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TIRELESS MBAPPE HITS BRACE FOR PSG



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SECOND VIRUS WAVE COULD LEAD TO OIL SURPLUS IN 2021



P16

OMANI ARTISTS GIVE SEOUL TASTE OF OMANI CULTURE AND NATURE



MUSCAT: Over the past 50 years of the blessed Renaissance, Omani women have made steady strides across various sectors setting a role model for their sisters across the world.

These achievements have won the Sultanate earned international commendation for gender equality, elimination of all types of discrimination by granting them all social, economic and political rights in line with the Basic Law of the State, International Human Rights Conventions and Oman Vision 2040.

On this occasion, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred Royal Order of Commendation on a number of Omani women. The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, presented the orders to the honourees during the celebration held on the occasion of Omani Womens' Day at Al Baraka Palace, on Saturday morning. The Honourable Lady congratulated the Omani women on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day which falls on October 17 every year.

ACTIVE PARTNERS

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth congratulated the Omani women on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year.

HH Sayyid Theyazin greeted the Omani women on the status they have attained thanks to the successes and accomplishments they have achieved in various fields as the Omani women became real and active partners in the march of development and nation-building.

SEE PAGES 2, 3 AND 4

EQUAL PARTNERS IN NATION BUILDING



Council of Ministers hails women's contribution

MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers on Saturday addressed a message of greetings and congratulations to women on Omani Women's Day.

On this occasion, the Council of Ministers issued a statement as follows: "Celebration of Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year, embodies the great attention accorded to women, since the dawn of the Renaissance, in recognition of efforts that they exert side by side with men in the country's current march of comprehensive development. "Women in Oman shared with passion the experience of national action and played constructive roles in it. Their multiple accomplishments in different sectors of work in government and private sectors are wide ranging. Omani women showed their mettle in representing the Sultanate in regional and international arenas.

"While the Council of Ministers greets Omani women on this occasion, it expresses deep appreciation for all mothers for their essential and fundamental role in building righteous families, protecting them and raising the efficiency of their members. Their role is commendable in grooming generations and orienting them towards preserving the achievements of past decades.

"The Council of Ministers hereby wishes Omani women more success in shouldering their responsibilities and maintaining their high performance for the sake of dear Oman." — ONA

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TRUMP TRIES TO SHORE UP FLORIDA, BIDEN TARGETS MICHIGAN

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LANKA INTRODUCES JAIL TERMS, FINESTO PREVENT VIRUS SPREAD

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 32°C
MIN: 22°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 23°C

NIZWA
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 22°C

SUNRISE 06.05 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:50
DHUHR: 11:57
ASR: 15:16
MAGHRIB: 17:44
ISHA: 19:54



New Zealand's Ardern wins historic second term

WELLINGTON: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern won a landslide victory in New Zealand's general election on Saturday, leveraging success battling COVID-19 into an unprecedented majority she said gave her a mandate for progressive reform.

Ardern's centre-left Labour Party took 64 seats in the 120-member parliament with 49 per cent of the vote, after the youthful and charismatic leader steered the nation through the upheaval wrought by the global pandemic.

"Thank you to the many people who gave us their vote, who trusted us to continue leading New Zealand's recovery," the 40-year-old told cheering supporters.

Ardern had dubbed the vote "the COVID election" and campaigned on her government's success in eliminating community transmission of the virus, which has caused just 25 deaths in a population of five million.

The pandemic is one of a string of emergencies that tested Ardern's leadership during a torrid first term, after she rode



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

to an unexpected victory in 2017 polls on the back of a wave of support dubbed "Jacinda-mania". She displayed both empathy and decisive action on gun control after a white supremacist gunman killed 51 worshippers in the Christchurch mosques attack last year. Ardern again found herself comforting a shocked nation when a volcanic eruption at White Island, also known as Whakaari, killed 21 people and left dozens more with horrific burns.

"There's no doubt the strong, great leadership we've had from Jacinda Ardern has been a massive factor in all this," Labour Party president Claire Szabo said of her party's win on broadcaster TVNZ.

Saturday's vote marked the first time any leader won an absolute majority since New Zealand adopted a proportional voting system in 1996 and was the party's strongest showing since World War II. Opposition leader Judith Collins conceded an "outstanding result" for Labour and congratulated Ardern on her win.

SEE ALSO P6

COVID-19 DEATHS HIGHER AMONG MEN IN OMAN

SAMUEL KUTTY
@SAMKUTTYVP

COVID-19 deaths among men is higher than women in the Sultanate.

"The percentage of death among men is higher than women and that the disease damages lot of organs in the body", said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while addressing the media during the weekend briefing on COVID-19 situation in the country.

Even as the COVID-19 mortality rate is still at one per cent out of the total infected cases, the minister said: "Any such death represents a disaster and great pain that could be limited if we follow proper preventive measures."

According to the minister, the mortality rate in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) ranged between 75 per cent and 85 per cent and it reached 83 per cent in the second week of this month.

While bemoaning the death of a 30-year-old man who had been in the ICU for five weeks, Dr Al Saeedi said: "Deaths have no priority. They

The mortality rate in ICUs ranged between 75% and 85% and it reached 83% in the second week of this month

are not limited to elderly or people with chronic diseases, as is evident from the cases of young people in their 20s or 30s who lost their lives".

The minister asked every

individual to understand that the novel coronavirus spreads fast, with imminent risk looming from a third wave of infection, which already began in many countries, in addition to the region.

"The more we cooperate and rally efforts as a government, citizens and residents, the more we could cut down the number of infection cases and ease pressure on health establishments," said Dr Al Saeedi.

While reaffirming that there wouldn't be any compromise with the health of people, the minister made a fervent appeal to the people to adhere to preventive measures.

"How much can we wait until we do the right things of wearing masks or keeping social distancing", he asked, reminding that "it is the responsibility of every individual to take precautionary measures and abstain from gatherings".



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His Majesty confers Royal Order of Commendation on Omani women

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred Royal Order of Commendation on a number of Omani women.

The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, presented the orders to the honourees during the Oman Womens' Day celebration held under her auspices at Al Baraka Palace on Saturday morning.

The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, congratulated the Omani women on the occasion of the Oman Women's Day which falls on October 17 every year.

The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, delivered a speech during the celebration in which she said: "I would like to extend a well-deserved greeting to the Omani women who responded to the Renaissance call and carried the banner and are still helping to build a mighty Oman. My greeting goes to every Omani woman living inside or outside this dear land who have made or are still making unlimited effort that contributed to the high status the Sultanate has achieved whether, be they working women, nursemaids or students. I highly appreciate their

efforts and constructive efforts in building and developing the nation be it through their vital role in bringing up children and preparing future generations or by performing their job duties in various locations.

"I also would like to extend my congratulations to women peers from all around the world who are leading a dignified life on our dear country.

"There is no doubt that the designation of this day as day for Omani women highlights their successive achievements, sheds light on their contributions and enhances their aspirations towards a brighter future for this dear country. The designation of the Oman Women's Day was initiated as a generous support and a Royal attention from the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may Allah the Almighty have mercy on him. The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said initiated the women empowerment approach in recognition of their leading role in various fields.

"Over the past fifty years, the Omani women have earned great attention and honouring out of the belief in their role in building the civilisation

and the society and their contribution to the sustainable development. Consequently, Omani women were given chances for education, training and employment in order for them to actively participate in the march of modern development equipped with education and knowledge and armed with the laws and legislations that protect their rights and preserve their status so that the Sultanate keeps pace with the other countries of the world in terms of women empowerment as real and effective partners in development until the Omani women reached their current influential status for which they earned recognition from the international organisations involved in women empowerment.

"In complementation of this wise approach, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is keen on reinforcing the principles of social responsibility and partnership between men and women in the Omani society with the aim of achieving integration of male and female sought by the civilised societies to achieve future aspirations and flourishing of nations. This approach was embodied by His Majesty's assigning a number of senior

government positions to excelling Omani women stemming from His Majesty's recognition of their abilities and skills in performing the duties assigned to them.

"I would also like to register a certificate of pride and appreciation to all those who are fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic in all sectors particularly the health workers. I would also like to express my appreciation to the female in the health sector and all the other sectors for their noble attitudes and sincere efforts.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to every Omani woman who is exerting great efforts in various fields. May Allah the Almighty protect our dear Oman and grant Omanis success in achieving progress and glory for Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik."

His Majesty has conferred the Royal Order of Commendation (second class) to:

Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiah, Under-Secretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs and Planning at the Ministry of Health.

The Royal Order of Commendation (third class) was conferred on Aisha bint Omar bin Ahmed al Habashiyah, Fareeda bint Musa bin Jumaa al Balushiyah, Zahraa bint Salim al Aufiyah, Engineer Yusra bint Khalaf bin Sulaiman al Sabhiyah.

The Honourable Lady also honoured during the celebration a number of female personalities who had an effective role in the embodiment of diligent woman.

The celebration was attended by female members of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura and under-secretaries.

A total of 50 Omani women were honoured during the celebration. They are:

Dr Aisha bint Sulaiman al Shuhayyah, senior family medicine specialist at Daba Hospital who led a medical team that worked in the frontline in fighting COVID-19 and chaired the Omani Women Association in Daba.

Dr Amna bint Rabei bin Salmin bin Mabrouk, from the Royal Court Pension Fund, member of the general assembly of cinema and theatre, 2018, member of the board of directors of Omani Society for Writers and Literati. 2008.

Mariam bint Khalfan bin Khamis al Houtiyah, deputy supervisor of physiology department and quality supervisor at the Sultan Qaboos University.

Dr Zainab bint Nasser bin Mohammed al Balushiyah, head of surgery department at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Dr Aqeela bint Mohammed bin Hassan bin Taqi, deputy senior pharmacist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Dr Shaikha bint Sultan bin Salim al Jabriyah, head of obstetrics and gynaecology department at Suhar Hospital.

Ahlam bint Mohammed bin Nasser al Toobiyah, assistant infection control officer at the medical services command.

Zainab bint Ali bin Jumaa al Maskariyah, head of emergency and crisis department at the Directorate-General of Health Services in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Kamal bint Sulaiman bin Khalaf al Kharousiyah, consultant family medicine physician.

Air Major Mariam bint Amir al Rashdiyah, air navigation officer at Royal Air Force of Oman.

Rahma bint Qasim al Farsiyyah, former director-general of museums.

Saada bint Salim bin Mohammed al Ismailiyah, director of women sports department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth.

Naema bint Abdullah bin Mansour al Maimaniyah, fine artist, owner of Naema Gallery in Muttrah.

Aya bint Rashid bin Said al Alawiyah, entrepreneur and member of the board of directors of Al Buraimi. branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Aisha bint Mazar al Houtiyah, Royal Protocol retiree.

Afraa bint Ahmed al Yahaiyyah, director of Youth Radio.

Khadeeja bint Hassan bin Sulaiman al Lawattiyah, Foreign Ministry retiree.

Hameeda bint Salum bin Salim al Shikiriyyah, director of the Department of Rural Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Dr Aida bint Saleem bin Salmeen al Hajriyyah, retiree from the ministry of social development.

Labiba bint Mohammed bin Hamad al Maawaliyyah, women affairs expert at the Ministry of Social Development.

Raheema bint Hameed al Musafir, has been involved in charitable work for 25 years.

Dr Limiaa bint Adnan al Haj, assistant professor at the college of science, Sultan Qaboos University.

Dr Badriyah bint Sulaiman al Fahdiyah, obstetrics and gynaecology consultant.

Ghaia bint Salim al Manthriyyah, study and follow-up member at the Ministry of Education in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Makkiya bint Hassan al Kamzariyyah, first teacher of Arabic at

the Ministry of Education.

Naila bint Mohammed al Maamariyyah, retiree from the Omani Society for Fine Arts.

Karima bint Musalam al Khadhuriyyah, CEO of Muttrah Volunteering Team.

Rahma bint Nasser al Tamtamiyyah, head of Muscat branch of the Omani Women Association.

Kanouna bint Said al Junaibiyah, assistant principal of Al Khadhras School in the Wilayat of Al Jazir.

Rasha bint Ghanim in Nahdiyah, a lady with a long experience in oil and gas sector.

Dr Amina bint Aubaid al Hajriyyah, Assistant Director-General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO).

Khadeeja bint Ali al Mafrajiyyah, educational supervisor at the Ministry of Education.

Hajir bint Hamad al Hadabiyyah, an executive at Mwasalat Company.

Reem bint Nour bin Mohammed al Zedjali, lawyer.

Sayyida Basma bint Fakhri al Said, worked at the university hospital for 11 years, psychiatric health expert.

Jawhara bint Hameed al Maamariyyah.

Yusra bint Salih al Ghailaniyyah, head of the board of directors of the Sur branch of the Omani Women's Association.

Rahma bint Mubarak al Noufaliyyah, head of the board of directors of Musannah branch of the Omani Women Association.

Zainab bint Mohammed al Harasiyyah, outstanding student at all educational stages despite her mobility impairment.

Suad bint Hamood al Sawafiyah, a blind woman who obtained bachelor's degree in Islamic studies and a teacher at Omar Ibn al Khattab Institute for the Blind.

Lila bint Hamad al Shikiliyyah, interested in agriculture and animal sector and owner of a project.

Dr Joukha bint Abdullah al Shikiliyyah, director-general of private colleges and universities.

Nafeesa bint Jaafar bin Mohammed Sulaiman, financial expert at the office of the Under-Secretary of Heritage and Culture.

Kawthar bint Thani bin Ali al Khaiifiyyah, lecturer at the Cybersecurity Academy 2011.

Naema bint Musalam al Mahriyyah, CEO at Majalis Al Atheer Events.

Noura bint Abdullah al Badiyyah, poet.

Jasmin bint Yousuf al Balushi, winner of the Woman of the Decade award.

