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INDONESIA HITS HALF A MILLION VIRUS CASES

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TWO NEW VLCCS TO JOIN OMAN SHIPPING FLEET

P9

'HUMBLE' WARNER SAYS HE WON'T RESPOND TO INDIA TAUNTS

OMAN

HM GREETES SURINAME, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Chan Santokhi of the Republic of Suriname on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Santokhi and his country's friendly people. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Shafiq Jaffrovich, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Jaffrovich and his country's friendly people. — ONA

ASIA

14 DEAD AS BLASTS ROCK AFGHAN CITY

KABUL: At least 14 people were killed in central Afghanistan on Tuesday when two blasts ripped through the historic city of Bamiyan, home to many members of the ethnic minority, officials said. The carnage brought to an end years of calm in the isolated town that has avoided the sort of large-scale attacks commonplace elsewhere in the war-torn country. The twin bombing marked the latest big attack in Afghanistan, where violence has surged in recent months. SEE ALSO P4

HM AND JOHNSON REVIEW BILATERAL RELATIONS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday received a phone call from Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK). During the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan and Johnson exchanged cordial talks and reviewed the strong relations between the two friendly countries. The UK Premier expressed his most sincere greetings to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani Government and people on the occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance. He wished His Majesty the Sultan success in leading the Omani people towards greater progress and prosperity. He hoped that relations of friendship and cooperation would continue to grow under His Majesty the Sultan's wise leadership. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his deep thanks and appreciation for the UK Prime Minister's sentiments. He wished him good health and happiness. He also wished the friendly people of Britain further progress. His Majesty hoped that relations between the two peoples will grow and prosper. — ONA

HM GETS MORE ND GREETINGS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received more cables of greetings on the occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance from King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Kais Saied of Tunisia, President Dr Bashar al Assad of Syria, Dr Barham Salih of Iraq, President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), President Michel Aoun of the Lebanese Republic, President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of Mauritania, President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow of Turkmenistan, President Macky Sall of Senegal, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, King Norodom Sihamoni of Cambodia, President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, President Sefik Dzaferovic, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia, President Nicos Anastasiades of the Republic of Cyprus, President Lazarus Chakwera of Malawi, President Khaltmaagiin Battulga of Mongolia, and President Katerina Sakellaropoulou of Greece. — ONA

NEW TECHNIQUE FOR CARDIAC CATHETER OPERATIONS

For the first time in the Sultanate, the National Heart Centre at the Royal Hospital has launched a new technique for cardiac catheter operations by using the ultrasound. Such procedures are performed by using an intravascular lithotripsy device in case of inability to dilating them by the usual lithotripsy techniques. DETAILS ON P2

INSIDE

BIDEN FORGES AHEAD WITH BUILDING TEAM

P5

WORSENING LAND INEQUALITY WIDENS GENDER GAPS

P6

World ramps up vaccine preparations

PARIS: Hopes over COVID-19 vaccines have given a boost to virus-weary citizens across the globe in recent days, but the disease remains rampant and world leaders are urging people to be patient. Governments have scaled up preparations for any vaccine, with the EU on Tuesday announcing a sixth contract to reserve doses — this time for up to 160 million from US giant Moderna. “Every member state will receive it at the same time on a pro rata basis,” European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said. Even once a vaccine becomes available, any return to normality for a global economy ravaged by the pandemic seems a long way off. The boss of Australia's Qantas also on Tuesday said proof of vaccination will likely become the only way people will be allowed to fly. Aviation has been particularly hard-hit, with the global industry body IATA estimating that airline revenue will plunge 60 per cent. Despite the vaccine optimism, the world is still engulfed in the unprecedented health crisis which has infected almost 58.9 million people and left nearly 1.4 million dead. But an easing in infection rates in parts of Europe has led some countries to start easing of restrictions. — AFP

A worker of German vaccine maker IDT Biologika shows a sample ampoule during the visit of German Health Minister Jens Spahn in Dessau-Rosslau, Germany, on Monday, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues. — Reuters

