his ruling that Trump’s team had presented ‘strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations’ in their complaints about mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania.



President Donald Trump in the White House in Washington, DC on Friday (AFP)

‘In the United States of America, this cannot justify the disenfranchisement of a single voter, let alone all the voters of its sixth most populated state,’ Brann wrote.

‘Our people, laws, and institutions demand more.’

Biden won the state-by-state Electoral College votes that ultimately decide who takes the White House by 306 to 232. The Electoral College is due to formally vote on December 14.

AFP

challenges that imperil his reform agenda, a grinding war in neighbouring Yemen and pockets of domestic opposition to his rule.

During his election campaign, Biden threatened to make Saudi Arabia ‘the pariah that they are’.

Saudi observers dismiss the Democrat leader’s campaign speeches about the kingdom as bluster, pointing out that Trump also struck a hostile note in his 2016 campaign before quickly warming up to its rulers.

AFP

14 pro-Iran fighters in Syria killed in airstrikes: monitor

Beirut, Lebanon - At least 14 pro-Iran militia fighters from Iraq and Afghanistan were killed in airstrikes in war-torn eastern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Sunday.

The strikes on Saturday night in Deir Ezzor province, on the border with Iraq, were likely carried out by Israeli war planes, the Observatory said.

The Israeli army said it doesn’t comment on foreign reports.

More than 10 strikes hit positions of Iran-backed militias outside the border town of Albu Kamal, according to the war monitor.

The attack killed eight Iraqis and six Afghan fighters, it said.

It also destroyed two bases as well as several military vehicles, the Observatory added.

Iran-backed fighters are heavily deployed in a stretch of territory between the Syrian towns of Albu Kamal and Mayadeen, both former strongholds of the Islamic State group.

Along with Russia, Iran has been a key backer of the Damascus regime in its nine-year-long civil war.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes on Syria since the civil war broke out in 2011, targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as government troops.

The Israeli army rarely acknowledges individual strikes.

Syria’s war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions more since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

AFP

Protesters burn Guatemalan Congress building



Protesters demanding the resignation of President Alejandro Giammattei set on fire a bus stop, in Guatemala City on Saturday (AFP)

Guatemala City, Guatemala - Hundreds of Guatemalans partly burned the Congress building on Saturday in a protest demanding the resignation of President Alejandro Giammattei, following the passage of a budget that has sparked outrage in the impoverished Central American nation.

The flames in the legislative building could be seen from the street in Guatemala City, and a spokesman for the Red Cross told journalists the group had treated several people for smoke inhalation.

Police arrested more than 20 people and almost 50 were sent to hospital injured, one of them in a serious condition.

A separate, peaceful, protest took place in front of the old government palace in the historic center of the capital, not far from Congress, also urging Giammattei to resign.

Carrying the national flag and banners that said ‘No more corruption’, ‘Giammattei out’, and ‘They messed with the wrong generation’, the protesters filled the central square in Guatemala

City in front of the old palace.

In a tweet, Giammattei denounced the attack on the Congress, and vowed legal repercussions.

‘I reiterate that you have the right to demonstrate according to the law. But we cannot allow vandalism of public or private property,’ he posted. ‘Whoever is proven to have participated in these criminal acts will fall under the full weight of the law.’

The widespread discontent and indignation in Guatemala against Giammattei’s administration and Congress are caused by a lack of resources for battling the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the new budget.

Guatemala’s Congress, dominated by conservative pro-government parties, this week approved an almost US\$13bn budget, the largest in the country’s history. Most of the funds will go to infrastructure tied to big business, sparking outrage in a country where poverty is widespread and half of children under five years old are malnourished.

AFP

Afghan VP vows to track down Kabul attackers

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh vowed on Sunday to track down those responsible for a rocket attack on the capital that killed at least ten people, even as the Islamic State group claimed to have fired the salvo.

The rockets struck several densely populated districts of Kabul on Saturday - including in and around the heavily fortified Green Zone that houses embassies and foreign firms.

The attack came hours before US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was to meet with negotiators from the Taliban and Afghan government in Qatar, amid signs of progress in talks between the two warring groups.

‘We will find out the networks who facilitated in transporting the materials (rockets) used in



This file photo shows Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (left) with Vice President Amrullah Saleh (centre) (AFP)

the attack,’ Saleh said on his Facebook page after a meeting with security officials.