— ONA

Tender Announcement

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of work	Fee (R.O)
6/2020/PEIE/HQ-6	CONSTRUCTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES FOR EXPANSION OF INDUSTRIAL CITY AT AL BURAIMI INDUSTRIAL CITY (AREA 1&2)	01-11-2020	26-11-2020	Construction	3000

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board Excellent Grade may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24166670, 24166409 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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Sayyid Theyazin: Women are pride of Oman and partners in development

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth congratulated the Omani women on the occasion of the Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year.

HH Sayyid Theyazin greeted the Omani women on the status they have attained thanks to the successes and accomplishments they have achieved in various fields as the Omani women became real and active partners in the march of development and nation-building.

HH Sayyid Theyazin affirmed that the Omani women are accorded great attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which enabled them to perform their duties and responsibilities and managed to assume leading positions in the state and contribute to accelerating the march of development and construction.

HH Sayyid Theyazin noted that the laws and legislations guarantee all women's rights adding that the Omani Women's Day celebration is a suitable opportunity to review the march of the Omani women and its level of development year over year. This could serve as a record for registering the achievements made by the Omani women and their accumulated



The Omani women have made a notable presence in terms of achievements in the fields of culture, sports and youth. They managed to win a multitude of regional and international awards and that is a source of pride for us and also reflects the civilisational standing the Omani women enjoy

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said

experiences so that we can move on towards enhancing their participation in building a better future for women and the society in general.

He added that the Omani women constitute a productive and constructive arm and they play a major role in achieving the Sultanate's futuristic visions alongside their male partners.

HH Sayyid Theyazin noted that the Omani women form a fundamental pillar for society building on the right basis of upbringing, goodness and high moral standards which make up the pillars of the of Omani culture.

HH Sayyid Theyazin added: "The Omani women have made a notable presence in terms of achievements in the fields of culture, sports and youth. They managed to win a multitude of regional and international awards and that is a source of pride for us and also reflects the civilisational standing the Omani women enjoy thanks of the attention accorded to them by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. On this occasion we would like to reaffirm our keenness on supporting women's efforts so that they can achieve their aspirations. We will endeavour to deploy all available capacities to attain the desired goals towards achieving the Oman Vision 2040." — ONA



The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, presented the Royal Commendation Medals to the honourees during the Omani Womens' Day celebration held under her auspices at Al Baraka Palace on Saturday.

Vision 2040 offers suitable environment for women

MUSCAT: Over the past 50 years of the blessed Renaissance, Omani women have made slow and steady strides across various sectors setting a role model for their sisters across the world.

These achievements have won the Sultanate earned international commendation for gender equality, elimination of all types of discrimination by granting them all social, economic and political rights in line with the Basic Law of the State, International Human Rights Conventions, Oman Vision 2040 and Social Action Strategy 2016-2025.

The Sultanate on Saturday marked Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year. The day was designated by late Sultan Qaboos in 2009 to recognise women's vital role as essential partners of development as well as in the upbringing of future generations and social growth.

The dedication of the day to women also comes in consolidation of the approach of partnership espoused by the comprehensive development march since its inception in 1970. The overall aim is to felicitate women and celebrate their continuous contribution in nation building.

Since the launch of the Sultanate's modern renaissance under the leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos, women have had unlimited access to participation in economic and social development.

To reaffirm his resolve to pursue the march of the blessed renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, in his nation address in February 2020, reaffirmed that women will continue to enjoy their full rights as guaranteed by the law. Women, he said, will work alongside men in different fields and will serve their country and society. This stems from the importance of citizens' participation in shaping the present and future of their country. It is also based on the belief that women are considered a basic pillar of development.

In Oman Vision 2040, emphasis is on a

suitable environment for women to strongly participate in various aspects of economic, social and political life in a manner that empowers them and enables them to actively enhance efforts of comprehensive, sustainable development.

Women constitute 49.7 per cent of Oman's population. In the 0-17 years' age group, they account for 42.8 per cent of the population. The gender ratio of men to women is 101:100, according to 2019 figures.

The Sultanate perceives education as an important sector of sustainable development that promotes prosperity, health and gender equality. Many factors led to the reinforcement of women's role as active partners in society. These include their access to education and work and their participation in different development fields. Women's access to good basic and higher education contributed to access to higher posts and specialist areas.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

The government provides free education for girls from Class 1 to Class 12. As per the Child Law (22/2014), education is compulsory till Class 10. The percentage of girls in classes 10-12 stood at 96.5 per cent during the school year 2018/2019, while illiteracy dropped considerably from 11.4 per cent in 2014 to 6.5 per cent in 2019.

Statistics show a high rate of Omani girls' joining higher education institutions within the Sultanate and abroad. Girls have equal rights as boys for higher education seats. Girls' registration in higher education stood at 73 per cent and they bagged 40 per cent of scholarships.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Women constituted 59.7 per cent of Social Security Scheme beneficiaries while girls claimed 64 per cent of scholarships and grants for Social Security Scheme beneficiary families

in 2018-2019. Women received 74.5 per cent of the Haj grants for Social Security Scheme beneficiary families.

ROLE IN PRIVATE SECTOR

Omani women registered many success stories in the private sector. They account for 33.2 per cent of the overall workforce of the government and private sector in July 2020. Their percentage in the private sector stood at 26.4 per cent or 66,400 workers in 2019.

The Sultanate on Saturday marked Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year. The day was designated by late Sultan Qaboos in 2009 to recognise women's vital role as essential partners of development as well as in the upbringing of future generations and social growth

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that the percentage of Omani women working in the government sector stood at 41.9 per cent and that 83,587 Omani women are registered in the public sector's retirement fund in 2019. The centre also shows that women constituted 61

per cent of the education ministry employees and 60.8 per cent of health ministry employees in the first half of 2019.

SHURA PARTICIPATION

Legislations guaranteed women the right to participate in politics. The Majlis Ash'shura Elections Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No 58/2013 based on Basic Law of the State, grants both men and women equal right to candidacy and voting.

The ninth election of Majlis Ash'shura (2019-2023), held in October last year, saw a rise in the number of candidates compared to the previous term. Forty women contested the elections from among 637 candidates for 86 seats of the Majlis. Of the total number of voters (713,335), women were 337,534 voters (47.3 per cent). In this term, two women won membership to the Majlis, while another was nominated as a member of the State Council.

Omani women's experience in Municipal Councils came in tandem with the government's approach to women's empowerment. Four of them found a place in Municipal Councils' first term, while seven of them won seats during elections for the Councils' second term (2016-2020). The proportion of voters in Municipal Councils' elections rose from 28.6 per cent in the first term to 46 per cent in the second term of these councils.

DIPLOMACY

Women also showed their mettle as diplomats. Omani women are now members in international organisations, among them one is the chairperson of Coordination Committee for Women Parliamentarians at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (October 2014) and the former Permanent Representative of the Sultanate in the UN chaired the UN Media Committee from April 2013 to April 2015. Omani women represented the Sultanate as

ambassadors in a number of countries, and they still do, and their proportion to men as ambassadors stands at 7 per cent. This is in addition to Omani women as members in international organisations like the Islamic Organisation for Science and Culture, as the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the UN and the World Trade Organisation. Oman was the first GCC state to have women as representatives in meetings of under-secretaries and the Consultative Authority.

Omani women carried the message of peace in different countries of the world and they sketch an honourable image in building bridges with countries of the world alongside Omani men.

ROLE IN RESEARCH

In the field of scientific research, Prof Salma bint Mohammed al Kindi made Oman and Omani women proud when she was selected by the US State Department to enter the hall of famous women in the field of sciences for the Middle East region. In 2017, Al Kindi received the Life Achievement Award from Venus Institution of India in recognition for her contribution to Chemistry. Al Kindi was also elected in 2012 as the first Omani woman to Fellow to the International Science Academy. She had also occupied the post of Dean of College of Science at Sultan Qaboos University, being the first woman to occupy the post in the college's history.

Another Omani, Dr Mona bint Mohammed al Habsi worked as team member of Japanese Prof Tasuku Hugo who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2018. Her research focused on combating cancer by boosting the immune system.

Women are in the forefront of agriculture and fisheries to ensure the nation's food security. They are active in poultry, cattle rearing, tanning, bee keeping and various types of food industries. — ONA



WOMEN SHOULDERING RESPONSIBILITIES IN ALL SPHERES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@LAKSHMIOMAN

Emotion is an asset for women not weakness

Women in Oman have proven their mettle in various professions and that includes law. Maisa Zahran al Ruqaishi, who is Assistant Attorney General, Director of Regional and International Cooperation Administration, graduated with a degree in law, Beirut Arab University in 2004. Over the years she continued her higher studies while working and received her Master's from Ain Al Shams University in 2015 and in 2017 she enrolled as PhD student in Law at Beirut Arab University.

Al Ruqaishi began her career in Public Prosecution in 2005 as an assistant public prosecutor for two years. "I worked through various jobs and functions until I became the assistant attorney general in 2019. However before I joined the current institution, I was training to be a lawyer," she said.

Her work for Public Prosecution has shaped her personal life and career. She feels interpersonal skills are extremely important in this profession. "I consider it my second home where I belong. I give credits to my work in honing my interpersonal and professional skills and in empowering me to deal with life requirements and hardships. Working as a prosecutor is not a walk in the park at all.

It is a sacred duty that directly affects people's rights. Prosecutors have jurisdictions in handling criminal cases including issuing arrest and search warrants and initiating an investigation. Therefore, huge responsibilities are entrusted to public prosecutors who have to uphold the public interest in the spirit of the law, not just in the letter of the law.

Oman was among the first countries to employ women as prosecutors especially considering that the Omani law



Maisa Zahran al Ruqaishi

does not dictate jobs should be reserved for males. "Some may think that a prosecutor's job is a hard labour that does not fit very well with a woman's nature as they are prone to emotion.

In fact, I do not see this as a case. Omani women are

strong and able to produce results wherever they are. Besides, emotion is a human quality that exists in both genders. It is not tied only to women. In many cases, women can discern some fine psychological aspects during investigations, especially in cases involving families, children and juveniles.

"Moreover investigation in criminal cases requires resilience, this is a merit found in women as well in men. I believe building nations and communities rests upon both genders, men and women. It is a partnership rather than a competition," said Al Ruqaishi.

She feels her work in Public Prosecution has given her an opportunity to know people better and to understand their habits since public prosecutors move a lot from one governorate to another. "I personally had the chance to know people more and to learn a great deal from their experiences."

"I would like to congratulate Omani women on their day, October 17, which was set by His Majesty the late Sultan Qaboos. Omani women are lucky to belong to this generous country as the government has shown special consideration to women and they are equal to men in rights and responsibilities.

"My hope is that each woman who lives in this great nation works hard to serve her country and the community to the benefit of the whole world. Happy Omani Women's Day to all women especially to mothers who raise a generation after another to women who work in all fields and to women who are partners in building and developing the nation," said the Assistant Attorney General.

(With translation support from Mohammed al Hajri)

More to be achieved

The declaration of Omani Women's Day has been an inspiration for women in Oman.

Noura Salim Subaa al Majarafi, Goal Development Coach at PDO, who was previously Reservoir Engineer reflects, "It empowered me to work harder towards achieving my life and work goals, knowing that women are being recognised."

While there have been advancements in the opportunities for women and the nation has seen many success stories there are still areas for development that are yet to be explored.

"I would like to see women holding higher technical positions in the oil and gas industry. Their strength really shines through their ability to be compassionate and carry a sense of humility that drives their success," said Noura.

The strength of a woman is to be happy and know what it takes to make her own happiness, she said adding, "A woman has the ability to spread positivity and lift others up. She has the ability to stand up for what is right and share her opinions. Being a woman is being confident and knowing her value."

The challenge being, "The task is to find the work — life balance and coping with life and work fears and failures," she pointed out.



Noura Salim Subaa al Majarafi

Empowered women empower their peers

One of the biggest achievements in the march towards empowering women in Oman is flourishing home businesses.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has been supporting the movement by encouraging and giving guidelines on how to acquire the home business licences or the commercial registration number to get the confidence of consumers.

By April 30, 2020 the number amounted to 7,795 licences.

Hafsa al Ismaily and Rahma al Ismaily are sisters who have full-time jobs in the private sector. But

they felt they needed to do more with their skills and talent. With full support from their family they took their first steps and now they are full of ambitions.

For both of them the creative ideas come from the kitchen. "I thought of many ideas but I started with cooking because cooking is my favourite hobby. The business is based on Instagram. It was difficult at first, but once I took the decision, with God's grace the customers just followed. When they say it is delicious. I feel great!"

She has always had an entrepreneurial flair. In school she had learnt crochet and thread



Hafsa and Rahma al Ismaily

work before she knew it she was already selling them for RO 5 to RO 7. "When life got busy with exams I had forgotten about my little business," she reflected.

She specialises in traditional cuisine while her sister went on to make ice cream.

"I use all natural materials, I have tamarind, mangoes and different berries," Rahma explained. She has designed tricolour ice cream for Omani Women's Day.

Ask her who inspires her the most and she says, "My family, friends and my husband"

"I hope one day I will open a restaurant," said Hafsa.

"I want to have an ice cream truck so I can take my ice creams to other towns in Oman. At present my business is focused only in Al Hail and Maabala. If I have a truck I will move it to the interior also. I will drive it as well," Rahma said enthusiastically.

"I think it is the way women support each other, whether they are in my family, friends or colleagues. They encouraged me and gave me hope," pointed out Hafsa.

The hope went on to become confidence.

"As Omani women we are so lucky because of His Majesty we are where we are!"

Trump tries to shore up Florida, Biden targets Michigan

DETROIT: US President Donald Trump sought to boost his standing in the battleground state of Florida on Friday by reaching out to seniors, while rival Joe Biden blasted Trump's response to the coronavirus pandemic on a tour of the swing state of Michigan.

The two men are focusing their campaigns on the closely-fought states that are expected to determine the winner of the November 3 election.

After spending the day in Florida, Trump held a rally in Georgia, traditionally a Republican stronghold. Trump, a Republican, lags in opinion polls and the latest figures from his campaign show he is also behind in fundraising as the race intensifies with 18 days to go before Election Day.