RO 300 fine for removing COVID band

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

A fine not less than RO 300 will be imposed on anyone who tries to remove the COVID-19 tracking bracelet at home, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH). As per the guidelines issued by the Supreme Committee, the band can only be removed by any of the MoH clinics or private medical centres authorised to do so, and any tampering with the band, which is the property of the ministry, is an offence and will alert the tracking centre. “Any attempt to remove or to tamper with the COVID-19 tracking bracelet is an offence and the fine will be not less than RO 300 with or without other actions as prescribed in the guidelines,” a source at the ministry said. Additionally, any damage caused to the bracelet will attract another fine of RO 200, and failure to abide by the law invites a fine of RO 100. Any visitor to the Sultanate and anyone returning from abroad is supposed to follow COVID-19 protocol and refrain from wearing or causing damage to the tracking bracelet is an offence. He or she should also have an insurance policy covering COVID treatment for one month, besides registering with Tarassud app by paying RO 25 which includes the bracelet charges (RO 6). He should also be under self-quarantine for a minimum of seven days, and is free to approach any medical centre for COVID-19 test and removal of the band by the medical staff. TURN TO P3

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 28°C | Min 20°C | SALALAH: Max 31°C | Min 25°C | NIZWA: Max 28°C | Min 16°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:28 | FAJR: 05:09 | DHUHR: 11:59 | ASR: 15:04 | MAGHRIB: 17:25 | ISHA: 18:39

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MAISARAH

For a Better Future

NHC uses new technique to perform operations

MUSCAT: For the first time in the Sultanate, the National Heart Center of the Royal Hospital, has recently launched a new technique for cardiac catheter operations by using the ultrasound.

Such procedures are performed by using an intravascular lithotripsy device in case of inability to dilating them by the usual lithotripsy techniques.

The ultrasound catheter has been carried out for two patients suffered from stenosis of the calcified coronary arteries. Through this new technique, the medical team succeeded in break-up the calcium inside the artery, which allowed dilating it and installing a stent successfully.

This procedure has been performed by a medical team headed by Dr Mohammed al Mukhaini, Dr Said Abdul Rahman and Dr Mohammed al Riyami with the assistance of technicians and nurses.

— ONA



Oman-China joint committee explores investment cooperation

MUSCAT: The Oman-China Joint Committee held its ninth session on Tuesday via video-conferencing to discuss and promote economic and investment cooperation between the two sides.

The Omani side was headed by Dr Saleh Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. The Chinese side was chaired by Qian Keming, Vice Minister of Commerce, in the presence of a number of officials from both sides.

The session explored ways of promoting relations of cooperation between the two countries in various economic, trade, investment and service fields, and increasing the volume of trade exchange between the two sides.

The two sides also looked forward to developing the bilateral



trade relations between the two countries with the hope of further strengthening these ties in line with the aspirations of the two countries. The volume of bilateral trade between the two countries in 2019 hit \$ 22.58 billion, and the Sultanate is the fourth largest trade partner of China in the Arab world.

The two sides stressed the importance of promoting cooperation, providing more necessary facilities within the framework of the laws and provisions in force in the two countries, developing cooperation

mechanism and organising businessmen exchange and trade gatherings regularly between the two countries to further enhance bilateral trade and encourage the two sides to hold various exhibitions.

The session also dealt with promoting cooperation in industry and logistics and enhancing investment between the two countries through exchanging visits at different levels, holding seminars and sharing experiences between the special economic zones of both countries.

Dr Saleh Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry called on the Chinese companies to take advantage of the incentives offered by the Foreign Capital Investment Law and other laws and to take advantage of the Sultanate's strategic location to activate the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. He also called for expanding investment in the fields of manufacturing, energy development, mining and other investment opportunities in the Sultanate.

The committee invited Omani companies to take part in the China International Import Expo. It also invited Chinese companies to participate in Omani exhibitions to enhance trade exchange and establish strategic partnerships between the Omani and Chinese companies. — ONA

Treasury bills worth RO 12m issued

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 528, worth RO 12 million was announced this week.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are as follows:

The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO 12 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from November 25, 2020, until February 24, 2021.

The average accepted price reached 99.798 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.795 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.80888 per cent and 0.81052 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 1 per cent.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Three Omani women win WiCSME awards

MUSCAT: Three Omani women were conferred with awards by the Middle East Women in Cybersecurity Association (WiCSME) from among 100 contenders representing eight countries, at a WiCSME virtual conference held recently under the theme 'to empower and secure together'.

Maisa al Dhankiyah won the Royal Camel Security Adviser award, Rahma al Brashdiyah bagged the Champion of Cybersecurity award, while the Executive Lady in Cybersecurity award went to Nahla al Balushiyah. The three Omani women were selected out of a shortlist of 19 nominees. Originally, there were 100 contenders of whom 30 made their way to the final stage.