Saleh said the attack left ten people dead and another 51 wounded. He assured the people that he will find out the nature of these attacks and has started a serious and extensive investigation

to identify the perpetrators.

Several buildings were damaged, including the Iranian embassy and a medical complex.

Although the attack was claimed by IS, officials blamed the Taliban. They have denied involvement.

It was the third attack in the

capital claimed by IS in less than a month.

The Taliban and Afghan government have been engaged in peace talks in Doha since September 12, but violence on the ground continues unabated.

In the past six months the Taliban have carried out 53 suicide

We will find out the networks who facilitated in transporting the materials (rockets) used in the attack... started a serious and extensive probe to identify the perpetrators

AMRULLAH SALEH

attacks and detonated 1,250 explosive devices that have left 1,210 civilians dead and 2,500 wounded, the interior ministry said this week.

AFP

The women who served as a deadly duo for the Taliban

Kabul, Afghanistan - Women assassins who lured an Afghan security official to his death with promises of sex before shooting him and dumping his body at a cemetery are among thousands of Taliban criminals freed as part of a fragile peace plan.

While the ultra-conservative Islamists ban women from many areas of life - often forcing them to stay home and barring them from most jobs - they are not above using them as killers.

Muzghan and her aunt Nasreen walked free from jail in September after confessing to being members of the Taliban’s ultra-violent Haqqani network.

The two women had been on death row after several killings, including the murder of an Afghan intelligence agent at their home. They had used Nasreen’s

daughter as bait ‘under the pretext of selling her body’, on the orders of a Taliban commander, a security official told AFP.

The pair then shot the man with a pistol fitted with a silencer and crammed his corpse into a metal box that they left in the local graveyard, case files say. Court documents show the two were prolific killers - adept not only at setting the deadly ‘honey-trap’ but also at brute murders - including of their own relatives.

Two men from their family who worked as policemen died at the women’s hands - one was poisoned and the other killed when they planted a ‘sticky bomb’ under the seat of his car.

It is not uncommon for relatives to take opposing sides in Afghanistan’s conflict.

Before their 2016 arrest, the



This file photo shows a man watching a video of Muzghan, one of the Taliban women assassins, on a computer in Kabul on November 12 (AFP)

pair also worked with other people including Muzghan’s husband to carry out a deadly grenade and shooting raid on a Sufi shrine, and another on a police station, their rap list adds.

‘I was arrested for murder,

kidnapping and cooperating with the Haqqani network,” Muzghan said in a video authorities made prior to her release. “I will not join this group again.”

It is vanishingly rare for women to take part in attacks for

the Taliban, notorious for banning school for girls, forcing women to wear burqas and sometimes executing those accused of adultery.

Of more than 5,000 Taliban prisoners released under a prisoner swap that the insurgents made a precondition to peace talks with the Afghan government, only five were women.

Cases like theirs are ‘almost unheard’ of, analyst Ashley Jackson from the Overseas Development Institute thinktank said.

“The Taliban’s norms and ideology firmly relegate women to the domestic sphere,” she said.

“To allow them to take part in, or admit that they played a role in waging the war, would go against core ideological tenets of the movement.”

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

G20 commits to fair distribution of vaccine

We will spare no effort to ensure their affordable and equitable access for all people: Statement



South Korean President Moon Jae-in (fourth from left) attends the virtual G20 Riyadh summit hosted by Saudi Arabia, at the presidential Blue House in Seoul on Saturday (AFP)

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - G20 leaders said Sunday they will 'spare no effort' to ensure the fair distribution of coronavirus vaccines worldwide, and support poor countries whose economies have been ravaged by the crisis.

As the pandemic rages, the club of the world's richest nations adopted a unified tone on the challenges ahead during a virtual summit hosted by Saudi Arabia.

But after a weekend of 'digital diplomacy', their closing communique lacked details on many of the issues dominating the meeting.

"We have mobilised resources to address the immediate financing needs in global health to support the research, development, manufacturing and distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 diagnostics,

therapeutics and vaccines,' they said in the statement.

"We will spare no effort to ensure their affordable and equitable access for all people."

While richer nations plan their vaccination programmes, with the US expecting to launch

ACT-Accelerator, a mechanism led by the World Health Organization that aims to ensure access to tests, treatments and vaccines for all.