Early voting is shattering records, with more than 23 million Americans having already cast ballots. Trump and the Republican National Committee raised some \$247.8 million in September, his campaign manager said on Twitter, well behind the \$383 million haul of Biden and the Democratic Party.

At an indoor event with a crowd of seniors in Fort Myers, Florida, Trump expressed some uncharacteristic empathy for those who have lost family members to COVID-19.

"My heart breaks for every grieving family that has lost a precious loved one. I feel their anguish. I mourn their loss. I feel their pain," said Trump, who recently recovered from his own bout with the disease.

Biden, a Democrat, has shown strength with senior voters, many of whom have faulted Trump for his response to the health crisis. Biden has lambasted Trump for often playing down the seriousness of the crisis, and has knocked the administration for seeking to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

"If I have the honour of becoming



US President Donald Trump during a Make America Great Again rally at Ocala International Airport in Ocala, Florida. — AFP

your president, we'll build on the Affordable Care Act, no matter what they do," Biden said at an event in Michigan. Trump again asserted that the country was "rounding the turn" on the outbreak, now in its eighth month, even as the number of US cases crossed 8 million on Thursday, rising by 1 million in less than a month.

"He'll do anything to distract us from focusing on his failures to deal with this virus to protect the nation," Biden said. "It's not disappearing, in fact it's on the rise again. It's getting worse, as predicted."

A new Reuters/Ipsos poll showed Trump and Biden in a statistical dead heat in Florida, which is coveted for its 29 electoral votes. US presidential elections are determined by electoral votes, allotted to US states and territories based largely on their

The two men are focusing their campaigns on the closely-fought states that are expected to determine the winner of the November 3 election.

populations, rather than a tally of the popular vote nationwide. Michigan and Georgia each have 16 electoral votes.

Biden's campaign said former president Barack Obama would travel to Philadelphia next week to campaign on his former vice-president's behalf. At a rally in Ocala, Florida, Trump played down Obama's potential impact. "Oh, I got an emergency call

today. They say, 'Sir, I'm sorry to tell you, but president Obama is going to start campaigning for Sleepy Joe.' I said, 'so what's the problem with that' — I said, 'you know, he campaigned harder than Hillary last time, so why do we care?'" Trump said.

Trump defeated former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election. At a rally in Macon, Georgia, Trump relished the crowd's chant that Biden's family should be sent to jail. "Lock up the Bidens."

Lock up Hillary!" Trump said, echoing a theme from his rallies four years ago. The president quipped that he might have to leave the country if he loses. Biden completed his campaign day with an evening get-out-the-vote rally in Detroit, where he criticised Trump for his actions while sick with COVID-19. — Reuters

French police arrest 9 after teacher beheaded

PARIS: French police have arrested nine people after a suspected sympathiser beheaded a school-teacher on the street of a Paris suburb on Friday, police sources said.

Investigators were trying to establish whether the attacker, who was shot dead by police, had acted alone or had accomplices. French media reported that he was an 18-year-old of Chechen origin.

Witnesses heard the assailant shout, a police source said.

His victim, a history teacher, had earlier this month shown his pupils cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad in a civics class on freedom of expression. President Emmanuel Macron called the incident terrorism.

Four relatives of the attacker, including a minor, were detained in the immediate hours after the attack in the middle-class suburb of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, the police sources said. Five more were detained overnight, among them two parents of pupils at the College du Bois d'Aulne where the teacher was employed.

Leaders condemned the killing, which many public figures perceived as an attack on the essence of French statehood and its values of secularism,

freedom of worship and freedom of expression.

Tareq Oubrou, the imam of a Bordeaux mosque, denied the killing marked a clash of civilisations. "It is not a civilisation that kills an innocent person, it is barbarity," Oubrou told France Inter, adding that the litany of deadly attacks by fighters or their sympathisers was devastating for France's Muslim community.

"Every day that passes without incident we give thanks," he said. "We are between hammer and anvil. It attacks the Republic, society, peace and the very essence of religion, which is about togetherness."

France will react with the greatest firmness after a schoolteacher was beheaded on the street of a Paris suburb on Friday after he had shown his pupils cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Saturday.

"Through one of its defenders, it is the Republic which has been struck in the heart by terrorism," Castex wrote on Twitter. "In solidarity with its teachers, the State will react with the greatest firmness so that the Republic and its citizens live, free! We will never give up. Never." — Reuters



Emergency responders walk past policemen in Conflans Saint-Honorine, 30kms northwest of Paris, as flowers are displayed after a teacher was decapitated by an attacker who has been shot dead by policemen. — AFP

Yemen's warring sides finish largest prisoner swap

SANAA: Yemen's warring parties completed the largest prisoner-swap in the country's five-year war on Friday, with fighters releasing fighters affiliated with influential pro-government fighters.

More than 1,000 people have been released and transported to their homes over the two-day exchange between the Ansar Allah fighters and the government in Yemen.

Ansar Allah said 671 prisoners arrived in Sanaa during the process. The swap has been two years in the making, with the rival sides initially agreeing to it in December 2018 as part of the UN-sponsored Stockholm Agreement, many parts of which have not seen any progress.

Delegates representing the government and Ansar Allah fighters finalised the details for this agreement last month after UN-brokered talks in

UN special envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths described the swap as 'an airlift of hope'

Switzerland.

Official Abdel Qader al Mortada said that the two sides had already agreed on another swap and are currently waiting for the United Nations to decide where they can meet to finalise the details.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the exchange of detainees, calling it an "important step" in the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. Guterres also urged the parties "to finalise the joint declaration, consisting of a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian



Freed Ansar Allah prisoners arrive after their release in a prisoner swap in Sanaa airport. — Reuters

measures, as well as the resumption of a comprehensive, inclusive political process to end the war," according to a statement by his spokesperson.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which facilitated the transfer and release of detainees, said that 11 flights in total took off or landed at five different cities: Yemen's Sanaa, Seiyun and Aden; and Saudi Arabia's Riyadh and Abha.

"We can say that this was really a successful conclusion," Katharina Ritz, the head of ICRC's Yemen delegation, said by phone.

"The people on the street are really very happy. I'm sure it gives hope."

ICRC synchronised the planes as they left rival cities to ensure both sides it would be a fair exchange, she said, adding that on Friday it was clear people were less nervous than the day before. "Hopefully this is the

beginning. There are several thousands still in prison and families waiting for them," Ritz added.

The ICRC carried out medical checks and provided the detainees with clothes, hygiene material and money to reach their homes. ICRC teams also provided them with personal protection equipment and information on the coronavirus pandemic, and ensured health safety measures were in place during the process. Many of the freed prisoners were injured, and ICRC provided them with crutches or wheelchairs. The Yemen Red Crescent Society and the Saudi Red Crescent Authority supported the ICRC.

On Friday, Ansar Allah fighters released prisoners from Sanaa "affiliated with the southern resistance and the western coast forces, like the Giants Brigade," an official said. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

MUMBAI

Health workers to get vaccine on priority

India's coronavirus infections rose by another 62,212 cases over the previous day and a local media report said on Saturday that the government had begun identifying about 300 million people who would be given the vaccine first when it is ready. The *Times of India* said that frontline health and sanitation workers, police officials and elderly people with co-morbidities will get the vaccine on priority.

The plan, which is still in the draft stage, aims to cover 23 per cent of the population in the first phase. The final plan is likely to be ready by end



October-November, the report said. The selected individuals will be given an estimated 600 million doses.

Earlier this month, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had said that India hopes to receive up to 500 million doses of coronavirus vaccines by July next year to inoculate about 250 million people.

VIENNA

Austrian FM tests positive for COVID-19

Austria's Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg is self-isolating after testing positive for COVID-19, his ministry said on Saturday, as the country posted a new daily record for infections.

Schallenberg could have contracted coronavirus during a meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Luxembourg on Monday, a foreign ministry spokeswoman told the APA news agency.

"He has not presented any symptoms so far," he said.

The minister has cancelled a trip planned for the coming days to Britain, Denmark, Greece and Cyprus. All members of the conservative government of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz will be tested as a precaution on Saturday.

Austria reported a new high of 2,300 cases on Saturday.

With a population of 8.8 million, Austria has also recorded 882 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Schallenberg is just the latest in a string of politicians to contract the disease, including US President Donald Trump, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. — AFP

BEIRUT

Lebanon marks protest movement anniversary

Lebanon marks the first anniversary on Saturday of a non-sectarian protest movement that has rocked the political elite but has yet to achieve its goal of sweeping reform.

A whirlwind of hope and despair has gripped the country in the year since protests began with an economic crisis and a devastating August 4 port explosion pushing Lebanon deeper into decay.

Two governments have resigned since the movement started but the country's barons, many of them warlords from the 1975-90 civil war, remain firmly in power despite



international as well as domestic pressure for change. Demonstrators plan to march from the main Beirut protest camp towards the port — the site of a devastating explosion, which has been widely blamed on the alleged corruption and incompetence of the hereditary elite.



In brief

■ COLOMBO



LANKA INTRODUCES
JAIL TERMS TO PREVENT
VIRUS SPREAD

Sri Lanka has introduced jail terms and fines for those failing to follow health measures aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus, officials said Friday. Those failing to wear face masks in public places or maintain social distancing could get a six-month jail term and a fine of Rs 10,000. “The laws are a shield for health officials and police to implement directives in containing the spread of the virus,” police deputy inspector general Ajith Rohana said. He said shops and offices are now legally required to provide sanitising facilities, maintain records of customers and restrict the movement of people in areas where the virus is spreading.

■ YANGON



1.1 M IN MYANMAR'S
RAKHINE BARRED
FROM VOTING

More than 1.1 million voters in Myanmar's western Rakhine state will be disenfranchised in upcoming national polls, according to data released by the election commission Friday, a move experts warned could fuel yet more conflict.

Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) is widely expected to be returned to power in the November 8 election — only the second since the country emerged from outright military rule.

But with virtually all Rohingyas stripped of citizenship and voting rights, many observers had already dismissed the polls as lacking credibility.

■ GUJRANWALA/LAHORE



SHARIF ACCUSES ARMY
CHIEF OF TOPPLING
HIS GOVT

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday accused the country's army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa of toppling his government, pressuring the judiciary, and installing the current government of Prime Minister Imran Khan in the 2018 elections.

Sharif was speaking via video link from London to a gathering of tens of thousands of people organised by opposition parties to kick-off a countrywide protest campaign in the eastern city of Gujranwala aiming to oust Khan's government.

Thai protesters vow to return to streets



People during a gathering of pro-democracy protesters who demand the government to resign and to release detained leaders in Bangkok. — Reuters

BANGKOK: Thai pro-democracy protesters said on Saturday they would defy an emergency decree banning gatherings for a third consecutive day after confrontations the previous night saw riot police use water cannons against the mainly young activists.

About 3,000 demonstrators in the city's main shopping mall district demanded the release of arrested protesters, and some shouted obscenities against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha before they were dispersed by police.

Free Youth, one of the main protest groups, Saturday morning called on its supporters to return to the streets later.

“Be prepared both physically and mentally for the demonstration and to cope with a crackdown if it happens,” the group's online post said.

Several hundred riot police dispersed the protesters on Friday by firing blue-dyed water laced with a chemical agent from the cannons.

Police later said the dye would mark protesters for future legal action.

The youth-led movement has jolted the kingdom's political elite with its demands for the government to step down and reforms of the previously unassailable monarchy.

The ultra-wealthy and powerful King Maha Vajiralongkorn has not



A pro-democracy protester stands in front of police officers during anti-government protests in Bangkok. — Reuters

The youth-led movement has jolted the kingdom's political elite with its demands for the government to step down

addressed the civil unrest directly but during a ceremony broadcast on Friday reminded people that Thailand “needs people who love the country, people who love the institution of the monarchy”.

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights said that 65 activists had been arrested

since Tuesday, including nine of the most prominent figures of the pro-democracy movement.

Earlier on Friday, two activists were arrested under a rarely used law banning violence against the queen because they were among a group surrounding a royal motorcade on Wednesday during a large demonstration. Both men could face life in prison if convicted.

A Thai journalist was also briefly detained during Friday's protest, according to his online news outlet, Prachathai.

Premier Prayut has extended the emergency decree banning gatherings

of more than four people until mid-November, ignoring activists' calls for him to resign.

The former army chief was the mastermind behind a 2014 coup before being voted into power in last year's election which protesters say was rigged in his favour.

Opposition party Pheu Thai has called on the government to lift emergency measures and free those detained.

Human Rights Watch on Saturday warned the emergency decree gave police “the green light to commit rights abuses with impunity” and called for international condemnation. — AFP

Jailed Philippine activist lays to rest her 3-month-old baby

MANILA: Jailed Philippine activist Reina Mae Nasino wanted to hold her three-month-old daughter for the last time before she was laid to rest on Friday but she could not.

Heavily armed prison officials guarding her refused to uncuff her despite pleas from her family and human rights supporters, who have decried what they

described as inhumane treatment of Nasino and other mothers in Philippine jails.

“We were denied the chance to be together. I did not even see your laughter,” said the 23-year-old Nasino, who was seen crying in front of her daughter River's tiny white coffin.

A local court granted Nasino a three-day furlough to attend the wake and funeral of her daughter.

Nasino, a member of the urban poverty group Kadamay, was arrested in November 2019 with two others for unlawful possession of firearms — charges she said were trumped up and part of a crackdown against left-leaning activists.



Protesters hold placards calling for justice outside the Manila North Cemetery where Nasino attended River's burial.

In April, she petitioned the Supreme Court to release her from jail on humanitarian grounds amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Nasino gave birth while in jail in July, but her baby was removed from her care and brought to her mother in August. The following

month, her baby became sick and was hospitalised, prompting calls for mother and child to be reunited.