The awards were classified into six main categories, namely: Leader of thought in Cybersecurity,



Executive Lady in Cybersecurity, Cyber Security Adviser", Rising Star in Cybersecurity, Champion

of Cybersecurity", and Supporting Lady of the Cybersecurity Community.

223 new COVID-19 cases, 5 deaths

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health announced on Tuesday 223 new confirmed cases of COVID-19, bringing the total number of COVID-19 patients in the Sultanate to 122,579.

The total death cases in the country has reached 1,391, with 5 people died on Tuesday.

The total recovery cases reached 11,3856, which is 92.9 per cent of the total cases reported so far, the ministry said.

Twenty-five people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 250, including 121 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

National Day Camel Race in Adam witnesses fierce competition



ADAM: The National Day Camel Race continued today for second consecutive day at Al Bashair Race Track in the Wilayat of Adam in the Governorate of Al Dakhliya.

The National Day Camel Race is organized by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, represented by Department of Al Bashair Race Track for Arabian Camels.

The race will end on Wednesday amid wide participation and strong competition from camel owners and trainers from different governorates of the Sultanate and the GCC countries.

Eleven rounds were held on Tuesday for the Laqaya category (Abkar and Jaadan) for a distance of 4 km, with the participation of 626 camels.

In the first round, "Rifal" owned by the Royal Camel Corps and trained by Aamir bin Rashid al Amri came first.

In the second round, "Sa'ayib" owned by Said bin Hamad al Judaili came first.

In the third round, "Sarab" owned by Majid bin Musabah al Rashidi came first.

In the fourth round, "Wahaja" owned by Said bin Salem al-Judaili got first place.

In the fifth round, "Ghada" owned by Faleh bin Yasser al Shamsi came first.

In the sixth round, "Al Montaser" owned by Hilal bin Jamil al-Saadi came

first.

In the seventh round, "Walah" owned by Said bin Mohammed al-Wihibi came first.

In the eighth round, "Al Shamikha" owned by Al Ghafiq bin Al Saghir al-Maliki came first

In the tenth round, "Harba" owned by Abdullah bin Said al-Gharbi, came first.

In the eleventh round, "Nihaya" owned by Hilal bin Hamoud al-Junaibi came first.

The competitions of this race will be concluded tomorrow with 7 rounds for Al Yadah category, for a distance of 5 km, and 4 rounds for the categories of Al Thanaya, Al Hol, and Al Zamoul for a distance of 6 km. — ONA



Foreign Minister receives GCC chief

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in his office today Dr Nayef Falah Mubarak al

Hajjraf, Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary-General.

The meeting reviewed the GCC march and the efforts exerted to

enhance this march, in addition to the consultation on matters that serve aspirations of the GCC peoples. — ONA

277,728 expats left Oman by October-end

MAJID AL HATTALI

MUSCAT, NOV 24

The number of expatriate workforce in the Sultanate fell by 17 per cent to 1.4 million by the end of October compared to the corresponding period the previous year. During this period, 277,728 expatriate workers left the Sultanate.

The number of expats fell by one per cent during the September-October period as 14,336 left the country.

Data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicate that the number of expats in the private sector stood at 1.138 million, a fall of 17.4 per cent.

Expat numbers at the public sector fell by 22.2 per cent to 42,895 down from the 54,687 registered in the same period of 2019. Expats number in the domestic sector dropped by 13.8 per cent to 253,697.

The NCSI data shows that the majority of expat workforce are based in Muscat Governorate, followed by North Al Batinah, Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah and Musandam.

Fine for removing COVID band

FROM PAGE 1

“The tracking band can only be removed by the PHCs (Primary Health Centres) or government hospitals or designated private health facilities on the eighth day of quarantine,” Head of Communicable Diseases (CDC), Muscat area, told the Observer.

“Any issue with the removal, be it tampering or any technical problems can be reported to the nearest health centres,” he added.

Meanwhile, the Primary Court in the South Al Batinah Governorate issued a verdict convicting a suspect who breached the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

The offender got the sentence for taking off the wristband tracker. The convict also failed to abide by home quarantine prescribed to him.