In a comment echoed by other world leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron

sive cost of the exercise would be underwritten.

G20 nations have contributed more than US\$21bn to combat the pandemic, which has infected 56mn people globally and left 1.3mn dead, and injected US\$11tn to 'safeguard' the virus-battered world economy, summit organisers said.

But the group's leaders face mounting pressure to help stave off possible credit defaults across developing nations.

G20 nations have extended a debt service suspension initiative (DSSI) for developing countries until June next year, but UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has pushed for a commitment to extend it until the end of 2021.

G20 finance ministers will examine the recommendation when the IMF and World Bank meet next spring 'if the eco-

nomic and financial situation requires' an extension by another six months, a communique said.

On trade, the club of the world's richest nations also emphasised that supporting a multilateral system 'is now as important as ever'.

"We strive to realise the goal of a free, fair, inclusive, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable, and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep our markets open," the communique said.

Ahead of the summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she hoped the US will adopt a more multilateralist stance under the incoming administration of Joe Biden. US President Donald Trump's robust 'America first' trade policy has rankled world leaders.

AFP

Key US Senate race candidate quarantining after 'infection'



US Senator Kelly Loeffler (AFP)

Washington, US - A US Republican senator contesting a runoff election in Georgia was quarantining on Saturday after possibly being infected with COVID-19, her campaign said.

Kelly Loeffler had campaigned with Vice President Mike Pence on Friday as well as David Perdue, another Re-

publican Georgia senator up for re-election in the January 5 runoff vote.

Loeffler's campaign said in a statement that she took both a rapid test and a PCR test on Friday morning.

"Her rapid test results were negative and she was cleared to attend Friday's events," the statement said. "She was informed later in the evening after public events on Friday that her PCR test came back positive, but she was retested on Saturday morning after conferring with medical officials and those results came back inconclusive on Saturday evening."

Boris Johnson to confirm end date for England virus lockdown

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will confirm that coronavirus lockdown restrictions across England are to end on December 2, his office said on Saturday.

The lockdown will be followed by a return to a three-tiered set of regional restrictions as part of the government's 'COVID Winter Plan', it added in a statement.

The statement quoted a spokesperson for 10 Downing Street as saying that current England-wide restrictions have 'helped bring the virus back under control' and 'eased pressures on the NHS (National Health Service)'.

The official announcement is



Boris Johnson (AFP)

expected on Monday.

The government has, however, cautioned that without regional restrictions the virus would wreak havoc before plans for vaccine distribution and mass testing have had time to take effect.

"That would put in jeopardy the progress the country has

made, and once again risk intolerable pressure on the NHS," the spokesperson explained.

A four-week national shutdown was imposed in England early this month, forcing people to stay home and businesses to close owing to a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was originally slated to run until December 2.

More areas are expected to face higher levels of restrictions at that point than they did prior to the lockdown however, the statement said.

Britain has suffered more than any other country in Europe, with more than 54,000 deaths from 1.4mn cases.

AFP

US gives emergency approval to therapy

Washington, US - US drug regulators gave emergency approval to a COVID-19 antibody therapy on Saturday as the pandemic led to further closures in parts of the world.

With cases surpassing 12mn in the United States, the highest in the world, many Americans were nonetheless heading to airports to travel for next week's Thanksgiving holiday despite health officials' warnings to stay home. Some US states were imposing new restrictions, including California, where a 10pm to 5am curfew was taking effect.

In the Middle East, Iran announced it had shut non-essential businesses in over half its cities and towns for up to two weeks and introduced movement restrictions.



A sign at the Research Centers of America, in Hollywood, Florida (AFP)

Trump's therapy

The antibody therapy approval in the United States offers some hope for those infected, though a relatively small number of doses will be available in the

coming weeks.

The same therapy was used to treat President Donald Trump when he was sickened with the virus.

The green light for drugmaker

Regeneron came after REGEN-COV2, a combination of two lab-made antibodies, was shown to reduce COVID-19-related hospitalisations or emergency room visits in patients with underlying conditions.

"Authorising these monoclonal antibody therapies may help outpatients avoid hospitalization and alleviate the burden on our health care system," said Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration. Regeneron's antibody treatment is the second synthetic antibody treatment to receive an emergency use approval (EUA) from the FDA after a similar therapy developed by Eli Lilly was granted the status on November 9.