Wearing a full-body personal protective equipment suit while standing in the heat of the sun, Nasino told her baby: “I hope we will be the last to experience this.” — dpa

■ CAMBODIA HIT BY FLOODS



A man carries his son through floodwaters on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. — AFP

Ardern wins landslide re-election in New Zealand vote

WELLINGTON: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's centre-left Labour Party won a landslide victory in New Zealand's general election on Saturday as voters rewarded her for a decisive response to COVID-19.

The mandate means Ardern, 40, could form the first single-party government in decades, and face the challenge of delivering on the progressive transformation she promised but failed to deliver in her first term, where Labour shared power with a nationalist party.

“This is a historic shift,” said political commentator Bryce Edwards of Victoria University in Wellington, describing the vote as one of the biggest swings in New Zealand's electoral history in 80 years.

Labour was on track to win 64

of the 120 seats in the country's unicameral parliament, the highest by any party since New Zealand adopted a proportional voting system in 1996. If Labour wins more than half the seats, Ardern could form the first single-party government under the current system.

Ardern came out of her home in Auckland, waved and hugged gathered supporters. Opposition National Party leader Judith Collins said she had called the prime minister to congratulate her for an “outstanding result”.

Labour had 49.0 per cent of the votes, far ahead of National at 27 per cent, the Electoral Commission said, with 77 per cent of ballots counted in an election that was largely a referendum on Ardern's aggressive



Labour Leader Jacinda Ardern visits Labour Election Day volunteers as polling booths open on election day for the 2020 General Election of New Zealand in Auckland. — AFP

handling of COVID-19. “People were very grateful and very happy with how we've handled COVID, they like the shape of the plan that we've got going forward from here for the economy,” said Finance Minister Grant Robertson, a top Labour MP.

Geoffrey Miller, an analyst at political website Democracy Project, said the victory was “very much a personal triumph for Jacinda Ardern's ‘superstar’ popularity and brand.” Of Ardern's current coalition partners, the nationalist New Zealand First Party had 2.6% and the Green Party 7.6 per cent.

If she is unable to form a Labour-only government, she is expected to continue to rely on the minor Greens while jettisoning New Zealand First.

— Reuters

Teaching is not looking at the clock on the wall

Teaching is not given by anyone, and nor is it a matter of luck! The ability to teach may be but teaching itself has greater foundations in working smart or working hard. It is more akin to that great South African golfer, Gary Player's quote that, "The harder I work, the luckier I get!" Teaching is not about telling students what you know, and then they will know it, but in helping students to learn what you know, by influencing their discovery of what you know, and thereby enabling them to learn even more.

Maya Angelou is an American poet and civil rights activist, renowned for her "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," an autobiography of her younger years, riven with her redemption from all manner of despair by her depth of character and love of literature. She wrote, illuminating much of the philosophy taken into thousands of classrooms each day and every day:

"This is the value of the teacher, who looks at a face and says there's something behind that and I want to reach that person, I want to influence that person, I want to encourage that person, I want to enrich, I want to call out that person who is behind that face, behind that colour, behind that language, behind that tradition, behind that culture. I believe you can do it. I know what was done for me."

Accountability for teaching



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ACCOUNTABILITY
FOR TEACHING
PERFORMANCE
IS OFTEN BASED
UPON CLASSROOM
OBSERVATIONS OF
TEACHING

performance is often based upon classroom observations of teaching, which are perfect if the observer knows what they are doing. But a good teacher doesn't always make a good observer, or why is an HOD or a Dean a better observer than anyone else. Observations are a 'snapshot' of a teacher's performance, but what most observers miss, due to their lack of training and experience, is the effect of the teacher on the learners. Artificiality of the process, students' unfamiliarity with the observers, and an instructional only perspective all add to a 'Sword of Damocles' effect in most observations.

Institutions do tend to hold teacher's accountable for poor student performance, ignoring the fact that from the Chancellors down, Deans, Department and Section Heads, Headmasters, Supervisors, bus drivers, previous teachers, parents, siblings and friends all contribute in some way to the learning experience, yet it is invariably the teacher upon whom the sword falls, and why one teacher ahead of another? Who knows? Yet, if a 'failing' teacher is identified, what recompense is offered to their students. None, simply an admonition, and an instruction to work harder next semester.

Those same students, more than anyone else, are affected by teaching quality, yet how often, other than in a facile documentary manner, do institutions ask the students about effective teachers,

or teaching? Eric Hanushek of Stanford University, writes that "poor teaching can affect a class by as much as a full level of achievement," while Roberto Mendro, a Dallas (USA) Educational Administrator wrote; "These effects are much larger than expected, and that the least effective teachers have a long-term influence on student achievement that is not fully remediated for up to three years later." So surely, they need to be heard?

In fact, Pearson Education found that a teacher's ability to relate to their students, their personality, understanding, knowledge of their learner's needs, dedication to their teaching, and engagement with their learners in cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels, were the keys to their having quality learning experiences. "The test of a good teacher," said Alice Wellington Rollins, a hundred years ago, "is not how many questions he can ask his students that they can answer readily, but how many questions he can inspire them to ask him, that he cannot answer readily."

Effective teachers have transformative powers. They are as much X-factor as superheroes or entertainers. In fact, they are both. They transform classrooms and lives, they inspire passion, fun, joy, play, discovery and excellence because they care, and because for them the most important things about a classroom are the students, and not the clock on the wall.

IMPORTED TORTILLAS?

Big Mexican farmers fear cuts will hit harvests

SHARAY ANGULO

Mexico's most productive farmers fear they may not be able to meet growing demand after state funding cuts, warning of a rising reliance on imports of the white corn used for staples such as tortillas and tamales.

Under President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the agricultural budget has been cropped by a third, with subsidies aimed at larger farmers, who account for two-thirds of corn production, almost entirely eliminated.

Mexico has historically been self-sufficient in white corn, but Jose Cacho, vice-president of Grupo Minsa, warns that these changes could force Mexico's second biggest corn flour miller to buy imported supplies in the medium term.

"There's a risk we won't be able to source enough," Cacho said, referring to the 800,000 tonnes Minsa buys annually, adding that it had not bought imported corn for years. Mexico's agricultural ministry and the president's office did not respond to Reuters requests for comment. Although the government says it considers all farmers important, its agriculture minister said last month that with limited resources available it must prioritise the most vulnerable in the country's many poor rural regions. Rural poverty has been a driver of immigration to the United States and

Corn is no longer good business because it is cheaper to import. They are disincentivising national production

JUAN PABLO ROJAS
National Confederation of Corn Farmers

social unrest for decades and Lopez Obrador, who ran on a pledge of helping the poor, has imposed a sweeping austerity programme and tried to reassign resources to tackle it. The government says new programmes supporting smaller farmers with price guarantees will eventually reduce imports. Mexico City-based GCMA forecasts that white corn production will to dip 3.4 per cent

to 23.5 million tonnes this year, before recovering in 2021. However, the consultancy sees Mexico's overall corn crop only inching up by about a million tonnes by 2024, the last year of Lopez Obrador's term in office. That is far short of demand growth of a million tonnes each year, or about 2.5 per cent annually.

Steadily growing use of yellow feed corn to fatten Mexico's livestock has for decades come from cheap US supplies, with imports now making up more than a third of national corn demand. While this has kept prices down, it has also undercut farmers in Mexico, where leading industry players say subsidy cuts are set to exacerbate the problem. "Corn is no longer good business because it is cheaper to import," said Juan Pablo Rojas, who heads the National Confederation of Corn Farmers and grows corn himself near the Pacific coast in western Mexico.

"They are disincentivising national production." Importing corn for tortillas could potentially make them cheaper, but a decline in national production for a product at the heart of Mexican identity would be a blow to its pride. Beyond such symbolism, Mexico is still scarred by US President Donald Trump's threat of a tariff war, which led corn importers to reconsider how reliable US supplies were.

"It affects our national sovereignty," said Rojas, adding that when farms fail, workers tend to migrate to look for work in cities or north of the border. Many support programmes have been eliminated, including \$300 million to promote exports and subsidies to help farmers pay into a price hedging mechanism, while about \$700 million in help for equipment has been cut to \$70 million in the 2021 budget.

And without more government support, larger corn farms cannot compete against the US government's aggressive payout schemes for its own corn farmers, Minsa's Cacho said. The US Department of Agriculture last month released details of a second round of its coronavirus crisis aid for farmers, including an estimated \$3.5 billion for corn farmers alone, the American Farm Bureau Federation said. — Reuters

LEGAL CHALLENGES

Duelling electors pose risk of American vote deadlock

TOM HALS

In the United States, a candidate becomes president by securing the most "electoral" votes rather than winning a majority of the national popular vote. Known as the Electoral College, the system allots electors to the 50 states and the District of Columbia largely based on their population.

It is theoretically possible for the governor and legislature, each representing a different political party, to submit two different election results, leading to so-called "duelling slates of electors."

Below are details of how that might play out. What are electors? The US president is selected by 538 electors, known as the Electoral College, with electors apportioned based on each state's population. The popular vote in each state typically determines which candidate receives a state's electoral votes.

The US Constitution and the 1887 Electoral Count Act govern the counting of electoral votes and any related disputes. The electors will meet on December 14 to cast votes, which are then counted by Congress on January 6 in a process overseen by Vice-President Mike Pence in his role as Senate president.

What are duelling electors? States with close contests between Republican President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival Joe Biden could produce competing slates of electors, one certified by the governor and the other by the legislature. The risk of this happening is heightened in the battleground states of Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, which have Democratic governors and Republican-controlled



A Voter poses for a photo outside an early voting location after casting their ballots in the US presidential election in Phoenix, Arizona, on Saturday. — AFP

TRUMP HAS
REPEATEDLY SAID
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IS RIGGED AND
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ATTACKS ON MAIL-
IN VOTING, WHICH
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DEMOCRATS

legislatures.

Some election law experts are concerned that an unprecedented volume of mailed-in votes and legal challenges will delay the outcome of the election for weeks, creating an extended period of uncertainty.

Trump has repeatedly said the election is rigged and made unfounded attacks on mail-in voting, which tends to favour Democrats. If early returns show a Trump lead, experts say the president could

press Republican-controlled legislatures to appoint electors favourable to him, claiming the initial vote count reflects the true outcome. Governors in those same states could end up backing a separate slate of electors pledged to Biden if the final count showed the Democratic candidate had won. Both sets of electors would meet and vote on December 14 and the competing results would be sent to Congress.

— Reuters



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Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (L) scores a goal during the French L1 football match between Nimes (NO) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at the Costieres Stadium in Nimes, southern France, on Friday. — AFP

TIRELESS MBAPPE HITS BRACE FOR PSG

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe shrugged off any lingering fatigue to score twice in his second game in 48 hours as Paris Saint-Germain defeated 10-man Nimes 4-0 on Friday to take over the top spot in Ligue 1.

France forward struck the opener on 32 minutes at the Stade des Costieres and netted again late on as a weary Nimes folded following the early dismissal of centre-back Loick Landre.

Alessandro Florenzi scored PSG's second on 77 minutes and Pablo Sarabia notched a fourth for the reigning champions as PSG climbed above Rennes on goal difference after a fifth successive win.

"I spoke with Kylian yesterday, he

told me that he felt good and that he absolutely wanted to play," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel.

"He's the guy who can always make a difference and he did just that."

New signings Moise Kean and Rafinha made their PSG debuts with a host of players missing following the international break and just four days ahead of the visit of Manchester United in the Champions League.

Neymar sat out the trip after scoring a hat-trick for Brazil in a World Cup qualifier in Peru that did not finish until the early hours of Wednesday in Europe.

However, Mbappe was handed a second start in three days having scored the winning goal for France

midweek in their Nations League match in Zagreb.

PSG lost Leandro Paredes to an injury inside 10 minutes. The midfielder had started both of Argentina's World Cup qualifying wins over Ecuador and Bolivia in the past week.

Landre was sent off moments later for a rash challenge on Rafinha, raking his studs down the side of the ex-Barcelona player's ribs.

Ander Herrera, cleared to return after a positive Covid-19 test, drew the first in a series of superb saves from Nimes goalkeeper Baptiste Reynet having replaced the injured Paredes.

But Mbappe gave PSG the lead after he was played through by Rafinha,

“
He's the guy who
can always make a
difference and he did
just that.

THOMAS TUCHEL
PSG coach

rounding the advancing Reynet before slotting in his third league goal of the campaign.

Everton loanee Kean should have

added a second but was denied by an alert Reynet, with Idrissa Gueye and Florenzi also testing the Nimes keeper.

Florenzi rattled the post twice in the second half, with a volley and header, but the Italy defender eventually gave PSG room to breathe as he nodded in Sarabia's header back across goal.

Mbappe promptly grabbed his second of the night with another nerveless finish after Sarabia shredded a tiring Nimes defence.

The Spaniard then caught out the hosts from a quickly-taken free-kick to smack in a fourth through the legs of Reynet two minutes from the end.

Earlier, Rennes extended their unbeaten start to the Ligue 1 season despite drawing 1-1 at bottom side

Dijon.

Martin Terrier put Rennes ahead in the first half with a neat finish, but Guinea-Bissau international Mame Balde barged through the visiting defence to equalise on 54 minutes.

Eduardo Camavinga, who last week became France's youngest goalscorer since 1914, came on for the last half-hour against a team who had picked up a solitary point from six matches.

Flavien Tait dragged a shot into the ground that clipped the crossbar as it looped over as Rennes were held for the second game in a row.

Lille or Lens could overtake PSG and Rennes with victory in Sunday's Derby du Nord, the first such fixture in over five years. — AFP





Nortje bowls fastest ball in IPL history

South African pace bowler Anrich Nortje bowled the fastest ball in Indian Premier League (IPL) history on Wednesday during his team Delhi Capitals' 13-run victory over Rajasthan Royals. The 26-year-old eclipsed compatriot Dale Steyn's effort of 154.40 km per hour set in 2012, clocking 154.74 kph and 155.21 kph in the game at Dubai before his best effort of 156.22 kph was scooped for a boundary by Rajasthan's Jos Buttler.