Entrepreneurship Award honours 16 winners

MUSCAT: The fourth edition of the Entrepreneurship Award honoured 16 winners at a celebration held on Monday evening under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

The event took place in Kempinski Hotel and was attended by Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development. Other guests included senior officials from the private and public sectors along with the Award's nominees. The rest of the invitees witnessed the ceremony through virtual channels.

Khalid bin Abdullah bin Hamed al Hosni was bestowed with the ‘Best Entrepreneur’ title, followed by Grandma's Mixes who scooped the ‘Best Home Business’. The ‘Best Micro Business’ was given to Wathiq IT, whereas, the ‘Best Small Business’ in the services sector was awarded to Thawani Technologies.

Cloud World Trading (Otaxi) and Tayyar Trading (emushrif)



both received the second place of the same award title. Oliban received the ‘Best Small Business’ in the industrial sector and the ‘Best Small Business’ in the trading sector went to Omamaty.

Mowred Engineering Services bagged the ‘Best Medium Business’ in the service sector and Titronic Middle East Technical Service won the ‘Best Medium Business’ in the industrial sector. Insight Information Security received ‘Best Medium Business’ in the trading sector.

For the second category, titled the ‘Entrepreneurship Supporters Award’, the SME Development

Fund (Inma) secured the ‘Best Financial Support’ title, whereas, Haya Water received the ‘Best Corporate Support’.

The ‘Best Supporting Public Organisation’ went to the Ministry of Labour and Shabab Reyadi initiative from University of Technology and Applied Sciences won the ‘Best Educational Initiative Award’. BP Khazzan Project for SME Development was awarded the ‘Best Development Initiative’.

The committee withheld the ‘Best Media Initiative’ award due to the lack of suitable candidates. During her speech, Halima

bint Rashid al Ze'ariyah, Chairperson of the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development, praised the government's efforts in empowering Omani entrepreneurs to strengthen this vital sector. “This award is aligned with the directives of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to enhance the growth of the entrepreneurial community and create a stable business ecosystem for them to excel and innovate. We will also march forward under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to further boost the capabilities of

Omani entrepreneurs and create a brighter future,” she said.

The award is organised by the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development in strategic partnership with Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) for a second consecutive edition.

The ceremony's agenda also featured a timeline video of the Award team's activities, a film on the Award's journey so far and highlights from the jury phase. A number of inspiring speeches were also delivered. The evening concluded by presenting a token of appreciation to the guest of

honour and the strategic partner.

Tariq bin Sulieman al Farsi, Chairman of the Entrepreneurship Award Committee, said, “This year's theme of the Award is ‘Competition and Innovation’ as these attributes represent the development of values and objectives of entrepreneurship locally and globally. It is also gratifying to witness an increase in the amounts dedicated to the Award's categories and technical support to RO 180,000. With 691 contenders this year, we saw a growth of 73.6 per cent in participation when compared to the previous edition. These numbers serve as a testament of entrepreneurs' determination and interest in this field as well as their willingness to compete.”

The Entrepreneurship Award was established in line with the directives of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The objective of the award is to encourage entrepreneurs and SMEs to productively contribute to an evolving economy, now more than ever. It also aims to create job opportunities and add to the in-country value as well as recognise the importance of this vital sector in forging a diverse national economy. — ONA



In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN’S LONELY ELEPHANT RELOCATES TO CAMBODIA

Pakistan’s only Asian elephant threw a farewell party for the creature ahead of its relocation to Cambodia following years of campaigning by animal rights activists.

The plight of Kaavan, an overweight, 35-year-old bull elephant, has drawn international condemnation and highlighted the woeful state of Islamabad’s zoo, where conditions are so bad that a judge in May ordered all the animals to be moved.

Kaavan is set to be flown to a wildlife sanctuary in Cambodia on Sunday, said Saleem Shaikh, a spokesman for Pakistan’s ministry of climate change, following months of veterinary care. — AFP

■ BANGKOK



THAI POLICE TO DEPLOY THOUSANDS FOR ROYAL PROTEST

Thai police will deploy nearly 6,000 officers on Wednesday for a demonstration at the office that manages the royal fortune by protesters demanding that King Maha Vajiralongkorn give up personal control of the assets.

Police said on Tuesday that no protesters would be allowed within 450 feet of the Crown Property Bureau, where royalists have also said they plan to gather in defence of a monarchy that faces its biggest challenge in decades.