AFP

Pandemic swells Montreal's homeless camps as severe winter sets in

Montreal, Canada - All along the edges of a long boulevard in Montreal stretches an unprecedented sight in this city: Hundreds of tents that have sprung up in a brand new homeless camp since the end of summer, with many of the people thrown out of their homes because of the pandemic.

"Welcome to the trendy encampment of Notre-Dame!" quipped Jacques Brochu, dubbed 'the mayor' by his neighbours.

At 60, Brochu said he found himself homeless and living in a

tent on Notre-Dame Street after losing his affordable housing, which was repossessed by its owner.

Like his new neighbours, he is preparing for a cold Quebec winter, where temperatures often plunge to minus 20°C.

"I manage to heat my tent very well," Brochu said, showing off his small candles.

A tarpaulin covering the shelter does the rest.

In the camp in Hochelaga, once a working-class neighbourhood in eastern Montreal that is undergoing gentrification, the



Homeless camp resident Jacques Brochu at his tent in a camp set up along a busy Montreal boulevard, on November 18 (AFP)

long-term homeless rub shoulders with people who have recently lost their jobs, as well as students and workers who have lost their homes.

Guylain Levasseur (55), who has been homeless for six years and lives in a small caravan, is considered the encampment's 'manager'.

Under a canopy by his caravan, which is lined with armchairs, he has set up a kitchen of sorts, where people can come and take food or donate it.

"There are people who come to bring us meals every day," he

said. His van is overflowing with sleeping bags and warm clothes also donated by good Samaritans.

For the past three months, he has given part of his meager welfare payouts to help buy generators to keep the tents warm.

The community has bought seven so far, running on gas donated by well-wishers.

Another resident managed to set up a WiFi network, under the account name 'Notre-Dame camp', and relayed from a router mounted atop his caravan.

The homeless people also

have access to portable toilets.

Serge Lareault, Montreal's commissioner for the homeless, said the coronavirus has 'thrown hundreds of people onto the streets'.

"The phenomenon of homeless encampments is new to Montreal," he said.

Last year, there were around 3,000 homeless people in the city, but that number has snowballed since the virus broke out, wreaking havoc on the economy and squeezing affordable housing.

AFP

ON THE GO, *with care*

5 noteworthy travel trends during the pandemic

COVID-19 has changed the way we travel. When the pandemic began, many people put vacations on hold, shelving their wanderlust. As the pandemic continues, people are starting to travel again, but in different ways that prioritise health and wellness. This has led to some interesting travel trends, showing Americans' love for travel is still vibrant, it's just a bit different than before. The top travel trends during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

1 Shorter vacations
As people dabble with traveling again, many are choosing to forgo the week-long vacation and instead taking shorter trips. In fact, 55% of fall 2020 travelers are booking two to five nights when vacationing, and 36% are booking one-night stays, according to a recent Tripadvisor survey.

Worry and expense associated with airline travel also has many people opting for destinations within driving distance of home. The traditional road trip is seeing a resurgence as people are packing up their vehicles to enjoy the drive to nearby adventures, whether that takes them to the country or a metropolitan area - or anything in between.

2 Extra space to play
The ability to spread out and be physically distant from others while enjoying time as a family is a top trend. People are seeking destinations with room to enjoy and space to play, both indoors and out. This might be renting a cabin and hiking the great outdoors or booking a room at a large resort with ample room so you're not uncomfortably close to other guests.

Kalahari has four locations that fit the bill, with the new location in Round Rock, Texas, taking the title of America's Largest Indoor Waterpark Resort, which has 1.5 million square feet of space to play, which means lots of opportunity for fun while prioritizing social distancing and safety. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found no evidence that COVID-19 is spread through recreational waters, so feel free to

enjoy the 223,000 square feet of indoor waterpark that includes 20 pools, 30 waterslides and 3 acres of outdoor pools.

3 Enhanced safety procedures
Top of mind for all travelers, safety is essential. Many destinations and resorts are prioritizing keeping guests safe with new procedures, like contactless and cash-free methods of payment, offering remote check-in and implementing a wellness concierge to monitor and communicate safety initiatives to guests.

Research the offerings at different accommodations and choose the one that you feel most comfortable with. Ask about the option to forgo cleaning service for the duration of the stay if you prefer no one enter the hotel room, with the option of fresh towels and toiletries to be delivered safely outside the door for convenience.