West Indies recall Bravo, Hetmyer for NZ tour

Darren Bravo and Shimron Hetmyer were named on Friday in the West Indies squad for a proposed two-Test series in New Zealand, having turned down invitations for the tour of England earlier this year. Bravo and Hetmyer have been recalled along with fast-bowling all-rounder Keemo Paul, who also skipped the England tour, as part of a 15-man squad backed up by six reserve players.

De Kock lifts Mumbai to top

MORGAN SUFFERS DEFEAT IN FIRST MATCH AS KOLKATA CAPTAIN



Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians and Hardik Pandya of Mumbai Indians after winning the match at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium, Abu Dhabi. — BCCI

ABU DHABI: South African captain Quinton de Kock scored a brilliant unbeaten 78 on Friday as Indian Premier League champions Mumbai Indians inflicted a crushing defeat on England counterpart Eoin Morgan in his first game leading Kolkata Knight Riders.

Morgan, who took over after Dinesh Karthik quit just hours before the game, won the toss but nothing else.

He saw his batsmen and bowlers hammered by Mumbai, whose eight-wicket win -- a fifth straight victory -- put them back level with Delhi Capitals at the top of the IPL standings.

De Kock hit three sixes and nine fours in a 44-ball demolition of the Kolkata bowlers, as Mumbai made 149-2 in just 16.5 overs to overtake their rivals' 148-5 off 20 overs.

Ironically, wicketkeeper De Kock dropped Pat Cummins in the

penultimate over of the Kolkata innings. Cummins and Morgan hit 35 runs off the final 12 balls to give a semblance of respectability to the score. Fast bowler Cummins hit his first T20 half century.

His 53 included two sixes and five fours. Morgan made 39, with two sixes and a four in the last six balls.

It only partially made up for a disastrous performance by Kolkata's leading batsmen.

The Australia-England partnership came together with their team in dire trouble at 61-5.

Despite their runs, Morgan knows he faces a tough task putting life back into big-spending Kolkata.

Cummins is the most expensive foreigner in the league with a \$2.8 million contract but has taken only two wickets in eight matches and conceded another 28 runs to Mumbai.

Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma

(35) and De Kock tore into the target from the first ball, which Sharma hit for a four. The pair put on 94 for the first wicket.

Sharma said he was happy to take a "backseat" and let De Kock "bat free".

"He likes to take it to the bowlers," said the India opener.

"It gives us a lot of confidence," said Sharma of the win. "Clinical with the ball, clinical with the bat, the overall performance that we expected was there."

Sharma said that after a six-month pandemic lay-off the whole team was "very hungry and they want to prove a point."

The IPL has been moved to the United Arab Emirates because of the coronavirus crisis.

Dehli Capitals get a chance to reclaim top spot alone when they take on Chennai Super Kings in one of two games on Saturday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS	
Rahul T c Suryakumar b T Boult	7
Shubman c K Pollard b Rahul C	21
Nitish R c Q de Kock b N Coulter-Nile	5
Dinesh K b Rahul C	4
Eoin Morgan not out	39
A Russell c Q de Kock b J Bumrah	12
P Cummins not out	53
Extras (Ob 2lb Onb Open 5w)	7
Total (20 overs)	148-5
Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-33, 3-42, 4-42, 5-61	
Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-32-1, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-51-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-22-1, Krunal Pandya 4-0-23-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-18-2	
MUMBAI INDIANS	
Rohit S c Dinesh K b Shivam M	35
Q de Kock not out	78
Suryakumar Y b Varun C	10
Hardik Pandya not out	21
Extras (Ob 5lb Onb Open 0w)	5
Total (16.5 overs)	149-2
Fall of wickets: 1-94, 2-111	
Bowling: Chris Green 2.5-0-24-0, Pat Cummins 3-0-28-0, Prasidh Krishna 2-0-30-0, Andre Russell 2-0-15-0, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-23-1, Shivam Mavi 3-0-24-1	

'Gul-dozer' calls time on topsy-turvy journey

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan bowler Umar Gul, who earned the nickname 'Gul-dozer' for his rattling of stumps, has called time on his 17-year cricket career.

With no crowds to bid farewell to the national hero because of coronavirus restrictions, the Twenty20 World Cup winner bowed out to a guard of honour from teammates and opponents after his final match — a disappointing defeat — in Rawalpindi on Friday.

"I want to be remembered as someone who tried his best for the country and it's flattering that I was called 'Gul-dozer' during this memorable journey in cricket," the 36-year-old said.

It was a topsy-turvy journey for Gul, whose affair with cricket began on the crowded streets of Peshawar.

He entered the international arena exactly a month after the legendary pace duo of Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis retired following Pakistan's disastrous 2003 World Cup.

It was like the baton of swing bowling had been passed from one generation to another, Gul recalled.

"It was tough to fill those shoes but I tried my best and it was great to lead Pakistan to the final of the Twenty20 World Cup in 2007 and then to the title two years later," he

said.

He finished with 163 Test and 179 ODI wickets, but he achieved his greatest success in Twenty20 cricket, the start of his career coinciding with the launch of the shortest format in 2003.

Gul was at his destructive best in England in 2009, finishing as the top wicket taker of the Twenty20 World Cup with 13. That included a mesmerising five wickets for just six runs in the semifinal win over New Zealand.

"Winning the World Cup was the highest point of my career," he said. "I remember those were very tough days and there was unrest in our country so our win brought smiles back on the faces."

At the time, Pakistan's military was fighting an insurgency from militants in the northwestern region of the country.

Bitter-sweet India memories Gul attributes his Twenty20 skills to the early days of his love for the game.

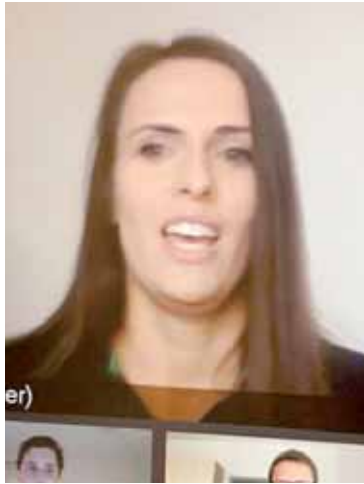
"I grew up playing 20-20-over matches in the streets and then Ramadan cricket where you look for wickets in a 20-over innings," he said.

But his baptism was in Test cricket, where he became an instant hero in 2004. — AFP



Teammates and opponents give a guard of honour to Umar Gul (C) during the National T20 Cup in Rawalpindi. — AFP

OTTA keen on developing women's game in Oman



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) delivered a visual presentation to International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) on the development of women's table tennis in the Sultanate.

The presentation was part of the webinar organised on Thursday by the ITTF High Performance and Development unit for the programme 'My Gender. My Strength'. The webinar came in connection with the Sultanate's celebration of Omani Women Day annually marked on October 17.

Sajjad Mohammed Baqir, Vice-Chairman of OTTA, made the presentation on behalf of OTTA and he briefed the participants on the



development stages of women's and girls TT in the country.

Sajjad began with the mention of the government attention on the women sports including table tennis. He wished a happy Omani Women day for all the women players, coaches and umpires.

The OTTA official explained the association's earlier efforts on the women's TT development during the Oman Tables Tennis Committee period.

"There was direct coordination among the OTTA, Ministry of Education and Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) to develop TT in the Sultanate at different categories with more focus at junior level and taking the potential stars



from schools, universities, clubs and even the elderly of both genders. The project of 'Women's Development in Oman's Table Tennis' came through an initiative organised between OTTA and OSSA."

"The execution of the project was through involving the domestic schools and encouraging the junior female students to take part at the Schools TT tournaments. Targets and objectives are set with a timeline of 2018-2021. The targeted groups included female students under 12 years old in all the government and private schools in Oman besides Physical Education teachers in these schools," he said.

Moving to the project's partners and the set plan, he said the OTTA had signed an MoU with Ministry of

Education and Oman School Sport Association. "The sponsorship for the project was STAG Company which provided all the equipment and tools. Four years agreement plan was set to develop the domestic women's TT through STAG TT tournament. The project was started in 2018 and it featured single qualification tournament and one team only advanced from each of the 12 governorates in Oman. The finals had been organised in Muscat."

"The OTTA had provided the equipment support for the event from STAG besides the coaching sessions delivered by OTTA technical staff. The OTTA had arranged the trophies and cash prizes for the top winners in coordination with the partners," Sajjad

added.

Sajjad shared some statistics and figures of 2018 and 2019. "There was gradual rise in the participants at the STAG TT league. More than 285 schools took part in the league besides participations of 698 students and 290 sports physical teachers. After completion of the 2019 league, more than 15 players were selected for the junior talent centre. The 2020 plan to develop the female students were impacted with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. All the set plans and future initiatives will be moved to new educational year 2020-21," he pointed out.

Commenting on the future plan, Sajjad said the plan in 2023 is to increase number of women umpires

to 30 as the Sultanate will organise the prestigious 2023 ITTF World Veteran Championship. "Also, our plan is to have more female and girls players. The target is to reach to 40 and 50 players in the few following years. Also, three top female players will be selected for the forthcoming international events. Preparing five top domestic women TT coaches to supervise the training programme of girls is another set plan to be accomplished within this three years," he concluded.

The ITTF officials at the High Performance and Development unit appreciated the Sultanate efforts in developing the women's game. They affirmed that ITTF will support any initiatives that will ensure the progress of TT in Oman.



Schauffele rides on hot start

LOS ANGELES: Xander Schauffele rolled in six straight birdies en route to an eight-under par 64 and a three-shot lead after the second round of the US PGA Tour's CJ Cup in Las Vegas on Friday.

Schauffele's 14-under total of 130 saw him vault over first-round leader Tyrrell Hatton, who finished the day in second on 11-under at Shadow Creek.

Schauffele, coming off a fifth-place finish at the US Open, started on No 10 and shot 29 on his front nine, stringing together six birdies from the 13th through the 18th.

He then cooled coming in, but still finished with a bogey-free round.

"I got off to a hot start and kind of slowed down. But I am just happy I made that par putt on the last," said Schauffele.

"Got a little bit stale there on the other side. The pace of play slowed down a lot. It was kind of hot and easy to let the mind wander. I am upset I didn't make more birdies, but pleased I didn't make any bogeys."

England's Hatton, who is coming off a European Tour win last weekend, shot 66 for 133.

American Russell Henley was alone in third after shooting a 68 for 134 and Talor Gooch sits fourth following a 65 for a nine-under 135.

Schauffele led by five at the turn. He had birdied his second hole, the 11th, and after a par at the 12th launched his run. On the par-three 13th, he landed his 212-yard tee



Xander Schauffele tees off on the fifth hole during the first round of the CJ Cup in Las Vegas. – USA Today Sports



I am upset I didn't make more birdies, but pleased I didn't make any bogeys

XANDER SCHAUFFELE,
US golfer

shot just two feet from the hole. He then drained back-to-back long bombs, making a 26-foot putt on the par-four 14th and a 37-footer on the par-four 15th.

On his final hole on the front, Schauffele landed his 98-yard approach 13 feet from the cup. He would make the putt for his sixth straight birdie.

It was one of the best birdie runs of his career, and just behind the seven straight he made at this event in 2018 when it was played in its typical location in South Korea.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the CJ Cup to be played in the United States this year.

"It was nice. I had a chip-in there, two long putts. Some of those holes you're not really trying to birdie them, you're kind of just

trying to leave yourself an uphill 35-footer and fortunately I made a couple of them," he said.

— AFP

CJ Cup at Shadow Creek scores
Second-round (USA unless noted, par-72):
130 - Xander Schauffele 66-64
133 - Tyrrell Hatton (ENG) 65-68
134 - Russell Henley 66-68,
135 - Talor Gooch 70-65
136 - Jason Kokrak 70-66, Collin Morikawa 71-65
137 - Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG) 69-68
138 - Lanto Griffin 70-68, Justin Thomas 72-66, Kevin Streelman 68-70, Tyler Duncan 67-71, Hideki Matsuyama (JPN) 70-68
139 - Harry Higgs 72-67, Ian Poulter (ENG) 69-70

Team ARTT launch new match kits

MUSCAT: Team ARTT (Arabian Region Travel and Tourism), launched their match kits in the presence of Ajay Pandey (OmanTech), Mohammed Laibu (OmanTech), Idris Solanki (SM Homes) and Noushad Ismail (Al Mardhouf Shopping) at the Oman Cricket Turf Grounds.

Due to the ongoing coronavirus concerns and to implement social distancing, very few people attended the function and rest were hosted online. Madhu Jesrani, Duleep Mendis (CDO Oman Cricket), Ali Anwar (ARTT), Nilesh Mehta (Muscat Pharmacy), Anil Khimji (Khimji Ramdas), Kiran Asher (Al Ansari Group of Companies), Raju Appanapalli (Appetite Restaurant), Sunil Kumar (Oman Oasis), Mangaldas Kamat (KR Paints) and Mazin al Wahibi (Body Master Gym) sent their best wishes to the entire team and it's management on this occasion.

ARTT co-owner Pranav Mehta, emphasised the reasons for the changes in the kit from the last season. "We had a few negative factors in our team last year, we have got rid of them and made a fresh new start. Hence we have orange at the bottom, which indicates a sunrise (new



beginning). The red indicates the positive and attacking style of gameplay which we want to represent. The navy blue colour signifies the trust, loyalty, wisdom and confidence.

Team ARTT will be playing their first match against Earnst and Young on October 30. Last year as well, both these team played the first match, where Team ARTT came out triumphant in a one-sided affair.

Captain Ahmed Khan, talking about the team combination was more than delighted for the inclusion of Zeeshan Siddiqui, Amir Ali and Aqil Khan.