Piya Tavichai, the deputy head of Bangkok police, said the two groups would be kept apart. “Depending on how protesters behave, we will take measures,” he told a news conference.

— Reuters

■ TOKYO



CHINA, JAPAN VOW TO BOOST TRADE TIES

Tokyo and Beijing pledged cooperation on trade and defence Tuesday, but locked horns on disputed islands as China’s foreign minister visited Japan for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The two countries had been working to improve historically tense relations before the pandemic erupted, and China’s President Xi Jinping had been expected for a state visit in the spring.

But with Beijing embroiled in increasingly bitter diplomatic and trade spat with Japanese allies from the United States to Australia, Tokyo’s diplomatic outreach appeared to take a backseat. — AFP

Afghan president calls for support but donors likely to cut aid



Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar and Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis prior to the plenary session of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference at the United Nations in Geneva. — Reuters

GENEVA: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani urged the international community to keep supporting Afghanistan on Tuesday even as he acknowledged that donors are likely to cut aid under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic.

Ghani’s call came in a virtual address to a global donor conference in Geneva, with Afghanistan beset by violence between the Taliban and government forces, rampant corruption and an imminent withdrawal of US troops.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown us all into a state of global uncertainty,” Ghani said from Kabul.

“We ask our international partners to help us do more with less... Financial resources — aid — will continue to be critical to our growth for the foreseeable future.”

Donor nations meet every four years to pledge aid to Afghanistan, which is almost entirely reliant on foreign assistance despite years of promised reforms and attempts to grow the economy.

The World Bank said in a report earlier this year that Afghanistan’s economy is set to contract by between 5.5 per cent and 7.4 per cent in 2020 due to the pandemic, exacerbating poverty and leading to a sharp decline in government revenues.

The previous 2016 conference in Brussels raised \$15.2 billion, but the 2020 donor conference could see less aid pledged as countries battle to recover from the pandemic.

And the conference aims to secure gains made over the last 19 years by tying new donations to joint political commitments — with consequences

Donor nations meet every four years to pledge aid to Afghanistan, which is almost entirely reliant on foreign assistance despite years of promised reforms and attempts to grow the economy

if they are not met.

Concerns are high that advances, especially in the area of women’s rights, could be lost as the Taliban unleashes further violence.

“Afghans have made remarkable progress in achieving their human rights — particularly those of women, minorities, and children,” said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, as he called for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire.

“These rights must be the foundations for a peaceful future. It is essential that they remain anchored in law and protected in practice.”

The Taliban and the Afghan government have been engaged in peace talks in Qatar since September 12 but no progress has been announced so far.

“Our commitment to negotiations with the Taliban remains firm,” Ghani said. But he said violence had “skyrocketed” since a US-Taliban deal in February paved the way for the withdrawal of foreign forces by May 2021. — AFP

■ FARMERS PROTEST AGAINST FARM BILLS



Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel stand guard as farmers block a railway track during a protest at the Jandiala railway station before dawn on the outskirts of Amritsar as train services prepare to resume after farmers unions announced the suspension of blockades for the passing of agriculture bills in the Lok Sabha. — AFP

Australia eyes vaccination entry requirement, says health minister

SYDNEY: Australia will likely require international arrivals to be vaccinated against the coronavirus or face a prolonged quarantine, as officials sketch out what “new normal” virus restrictions may look like.

Although “no final decision” had been made on how to proceed when a vaccine becomes available, Australia’s Health Minister Greg Hunt suggested Tuesday that a vaccination or a strict two-week quarantine would be a condition for entry.

The comments came as Qantas CEO Alan Joyce said international travellers would need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to fly with the Australian flag carrier.

“We are looking at changing our terms and conditions to say for international travellers that we will ask people to have a vaccination before they can get on the aircraft,” he told Channel Nine television.

“Whether you need that domestically, we will have to see what happens.”

Health Minister Hunt said: “We



Passengers disembark from the first Qantas flight from Melbourne following the lifting of state border restrictions with New South Wales at Sydney Airport in Sydney. — Reuters

would expect that people coming to Australia whilst COVID-19 is a significant disease in the world will either be vaccinated or they will isolate.”

For eight months, Australia has had virtually closed off from the rest of the world, with a blanket ban on

non-residents entering the country and citizens strongly advised against all foreign travel.

But with promising results in vaccine trials, Hunt suggested Australians may start receiving doses as early as March.