4 Experiences are priorities
Quarantine, sheltering in place, remote working and virtual learning: people have been spending a lot of time at home, so when they are traveling they want to prioritize unique experiences to make meaningful memories as a family. Because many theaters, sports arenas and tourist attractions remain shut down, people are looking at destinations that offer an all-under-one-roof experience with fun for the whole family.

5 Planning for the future
Some people are still not comfortable with vacationing, which is why dreaming of the future and planning trips is the final top trend during the pandemic. With extra time on your hands, it's ideal for researching new destinations, learning about unique opportunities and watching for discounts to help you save on advanced bookings. You might also ask for gift certificates and vacation experiences for holiday gifts so you are ready to roll when you're comfortable with traveling again.



YALLAGO UPDATE

TREK OR TREAT

The trek serves to commemorate the sultanate’s 50th anniversary of the Renaissance, to pay homage to the Late Sultan, HM Qaboos bin Said and salute His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik



Hubert Vaz

Oman’s daredevil adventurer, Anisa al Raissi, who along with her UK companion, Dr Natalie Taylor, set out on November 18 on an ambitious 1,200km trek from Musandam, in the north of Oman, to Mirbat, in the south of Oman, to mark the 50th National Day of Oman, is at it – overcoming adversity – the key goal of the expedition, in all earnestness.

Doing what she loves to do most, Anisa, who works as Business Development Manager for Outward Bound Oman, said this 50-day expedition, termed YallaGo, was intended to challenge their own potential and to encourage people to overcome all adversity in these trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the first leg itself, with the arduous task of kayaking on hand, Anisa has been relishing every moment, even though she suffered blisters on her palms, with blistering heat overhead in the Arabian Sea.

The trek serves to commemorate the sultanate’s 50th anniversary of the Renaissance, to pay homage to the Late Sultan, HM Qaboos bin Said al Said and salute His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said. It is also intended to strengthen cultural ties between the UK and Oman.

Anisa and Natalie began the expedition as per schedule in all earnestness and have undergone great training and preparations to encounter multiple terrain, as they walk, climb and kayak across Oman. The first leg of their expedition involved kayaking from Musandam and they have successfully completed it, after facing some tough challenges, with due support from the accompanying support team.

After initial formalities and felicitations, they started their journey from Quoin Island in the North of Oman, near Musandam, setting the ball rolling for around two months of adventure. The expedition is slated to end in Dhofar region in early January. All through, they will be working against the clock to complete their task on time while adhering to the regulatory safety measures en route.

The journey’s progress is being updated at www.yallago2020.com, as well as on the YallaGo2020 social media pages to showcase the sultanate’s natural beauty to the world.

Responding to Muscat Daily on the third day of the expedition, Dr Natalie said, “We set out as planned. The weather on day one made the sea kayak harder and on day 2 the sea state and weather meant the Royal Oman Navy advised we did not kayak through the lion’s mouth. The rest was on schedule and we have kayaked over 100km.”

She further disclosed that Anisa suffered blisters on her hands as she has not done much kayaking before. However, they worked together as a team and Natalie towed her kayak to ensure that they covered good distance together.

“We travel to start the hike today (Sunday. We will be hiking from now on. We have been blessed with amazing support from the Navy and our support crew. A special thanks to general Richard Stanford who was key to securing support for this kayak leg and beyond,” Dr Natalie added.

Anisa added, “My prime concern for ‘leg 1’ was not being comfortable in the open ocean as there were some moments when it got very wavy. We handled this by staying close and communicating, and with each day, Nat got more confident which resulted in her mood lightening up, as well, and enjoying the beautiful scenery! Concern for myself were my hands as this was my very first real kayak experience. My hands were not conditioned and got blistered from day one. Our support team of the Omani Navy were very helpful in taping me up every night which got me through ‘leg 1.’”

About the coordination between the duo, Anisa said, “Team work is key in accomplishing Herculean tasks such as this expedition. It has been, and still is, a learning curve for both of us, on how best to use each others strengths, but we are getting closer every day.”

Today (November 23), the duo begin the actual trek in a straight line from the northern tip of Oman to the southern tip which tentatively would be reached on January 6, 2021.

Team work is key in accomplishing Herculean tasks such as this expedition
ANISA AL RAISSI



Anisa al Raisi (right) with Dr Natalie Taylor