"All of these three players are vastly

experienced and would provide stability to our middle order. Youngsters like Moshin Qureshi, Sanjaya Raj, Bilal Asim and Adeel Abbas would electrify our energy in the field. We have a very wide range of high-quality bowling options, which should be a big plus for us. We bat very deep as well, so the pressure to post a competitive total against our quality bowling side will be our biggest strength."

Ali Anwar, mentioned that the team has made sure that the players have got the best of facilities, equipment and clothing.

"There hasn't been any compromises at all. We have also taken care of all precautionary measures to make sure that all our players are provided with a safe environment. From hand sanitiser, to our designed face masks, to each player provided his own clothing and equipment set to discourage sharing, we have covered it all. We have a brilliant side and we are looking forward to a very good season. "

Noushad, Idris and Ajay Pandey were all very excited to be a part of Team ARTT and were looking forward to a long and strong relationship.

Sports bodies cut budgets for local events

ADIL AL BALUSHI
Muscat, Oct 17

Many of the domestic sports bodies in Oman have reduced their financial allocations for the domestic events after the government decision to implement a 10 per cent cut in the annual budget to all the relevant parties.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) was the first association to implement the decision. The OFA will reduce cash prizes for all the national footballing competitions including the HM Cup, Omantel League, the first division league, U-21 league, U-19 league and U-16 league.

The Oman Handball Association (OHA) has a reduced budget for the Ministry's Shield championship. The OHA decided to reduce cash prizes for the top three winners. After the implementation of the decision, the total allocated budget for cash prizes of the top handball event is RO 20,000. The winners will receive an amount of RO 10,000, while the second-placed team will get RO 6,000. The third-placed team will now get RO 4,000.

Dhofar Club's Secretary-General Abdulaziz al Rawas stated that the sports bodies did not properly implement the Ministry decision on reduction of the annual allocated budget.

"The local clubs will suffer due to this decision. There are many other options for the associations

to reduce different operational expenses rather than decreasing the budget for local competitions and cash prizes," he added.

Al Rawas said, through official Dhofar accounts at social media, that the current sporting season is exceptional due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. "All the clubs which are competing in different sporting events are looking forward to register top places to cover their financial difficulties to some extent at least," he pointed out.

The above decision came in adherence to the circular of the Ministry of Finance to all the government units including Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. According to the government instructions, there will be a 10 per cent reduction in the budgets for all the government ministries, authorities, military and security units through fiscal year 2020. This step will support the government to achieve financial stability by cutting spending to reduce the budget deficit and eventually shore up the economy.

The Ministry of Finance had issued the circular in May 2020 and affirmed to fully comply with the financial measures undertaken. The Ministry called upon all the departments concerned to cooperate and adapt their conditions accordingly to realise the overall public interest in securing financial and economic stability.



SHORT TAKES

LOS ANGELES

Limited fans to be allowed at Houston Open

The US PGA Tour plans to allow a limited number of golf fans to attend the Houston Open tournament next month in Texas.

The Tour and event organisers said they have been working with Texas health officials to come up with a plan to allow 2,000 fans a day to Memorial Park Golf Course.

Those lucky enough to get a ticket will have to shell out \$109 per ticket for the November 5-8 event. Spectators are usually charged between \$30 and \$60 to attend a PGA event.



ST ANDREWS

Wallace stars in front of Harrington

England's Matt Wallace shot a fine five-under 67 in front of Ryder Cup captain Padraig Harrington to move into a share of the lead at the halfway stage of the Scottish Championship at Fairmont St Andrews in the United Kingdom on Friday.

The 30-year-old fired six birdies and just one bogey to reach 12 under par — a total that left him level with Spain's Adrian Otaegui, who added a 70 to his opening 62.

Aaron Rai, the winner of the Scottish Open a fortnight ago, is one shot back, with France's



Adrien Saddier in fourth place.

Harrington, Europe's captain for next year's rearranged Ryder Cup clash against the United States at Whistling Straits, carded a 69 to leave him in a tie for fifth on nine-under-par.

SYDNEY

Australia's 3 premier golf events cancelled

Golf Australia on Friday announced its three major summer tournaments will not be going ahead as planned in February due to complications caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Australian PGA Championship, Australian Open and Women's Australian Open have all been cancelled. It will be the first time since 1945 that the men's open will not tee off.

"It's unprecedented and a real blow for Australian golf and its fans," PGA of Australia chief executive Gavin Kirkman said. He



said that they had spent "months in exhaustive consultation with all relevant authorities" to find a way to safely stage all three events.

"But even with multiple contingency plans, it has reached a point where decisions have to be made and this, regrettably, is the one we've had to take."

Second sovereign downgrade wave coming, major nations at risk



The New York Stock Exchange is seen in the financial district of lower Manhattan during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in New York City. – Reuters

LONDON: Some of the world's top economies could see their credit ratings cut or put on downgrade warnings in the coming months in a second global wave of coronavirus-related revisions, S&P Global's top sovereign analyst has warned.

S&P's sovereign group managing director Roberto Sifon-Arevalo told Reuters that the immense costs of supporting health systems, firms and workers through the pandemic was fundamentally altering some countries' finances for the worse.

The rating agency has already downgraded or cut the outlooks on nearly 60 countries this year, but only relatively few have been higher-rated richer nations.

With some though piling on 15-20 points of debt as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) — amounts that would normally take four or five years to accumulate — and locked into higher spending for the next 3-5 years, that could be about to change.

"You are talking about ratings in the EU, or in highly developed countries like Japan or the UK or in this part of the world, the United States, that have been able to implement pretty massive fiscal and monetary packages to defend themselves," Sifon-Arevalo said.

"The main point to see here is where do we see the trajectory going forward. If we see the trajectory as establishing more of a different structural pattern, then you are going to see some (rating) movements there."

A total of 31 countries — almost

You are talking about ratings in the EU, or in highly developed countries like Japan or the UK or in this part of the world, the United States, that have been able to implement pretty massive fiscal and monetary packages to defend themselves

a quarter of all those S&P rates — currently have "negative outlooks" on their ratings which more often than not get converted into downgrades.

Of the bigger economies it includes Australia's prized triple-A rating, Italy and Mexico's BBB scores and Spain's A grade. However, a blizzard of new negative outlooks could be just as much of a worry at a time when many major economies are seeing a resurgence of the virus.

"We are going through the revisions. Now, and over the next few months we will continue to do so," Sifon-Arevalo said.

"I would say initially it's going to be an outlook change. And again, there's going to be those that maybe will come out of that and will come back to stable (outlooks) in a couple of years."

"But then there will be those that will not come back to stable and they will keep going down the rating spectrum." — **Reuters**

VAT's indirect economic spinoffs: reduced cost of debt, job creation

KNOCK-ON EFFECTS:
Implementation of new tax will unleash a number of beneficial spinoffs – direct and indirect – with positive ramifications for the wider Omani economy

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Oman government's decision to roll out Value Added Tax (VAT) with effect from April 2021 will not only buoy the country's constrained fiscals, but perhaps just as importantly, it will have beneficial and far-reaching socio-economic impacts as well.

For one, VAT implementation will contribute to a gradual, but significant, reduction in the government's interest cost burden in financing its sizable debt. Secondly, the introduction of a new tax regime in the country will create potentially thousands of jobs for Omanis in a variety of accounting and tax related fields.

According to Muscat-based tax expert Alkesh Joshi, the benefits accruing to the national economy as a result of VAT implementation will far outweigh the cost burden on consumers once the new 5 per cent levy — one of the lowest VAT rates in the world — comes into force on goods and services next April.

"VAT implementation will unleash a number of beneficial spinoffs — direct and indirect — with positive ramifications for the wider Omani economy," Joshi, Partner, Oman Tax Leader, MENA Energy Tax Leader at EY, said.

"We expect revenue collection from VAT, estimated to range from RO 250 – 300 million for the first full year of implementation, to offset Oman's mounting budget deficit, albeit modestly initially.

But there's a far more important spinoff as well: the implementation of a new tax regime will encourage international ratings agencies to issue more favourable outlooks for the Omani economy, as opposed to the relatively unflattering ratings that have been issued, of late. A positive ratings outlook will make it less



With the VAT Law effectively requiring every tax-liable company to comply with the new tax regime and maintain their books accordingly, the requirement for qualified accountants and tax auditors, among related disciplines, such as IT and computing, will be significant

expensive for Oman to borrow from international markets."

Citing budgetary estimates, the tax expert noted that the 2020 State Budget has allocated a staggering RO 860 million towards the financing of the country's outstanding debt for the year, up from RO 630 million in 2019.

"With positive ratings outlooks, this enormous interest burden will be progressively reduced in the coming years. Indeed, combined with collections from VAT, this saving on the cost of borrowings could result in a net benefit for the Omani economy ranging from RO 800 million RO 1 billion annually in a few years," Joshi remarked.

Thus, while the VAT collection in itself is expected to be modest, the knock-on effects for the economy, notably in reducing the budget deficit, will be enormous, says the expert.

necessary to underpin the efficient operation of this new tax regime. We reckon that potentially thousands of new jobs will be created, mostly in the fields of accounting and tax audit, but also in hardware and software support, training services, and so on, as a result of this new tax."

Joshi also sees the new tax as an opportunity for citizens and residents to contribute to nation-building at a time when the country is facing huge economic challenges.

"The modest 5 per cent levy on goods and services is a small sacrifice we should bear to help Oman at this juncture. In addition, VAT also has the potential to somewhat level the playing field between the economically weaker and affluent sections of the populations.

Experts have found that low income households make a relatively small contribution towards VAT because the bulk of their household expenditure, covering food, healthcare and education, is zero-rated or exempt from the new tax. But in contrast, affluent households make a larger contribution towards VAT because the major share of their expenditure is on high-end goods and services which are all taxable."

OPEC+ OUTLOOK

Second virus wave could lead to oil surplus in 2021

MOSCOW: Opec and its allies fear a prolonged second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and a jump in Libyan output could push the oil market into surplus next year, according to a document, a gloomier outlook than just a month ago.

A panel of officials from Opec+ producers, called the Joint Technical Committee, considered this worst-case scenario during a virtual monthly meeting on Thursday. In September, the panel had not seen a surplus under any scenarios it considered.

Such a surplus could threaten plans by Opec, Russia and allies, known as Opec+, to taper record output cuts made this year by adding 2 million bpd of oil to the market in 2021.

The Opec has not indicated any plan so far to scrap that supply boost.

"The earlier signs of economic recovery in some parts of the world are overshadowed by fragile conditions and growing scepticism about the pace of the recovery," according to the document used in the panel's monthly meeting in October.

"In particular, a resurgence of



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo. – Reuters

COVID-19 cases across the world and prospects for partial lockdowns in the coming winter months could compound the risks to economic and oil demand recovery," it said.

The document presented scenarios that included a base case that still showed a deficit in 2021 of 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd) on average, albeit less than the deficit of 2.7 million bpd forecast in the previous month's base case.

But under its worst-case scenario, the document said the market could flip into a surplus of 200,000 bpd in 2021.

This year, Opec+ agreed to make record output cuts to support plunging prices as oil demand collapsed. It cut 9.7 million bpd from May, tapering that to 7.7 million bpd from August. From January, cuts are due to ease to 5.7 million bpd.

However, since the Joint Technical Committee met in September, Libyan output has climbed and a global rise in coronavirus cases has led to renewed restrictions on movement in some countries, weakening demand for crude. — **Reuters**

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

AGREEMENTS

MADAYN SIGNS TWO KEY AGREEMENTS



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed an agreement with Roadline Company to implement support infrastructure projects at Samayil Industrial city, and another agreement with Amazon for Environment and Sustainability to provide a healthy environment in Madayn's industrial cities.

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SALES

US RETAIL SALES BLOW EXPECTATIONS IN SEPTEMBER



US retail sales accelerated in September, rounding out a strong quarter of economic activity, but the recovery from the COVID-19 recession is at a crossroads as government money runs out and companies continue to layoff workers. Other data showed an unexpected drop in output at factories.

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GOLD

INDIAN GOLD DEALERS TO STOCK UP, HOPE TO USHER IN FESTIVE GLITTER



Physical gold dealers in India continued to stock up this week ahead of an expected festival sales bump, while the Golden Week in top consumer China did little to revive bullion demand. Gold is considered an intrinsic part of Indian festivals such as Dussehra, Diwali and Dhanteras.

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From zero to hero selling online (Part 2)

The next step was to set up a website and an online store. The website that I created was not meant to be an online shop, but rather a showcase of the products that talked about the concepts behind and educate visitors about alternative diets.

The reason why I didn't try to sell directly from my website is because existing marketplaces offer visibility to a much larger audience, so instead of investing my time getting potential customers to find out about my website, I could just upload the products on a marketplace and start selling right away.

As I was working at my own

informative website I realised that I could have added flavouring to the chips. So I made variations with herbs and chilli. I then had 3 products to sell. I took plenty of nice pictures of the products and even created cute mascottes for each flavour.

Once my website was up and running, I opened a store on Lazada, one of the most popular marketplaces in Southeast Asia. There I started uploading my initial 3 products.

To my surprise I received the first order within a couple of days from opening the store. That is the big advantage of working with an existing marketplace. Immediately after, I started looking for other keto



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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THE REASON WHY I DIDN'T TRY TO SELL DIRECTLY FROM MY WEBSITE IS BECAUSE EXISTING MARKETPLACES OFFER VISIBILITY TO A MUCH LARGER AUDIENCE

friendly snack recipes and I came across almond flour based keto cookies.

I perfected the recipe and maximised the space in my oven. Run through the same cost calculation and applied profit. So I had 4 products to sell. Within a week I was receiving daily orders for all of the 3 types of chips and the first orders for cookies too.

I realised that it was essential to participate in the Lazada marketing campaigns, because their marketing efforts were amazing at driving traffic to all the individual stores. At that point in time, when searching for keto products on Lazada, my snacks were the only cooked products. The other "competitors"

were keto powders.

I needed to rush to seize a larger share of the market, so I decided to start frying dried anchovies and added flavour to them.