— AFP

Indonesia hits half a million virus cases

JAKARTA: Indonesia reached a grim milestone on Monday in surpassing more than half a million coronavirus cases, as average new daily infections hit a record and hospitals in the country’s most populated province edged closer to capacity.

Indonesia now has 502,110 infections and 16,002 deaths from COVID-19, the highest numbers in Southeast Asia, having struggled to contain the spread since its first case in March.

Health experts say shortfalls in testing and contact tracing and a consistently high positivity rate - the infection rate per person tested - indicate the real numbers are likely to be significantly higher.

In the capital Jakarta, where relatively loose social restrictions are in place until December 6, some met the milestone with glum resignation.

“The government isn’t serious and the people are getting fatigued,” said Ahmad Rozali, a clothes trader at Tanah Abang market.



A medical worker utilises a swab chamber to collect his swab sample to be tested for COVID-19, as the outbreak continues in Jakarta. — Reuters

“There’s an air of fear among the people,” said another trader, Dewi Nuraini, 45, who described the economy as “crumbling.” “If we want to start a business, it will meet a dead

end,” she said.

Average new daily cases in Indonesia have been about 4,000 in November, with spikes in some provinces straining hospitals on the

Battle against spread far from over, says epidemiologist

main island of Java. There were more troubling trends in Monday’s data, with the seven-day average of new daily infections hitting a record 4,495 and the positivity rate at over 16% for three successive days.

In Bandung, the capital of West Java, a province of almost 50 million people, occupancy at 27 referral hospitals was 88.8% on Monday, city secretary Ema Surmana said, with 698 of the 786 beds for coronavirus patients taken.

West Java epidemiologist Panji Fortuna Hadisoemarto said local and national transmission patterns indicate Indonesia’s struggle with the

virus was far from over. “If it happens in West Java, it doesn’t necessarily happen elsewhere,” he said.

“But looking at the trend, it is still increasing in all provinces... Nowhere’s reached its peak.”

West Java’s occupancy rate in its COVID-19 wards was 73 per cent and also hovering above 70 per cent were Banten and Central Java provinces, according to an internal health ministry document seen by Reuters. The ministry did not immediately respond to request for comment on those rates.

However, Wiku Adisasmito, spokesman for the country’s COVID-19 task force, said occupancy rates of around 70 per cent in coronavirus wards were still within the “ideal” range as defined by the health ministry.

Task force head Doni Monardo earlier on Monday said more should be done to ensure hospital occupancy did not rise further. — Reuters

President-elect Biden forges ahead with building team

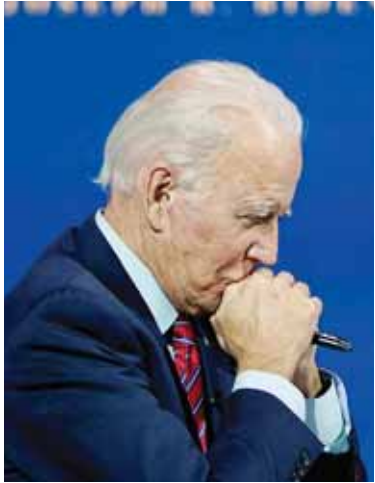
WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday began a new phase in his transition to the White House after the Trump administration gave the Democrat access to critical resources that will enable him to take the reins of power in January.

The General Services Administration's announcement on Monday that it would formally recognise Biden's transition came after weeks of the president falsely claiming that the November 3 election had been marred by widespread voter fraud.

Trump, in a post on Twitter, offered support for the move. Critics have said the president's refusal to accept the results undermined US democracy and undercut the next administration's ability to fight the novel coronavirus.

While Trump stopped short of conceding, it was the closest he has come to acknowledging that it is time to hand over power to Biden, who will take office on January 20.

The GSA announcement will allow the president-elect to access millions of dollars in funds and focus on putting together a leadership team. It also paves the way for Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to receive regular national security



US President-elect Joe Biden listens as he holds a videoconference meeting with members of the US Conference of Mayors at his transition headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. — Reuters

briefings that Trump also gets.

On Tuesday, Biden and Harris are expected to formally introduce their appointments to critical national security and foreign policy positions in Wilmington, Delaware. Two Trump administration officials said the Biden agency review teams could begin interacting with Trump agency officials as soon as Tuesday. The Biden transition team said meetings would begin with federal officials

on Washington's response to the coronavirus pandemic, along with discussions of national security issues.