In Southeast Asia it is called ikan billis and it is a traditional Malay snack. But I rebranded it in a "hipster fashion" riding on the popularity of the keto diet. I started with the plain anchovies, then added 2 flavours on top of the original one: herbs and wasabi. My inventory was now at 7 types of products and about 10 orders per day.

As the Lazada campaign approached I started promoting for free on Facebook, but frankly it did not matter very much because all of the clients who came across my

products were through Lazada, so I focused on that channel.

At the second week mark I was heavily occupied in preparing the products, packing them nicely and shipping them with an attached hand written thank you card to the customer.

I could have taken up to 4 hours of my day. By the 3rd week (on the 22nd day to be precise) the Lazada campaign finally started. To my greatest surprise I received 44 orders in 1 single day. It was amazing. I spent nearly 8 hours overworking my oven, printing labels, packing and going back and forth the post office.

[Stefano Virgilli is a member of the International Press Association]

More than 13,500 certificates of release issued in Q2

MUSCAT: The number of certificates of release issued for important commodities of the mechanical and metal products, electrical products, chemical products, building materials products, food and agricultural products sector reached 13,576 in the Q2 of this year.

The Statistics Department of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that the number of release certificates issued for the mechanical and metallic products sector was 1,317 which included release certificates for passenger cars and their tires. There were 1,436 release

certificates issued for electrical products which included for lead-acid batteries for cars, air-conditioning, refrigeration, appliances and low-voltage electrical equipment. In the chemical products sector, there were 1,110 certificates of release issued for automotive engine oils and cosmetics.

The number of certificates of release in the building materials products sector during the Q2 amounted was 9,686 which included for Portland cement, rebar, toys, safety shoes and paints. The number of release certificates for the food and agricultural products sector reached 27.

BUSINESS RELATIONS

Madayn signs two key agreements

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed an agreement with Roadline Company to implement support infrastructure projects at Samayil Industrial City, and another agreement with Amazon for Environment and Sustainability to provide a healthy environment in Madayn's industrial cities.

The agreements were signed by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, Dr Ahmed bin Haboush al Farsi, CEO of Amazon for Environment and Sustainability, and Eng Khamis bin Salim al Souli, CEO of Roadline Company.

Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, Director-General of Samayil Industrial City, said: "The agreement incorporates designing and implementing a dual-lane road spanning 1.3 km from Al Dasur bridge intersection to the main entrance of Samayil Industrial City. Besides, the agreement includes box culverts for rainwater drainage and lighting along the road.

"The agreement also comprises designing and implementing a dual-lane road linking Samayil Industrial City with Al Sharqiyah Expressway, as well as designing and executing



sewage pipe of 11 km length linking phases one and two of Samayil Industrial City. The total value of the agreement is RO 2.6 million and the project will be implemented in a period of 12 months."

Al Hadabi informed that the number of operating projects in Samayil Industrial City has touched 56, and the number of under construction projects has reached 49. Since the beginning of 2020, ten projects have been localised in Samayil Industrial City representing various industrial activities.

Additionally, the number of national and foreign workforce has touched 1,240 in Samayil Industrial City, and the area has reached 7.5

million sqm.

According to Dr Khamis bin Said al Muniri, Director-General of Madayn Industrial Academy, the agreement signed with Amazon for Environment and Sustainability is in line with Madayn's efforts to support SMEs and create a healthy environment in the industrial cities.

"The agreement aims to provide consultations in the field of identifying and measuring air pollution in the industrial cities, and provide scientific solutions to investors to address the environmental impacts resulting from pollution, and consequently ensure the provision of a healthy work environment at these industrial cities," Al Muniri elaborated.

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

AHLIBANK ANNOUNCES LUCKY WINNER OF 'SALARY FOR LIFE' DRAW PART OF 2020 WAFRA PRIZE SCHEME



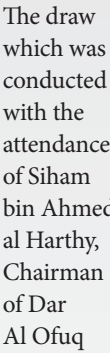
Ahlibank announced the third winner of its grand 'Salary for Life' draw as part of the 2020 Wafra Prize Scheme, committing to its on-going customer engagement strategy. S A S al Balushi from Sohar branch, bagged the RO 250,000 grand prize money, which is RO 1,000 to be paid monthly for 250 months, at a ceremony held at Ahlibank's headquarters in the presence of the bank's senior officials.

Commenting on the initiative, which has attracted many customers to the bank, Muneer al Balushi, Head of Retail Distribution at Ahlibank said, "In Ahlibank, we are continually working towards encouraging a savings culture among the people of Oman."

MUSCAT

BANKDHOFAR HONOURS WOMEN BY CONDUCTING OMANI WOMEN'S DAY DRAW

Marking the Omani Women's Day, which is celebrated on 17th of October every year, BankDhofar conducted Omani Women's Day draw with a total prize amount of RO 5,000.



The draw which was conducted with the attendance of Siham bin Ahmed al Harthy, Chairman of Dar Al Ofuq Group, saw 5 lucky winners take home RO 1,000 each.

Commenting on the draw, Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, said: "Omani Women's Day is one of the important occasions which is celebrated every year to recognise the roles played by the women in various sectors.

"To honour women for their immense contributions, we have dedicated a special prize for women as part of our Savings Account Scheme 2020."

MUSCAT



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MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Corporate results weigh on MSM Index

MSM30 ended the week marginally lower by 0.29 per cent. Financial Index was down 0.66 per cent while Industrial Index declined by 0.72 per cent. Services Index was higher by 0.30 per cent. Shariah Index also declined by 0.16 per cent.

Raysut Cement Company SAOG completed its negotiation and officially acquired 75 per cent shares of Lafarge Holcim Maldives Ltd, a cement terminal located at Thilafushi Island, Maldives, at a purchase value of \$8 million.

Oman Investment and Finance Company received Central Bank of Oman approval to operate as a payment service provider (PSP). Accordingly, within six months, OIFC will be required to complete all legal requirements related to obtaining the final approval and required license in that regard.

United Power Company announced that it has requested the Capital Market Authority to convert the Company from a Public Joint Stock Company to Limited Liability Company.

With the blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and in implementation of Royal directives to consider the financial conditions undergone by public and private sector retirees, the Central Bank of Oman has launched the 'Programme of Amending Terms for the Repayment of Loans and Personal Finances Granted to Public and Private Sector Retirees'.

The programme will be applied to loans and personal and housing finances granted to retired employees according to the following terms:

- The maximum loan deduction service must not exceed 30 per cent of the monthly pension if it is equal to or less

Oman Public Finance			
(OMR mn)	7M-2019	7M-2020	Change
Oil Revenue	3,667	2,635	-28.1%
Gas Revenue	1,085	823	-24.2%
Other Revenue	1,673	1,731	3.4%
Revenue	6,426	5,189	-19.3%
Current Expenditure	5,234	5,134	-1.9%
Investment Expenditure	1,315	982	-25.3%
Actual expenditures under settlement	513	460	-10.4%
Participation & Support	365	162	-55.6%
Expenditure	7,427	6,739	-9.3%
Deficit	(1,001)	(1,550)	54.9%

On the expenditure side, civil ministries expenditure dropped to RO 281 million in July 2020 compared to RO 469 million in June 2020.

than RO 1,500. If it is more than RO 1,500 the maximum ceiling of deduction must be not more than 35 per cent.

- Licensed banks may extend the period of repayment of loans/finances till the retiree reaches the age of 70 years.

- In case the licensed banks would not be able to get a repayment of the due balance of the loan/personal finance before the retiree reaches the age of 70 years, the banks may deduct a down payment (free of early payment fees) of not more than 25 per cent of the sum of end of service gratuity if the monthly pension is equal to or less than RO 1,500 or 35 per cent of the sum of end of service gratuity if the monthly pension is more than RO 1,500.

As per CBO's latest monthly bulletin, Oman reported deficit of RO 1.55 billion for 7M-2020 compared to RO 1.0 billion deficit in similar period last year.

Revenue during the period declined by 19.3 per cent to RO 5.19 billion compared to RO 6.42 billion in same period last year. Expenditure on the other hand also aided in controlling

the deficit. Expenditure declined by 9.3 per cent to RO 6.73 billion in 7M-2020 compared to RO 7.42 billion in 7M-2019.

In the month of July alone, Oman revenue stood at RO 358 million with oil and gas revenue at RO 62.7 million and RO 82.3 million, respectively.

On the expenditure side, civil ministries expenditure dropped to RO 281 million in July 2020 compared to RO 469 million in June 2020.

The value of goods re-exported from Oman amounted to more than RO 8 billion between 2016 and the first half of 2020, according to government figures.

The NCSI's annual yearbook for 2020 shows that re-exports in Oman accounted for RO 2.05 billion in 2016, RO 2.1 billion in 2017, RO 1.8 billion in 2018 and RO 1.46 billion in 2019.

As of June 2020, the value of goods re-exported this year stood at RO 741.2 million, and developments are already underway to expand Oman's ports in anticipation of increased trade over the coming years.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

US retail sales blow expectations in September

Retail sales jumped 1.9 per cent last month as consumers bought motor vehicles and clothing, dined out and splashed out on hobbies.

WASHINGTON: US retail sales accelerated in September, rounding out a strong quarter of economic activity, but the recovery from the COVID-19 recession is at a crossroads as government money runs out and companies continue to layoff workers.

New coronavirus cases are also surging across the country, which could lead to restrictions on businesses like restaurants, gyms and bars, and undercut consumer spending. The economy is already shifting into lower gear. Other data on Friday showed an unexpected drop in output at factories last month.

"Although sales growth is strong, it will slow through the rest of this year and into next year," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"The slowing will be even larger if Congress does not pass another



People shop at Macy's Department store in New York City. — Reuters

stimulus bill. Unemployment remains pervasive throughout the US economy."

Retail sales jumped 1.9 per cent last month as consumers bought motor vehicles and clothing, dined out and splashed out on hobbies.

That followed an unrevised 0.6 per cent increase in August.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales would rise 0.7 per cent in September. Some said September's surge was likely exaggerated by difficulties stripping

seasonal fluctuations from the data after the shock caused by COVID-19. Unadjusted retail sales fell 2.8 per cent after dropping 1.0 per cent in August.

Retail sales have bounced back above their February level, with

the pandemic boosting demand for goods that complement life at home, including furniture and electronics. An aversion to public transportation has boosted motor vehicle purchases. Retail sales rose 5.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis in September.

They account for the goods component of consumer spending, with services such as healthcare, education, travel and hotel accommodation making up the other portion.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, sales increased 1.4 per cent last month after a downwardly revised 0.3 per cent drop in August.

These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product. They were previously estimated to have dipped 0.1 per cent in August.

Economists have attributed the strength in retail sales to fiscal stimulus, especially a weekly subsidy paid to tens of millions of unemployed Americans. September's robust sales reinforced expectations for record consumer spending and economic growth in the third quarter.

Growth estimates for the July-

September quarter are as high as a 35.2 per cent annualised rate. That would recoup roughly two-thirds of the output lost because of COVID-19. The economy contracted at a 31.4-per cent pace in the second quarter, the deepest decline since the government started keeping records in 1947.

US stocks bounced from three straight days of losses on the retail sales data and Pfizer's announcement that it could apply for emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate as early as November.

Last month, sales at auto dealerships surged 3.6 per cent. Receipts at restaurants and bars increased 2.1 per cent. Receipts at clothing stores jumped 11.0 per cent.

"Some of the gain may have reflected increased demand from back to school sales, but with most schools remote learning the reported strength seems dramatic and likely unsustainable," said Kevin Cummins, chief US economist at NatWest Markets in Stamford, Connecticut.

Even with September's gains, sales at bars, restaurants and clothing stores remain well below their pre-pandemic levels. Purchases at electronics and appliance stores fell 1.6 per cent. — Reuters

Google sweetens Fitbit concessions, EU okay in sight



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

BRUSSELS: Alphabet's Google has tweaked concessions aimed at allaying EU antitrust concerns about its \$2.1 billion purchase of Fitbit, people familiar with the matter said, putting it on course to secure EU approval for the deal.

The world's most popular Internet search engine last month offered to restrict the use of Fitbit data for Google ads, facilitate rival makers of wearables seeking to connect to the Android platform and allow third parties' continued access to Fitbit users' data with their consent.

Google revised the package after the European Commission received feedback from rivals and consumers, the people said, declining to provide details. The move could also help stave off a possible EU charge sheet setting out specific concerns.

The EU competition enforcer has to date not sought further feedback from the market, indicating the changes have likely passed muster with the Commission.

The EU competition enforcer, which earlier on Friday extended the deadline for its decision to January 8 from December 23 in agreement with Google, declined to comment.

Google reiterated its previous statement, saying that the deal was about devices and not data. "The wearables space is crowded, and we believe the combination of Google and Fitbit's hardware efforts will increase competition in the sector, benefiting consumers and making the next generation of devices better and more affordable," Google said.

Concessions so far, however, have failed to appease rivals and customers.

A group of 19 bodies including consumer organisations and privacy advocates in the EU, the United States and Brazil is among the latest critics, issuing a joint letter to demand tough concessions from Google. — Reuters

Only a quarter of BP's job cuts to be voluntary

LONDON: BP is set to make around 7,500 compulsory redundancies after roughly 2,500 staff — or just over one in ten of those eligible — applied for voluntary severance, according to an internal memo and company sources.

The oil major announced plans in June to lay off almost 15 per cent its 70,000-strong workforce as part of Chief Executive Bernard Looney's plan to cut costs and "reinvent" the business for a low carbon future.

Many layoffs will come from office-based staff including BP's core oil and gas exploration and production division, where thousands of engineers, geologists and scientists are set



The logo of BP is seen at a petrol station in Singapore. — AFP

to leave. They will not impact frontline production facilities.

A BP spokesman confirmed the voluntary redundancy figure.

"We are continuing to make progress towards fully defining our new organisation... We expect the process to complete and for all staff to know their positions in the coming months," BP said in a statement. — AFP

Indian gold dealers continue to stock up, hope to usher in festive glitter

BENGALURU: Physical gold dealers in India continued to stock up this week ahead of an expected festival sales bump, while the Golden Week in top consumer China did little to revive bullion demand.

Gold is considered an intrinsic part of Indian festivals such as Dussehra in late October, and Diwali and Dhanteras in November.

Demand from dealers has been improving slowly as they expect a revival in retail purchases during the festival season, said Mukesh Kothari, director at Mumbai gold dealer RiddiSiddhi Bullions.

Dealers charged a \$1 an ounce premium over official domestic prices, inclusive of 12.5 per cent import and 3 per cent sales taxes, down from last week's premium of \$2.

On Friday, local gold futures traded around 50,750 rupees per 10 grams.

Limited supply due to September's sharp drop in imports also allowed dealers to charge a premium, said a Mumbai-based dealer with a bullion importing bank.

Discounts in China eased to \$30-\$35 an ounce, their lowest since July, versus global benchmark spot gold rates as a week-long holiday saw some retail buying, although



A saleswoman picks gold necklaces to show it to a customer inside a jewellery shop in Kochi. — Reuters

demand was still subdued.

"They have sufficient gold to circulate and that's why there is no rush for the time being," said Bernard Sin, regional director for Greater China at MKS, adding that demand could pick-up in the run-up to the Chinese new year. — Reuters

SOVEREIGN CREDIT

Moody's downgrades UK debt rating

LONDON: Ratings agency Moody's cut the United Kingdom's sovereign debt rating on Friday, citing a combination of the economic hit from the coronavirus crisis, Brexit and the lack of clear budget plans from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government.

Moody's lowered the rating by one notch to "Aa3" from "Aa2," putting Britain on the same level as Belgium and the Czech Republic.

Britain's economy, the world's sixth-biggest, shrank by the most among Group of Seven nations in the second quarter and its public debt has leapt to more than £2 billion (\$2.58 billion), surpassing 100 per cent of gross domestic product.

Moody's said Britain's economic growth had been "meaningfully weaker than expected and is likely to remain so in the future" as existing problems were exacerbated by the decision to leave the European Union.

Britain's failure to reach a trade deal with the EU that meaningfully replicated the benefits of EU membership would be compounded by the long-term damage likely to be caused by the legacy of the coronavirus pandemic.

Johnson said earlier on Friday that Britain had to prepare for a no-deal Brexit unless the EU changed course and there was currently no point in continuing the negotiations. Britain faces the prospect of tariffs and other trade barriers from January 1 without an agreement.

"Even if there is a trade deal between the UK and EU by the end of 2020, it will likely be narrow



A stack of one pound sterling coins sit in front of a British Union flag in this photograph in London. — AFP

Moody's lowered the rating by one notch to "Aa3" from "Aa2," putting Britain on the same level as Belgium and the Czech Republic.

in scope and therefore the UK's exit from the EU will, in Moody's view, continue to put downward pressure on private investment and economic growth," Moody's said.

It also said Britain had lost some of the budgetary discipline of previous governments and its fiscal policy had become "less predictable and effective," meaning its high debt levels were unlikely to come down quickly.

"The UK effectively has no fiscal policy anchor," it said. The agency revised the outlook on the country's sovereign debt to "stable" from "negative," reflecting its expectation that the UK's debt would likely stabilise. — Reuters

Gold set for weekly decline as US stimulus hopes ebb

SINGAPORE: Gold fell and was on the way to its first weekly decline in three weeks on Friday, as fading chances of a US stimulus agreement before the November 3 presidential election dented the metal's appeal as an inflation hedge.

Spot gold fell 0.3 per cent to \$1,901.87 per ounce. Bullion is down 1.4 per cent so far this week. US gold futures settled 0.1 per cent lower at \$1,906.40.

"With a stimulus bill this year highly uncertain, gold remains beholden to the USD," said Tai Wong, head of base and precious metals derivatives trading at BMO.

"While sentiment for gold remains strongly bullish without a strong short-term driver, we seem to be oscillating around \$1,900 unable to substantially break the month-long range of \$1,850-\$1,950."

The dollar index eased 0.2 per cent on the day, but was on track for a weekly gain, making it more expensive for holders of other currencies to buy gold.

— Reuters

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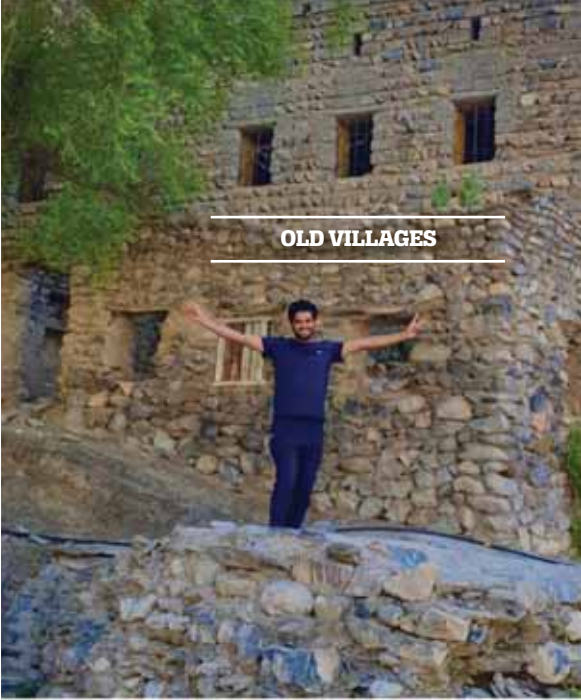
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COOK LIKE A CHEF

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MOUTHWATERING DESSERT

With a creative side and a sense of precision, Chef Victor makes all sorts of entremets, freshly baked pastries and confectionery. His creations are a sheer delight to the eye and the palate. Today, he is sharing one of the best recipes he knows so you can try creating it at home.

WHITE CHOCOLATE MOUSSE
95 gm White chocolate
113 gm Whipped cream
5 gm Gélatine leaf
50 gm Strawberry purée
7 gm Oil

PREPARATION METHOD: Soak the gélatine leaf in the cold water. Melt the chocolate, fold with oil & keep warm. Heat the strawberry puree and add melted gélatine into it. Fold whipped cream into the white chocolate mix in three-step. Immediately add the strawberry purée mix to white chocolate mix and fold nicely.

ALMOND DACQUOISE
36 gm Icing sugar
45 gm Almond powder
7.2 gm Flour
14 gm Sugar
72 gm Egg white

PREPARATION METHOD: Sieve the icing sugar, almond powder and flour together and keep it in one bowl. Whip the egg whites until its soft and start to add the sugar very slowly. Whipped until you get strong & shiny meringue. Fold slowly the dry ingredients and spread on a silicon mat or a butter paper and bake at 180c until you get a soft golden colour. After cooling wrap it and put in the freezer (you can put in the chiller as well, if you put in the freezer it will be easy to handle).

ALMOND SABLE
40 gm Butter
28 gm Brown sugar

12 gm Almond powder
56 gm Flour
a pinch Soda
8 gm Egg

PREPARATION METHOD: Put the cream brown sugar & butter together in a bowl. Add egg to it, and mix it well. Add all the dry ingredient and fold very gently. Make a ball and put on a butter paper and press it until it gets flattened like 10cm thick sheet. Wrapped it and keep it in chiller. Give rest for at least 2hrs. Roll the dough to 3.5mm thickness and cut with a round cutter and place on the tray with a butter paper. And again keep the tray in the chiller for about 10minutes. Bake at 180c for 10 minutes approximately.

COLOUR GLAZE
60 gm Cream
30 gm Glucose
75 gm Sugar
30 gm Milk
5 gm Cornflour
2.4 gm Gélatine
5 ml Red liquid colour

PREPARATION METHOD: Soak gélatine leaf in cold water. Take half amount of milk & mix with cornflour. Boil cream, sugar, glucose and other half milk altogether. Add cornflour mix and give one boil to it. Strain the mix and keep in a container. Once it's below 60c, add gélatine to it. Use a hand blender to blend it nicely and add a red liquid colour to it. Blend again and keep it in the chiller for 12hrs.

ASSEMBLY
Make white chocolate strawberry mousse and put in the silicon mould until half. Add a layer of almond dacquoise and fill with white chocolate strawberry mousse. Lastly, add another layer of almond dacquoise and freeze it. Until it became hard. Melt and temper the red glaze on iced bath, before you demold the mousse. Demold the mousse and put in a cooling rack. Put the glaze on the frozen mousse and cover nicely. Place the frozen mousse on the baked almond sable and garnish as you like.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF VICTOR CHOUDHARY
Pastry Chef
Hormuz Grand Hotel,
A Radisson Collection Hotel

Pastry Chef Victor Choudhury has been leading the pastry team of Hormuz Grand Muscat, A Radisson Collection Hotel, since early 2019. With over 12 years of experience in the industry, Chef Victor is equipped with an exceptional sense of taste and knows how to marry flavours and textures; he is constantly innovating and creating delectable pastries. He has rich experience in the pastry arena, having worked with top International hospitality brands such as ITC Hotels, IHG, Hyatt, the Leela Palace, and Kempinski.

GLOBAL TRENDS

Frankfurt Book Fair opens with entirely virtual ceremony

PARIS: When Guillaume Benoliel sits at the piano stool rehearsing Rachmaninoff's Italian Polka for a forthcoming concert, his feet dangle in the air.

"I've met talented people in my career but not like him," said Benoliel's teacher, Serguei Kouznetsov.

Guillaume is six years old. His parents, Claire and Dominique - both of them amateur musicians - sent him for his first piano lesson aged four after they realised he could hear a tune and play it back for himself. He also has perfect pitch.

In late August, Benoliel had his moment in the spotlight in Salzburg, the Austrian city and birthplace of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Bénoliel was selected to perform on stage in a concert after winning two prizes in the Grand Prize Virtuoso competition.

He picked up first prize in the young musician category, and a special prize in the exceptional young talent category.

Away from the concert halls, music is simply a fun experience that he shares with his family. They sometimes play together, and in the evenings Benoliel gives mini-concerts for his parents in the living room of their home southeast of Paris.

"Every day is full of adventures and pleasure because we both love music," said his mother Claire, who works in management consulting.

As for his future career, she said she and her partner will let their son decide. But she said whatever path he takes, she hoped music will still be present in his life. — **Reuters**

Egyptian designer tailors clothing brand for people with disabilities

CAIRO: When Ashgan al-Abhar's wheelchair-using friend said she dreamed of wearing a dress that did not obstruct her mobility, she decided to launch a clothing brand for people with disabilities and those of short stature.

Earlier this year she started "Metfasal Leek" - Arabic for "Tailored for you" - a clothing line that she says is the first of its kind in Egypt.

Al Abhar, 43, said after working with various companies on ways to cater for people with disabilities, she had noticed that they were not being served by clothing manufacturers.

"People with short stature would struggle to find their sizes in the market," she said.

She is using volunteers to test the clothes, giving them free samples, ahead of a planned commercial launch. One volunteer, Ziad Hamdy, struggles with a disability that prevents him from using his hands and fingers easily.

"I couldn't button up my shirt, buckle my trousers," he said. Hamdy now has hook-and-loop fasteners instead of buttons, which he says saved him a lot of time and effort. Al Abhar hopes the initiative will help change views about people with disabilities and persuade the public "to stop associating them with charity".

"It makes us feel we are like everyone else," said volunteer Hanan Fouad. — **Reuters**

features

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Omani artists give Seoul a taste of Omani culture and nature

BY MAI AL ABRI

Seoul International Art Festival (Jump Over 2020) aspires to bring together the masters and world artists with highest-quality of artworks in one place. The big event also hosted the artworks of four promising Omani artists who showed huge potential and whose quality of work is at par with the many artists who take part in the event.

Abdullah al Hunaini participated with four paintings, Khamis al Hunaini shared two sculptures, Saud al Hunaini participated with four abstract calligraphy and Hussein Obaid with four paintings.

A total of 166 artists took part in the event representing 56 countries

from different continents. The event is hosted and organised by the World Culture Artists Association, Inc.(WCAA), and managed by the International Creative Artists Association (ICAA) with Bosuk Lee, chairwoman of WCAA and president of International Creative Artists Association(ICAA) from the Republic of Korea serving as its director.

Jump over 2020 included different paintings, sculptures, graphics, ceramics and installations, and those four artists who were selected from Oman are determined to represent Oman's art and cultural field. All their works have something to tell about Oman and its outstanding customs and nature.

The Hunaini brothers Abdullah and Khamis are a twin and were born in 1965 and are known for their love of art and music. As for the younger brother Saud, he was born in 1967 and they joined the youth studio in 1980

and from there begins his career. They specialised in absolute realism and the pictorial realism where they use the oil and acrylic colours, strong colours and perfect skilful use of light to create a dramatic effect.

Saud's topics range from Omani scenes, traditional aspects, human suffering, social life and letter formations.

Hussein Obaid is a member of several art institutions such as the International Association of Fine Arts (UNESCO), Youth Art Studio, Cultural Club and the Omani Society for Fine Arts.

Group exhibitions are of particular importance to show the difference in the artist's profiles and to revalue their distinct position and concept, said Saud al Hunaini, adding, "As venues are coming and going, the artist remains for the art world the cornerstone and anchor."

"Art exhibitions are an avenue to make artwork visible to the public and where artists study or share their concepts and styles, nationally as well as internationally," said Obaid.

"We are pleased to having the chance to share our artworks that represent our beloved country to other nations," he said.

To be invited, artists had to send a short biography, self-portrait, and two to four high-resolution images of their artworks to be shown in the virtual (online) exhibition.

If an artist would like to participate in the visual exhibition, he is required to ship two artworks that do not exceed 90cm to the WCAA, Korea. The artworks will be displayed in the Museum in Seoul from October 15 to 30, 2020. The same artworks will be displayed in the Sejong Tower Gallery from December 14 to 31, 2020.



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