Biden on Monday tapped trusted aide Antony Blinken to head the State Department and John Kerry, a former US senator, secretary of state and 2004 Democratic presidential nominee, to serve as his special climate envoy.

Biden, who plans to undo many of Trump's "America First" policies, also named Jake Sullivan as his national security adviser and Linda Thomas-Greenfield as US ambassador to the United Nations - both with high-level government experience.

He is likely to tap former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen to become the next Treasury secretary, according to two Biden allies, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a personnel decision that was not yet public.

On Monday evening, Sue Gough, a spokeswoman for the Pentagon, said that the Department of Defense had been contacted by the Biden-Harris team. "DoD is prepared to provide post-election services and support in a professional, orderly, and efficient manner that is befitting of the public's expectation of the Department and our commitment to national security," Gough said.

While Trump on Monday said he backed GSA Administrator Emily Murphy's decision, he and his advisers vowed to continue fighting the election results. "Our case strongly continues, we will keep up the good ... fight, and I believe we will prevail! Nevertheless, in the best interest of our Country, I am recommending that Emily and her team do what needs to be done with regard to initial protocols, and have told my team to do the same," Trump said on Twitter. Trump later said on Twitter that his team would move "full speed ahead" with challenging "what will go down as the most corrupt election in American political history," adding that he would "never concede."

Biden won 306 state-by-state electoral votes to Trump's 232. Biden also holds a lead of more than 6 million in the national popular vote. Murphy's decision to allow the formal transition followed weeks of failed legal efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the election in key battleground states. Murphy, who was appointed to the GSA job by Trump, said she faced threats for not starting the transition earlier and told GSA employees in a letter that the decision to do so was hers alone.

— Reuters



A nurse prepares to inoculate a volunteer with Russia's new coronavirus vaccine in a post-registration trials at a clinic in Moscow. — AFP

Russia: Sputnik V virus vaccine 95% effective

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine was 95 per cent effective and would be cheaper and easier to store than some alternatives, as the global race heats up to develop a jab.

The announcement was the latest in a flurry of breakthroughs as several vaccine makers worldwide published preliminary data showing efficacy rates of 90 per cent and higher.

Countries are hoping to begin inoculating their populations by year's end or in early 2021 to stop a pandemic that has claimed the lives of nearly 1.4 million people.

Russia was one of the first to announce the development of a vaccine in August — dubbed Sputnik V after the Soviet-era satellite — but before the start of final clinical trials.

In statement on Tuesday, the vaccine's developers said preliminary data after trials involving thousands of volunteers showed "an efficacy of

the vaccine above 95 per cent" after a second dose.

Russia's health ministry, the state-run Gamaleya research centre and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said in the statement they expected the vaccine to record an even higher effectiveness after the next analysis.

"No unexpected adverse events were identified as part of the research," it said, though some of those vaccinated suffered short-term effects including fever, weakness, fatigue, and headache.

The two-dose vaccine will be available on international markets for less than \$10 (8.40 euros) per dose, they said, and will be free for Russian citizens.

It can be stored at between two and eight degrees Celsius, they said, instead of the temperatures far below freezing required for some other vaccines. — AFP

Both sides claim gains in Ethiopia war, Tigrayans accused of massacre

ADDIS ABABA/NAIROBI: Ethiopia's state-appointed rights group accused a Tigrayan youth group on Tuesday of massacring hundreds of civilians as federal and local forces both claimed advances in a three-week war in the country's mountainous north.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government said enemy soldiers were surrendering as it advanced towards the regional capital, but the Tigrayans reported they were resisting and had destroyed a prestigious army division. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission published findings into a November 9 attack in Mai Kadra in southwest Tigray state — first reported by Amnesty International — where it said a youth group called Samri killed at least 600 people of the minority Amhara and Wolkait ethnic groups in the town.

Non-Tigrayans were beaten to death, stabbed, set on fire and strangled with ropes, the report said, though some residents protected neighbours by hiding them in homes. The commission accused local forces of colluding in the massacre. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was not immediately available but has previously denied



An Ethiopian refugee fleeing from the ongoing fighting in Tigray region, walks past a WFP tent, at the Um-Rakoba camp, on the Sudan-Ethiopia border, in Al Qadarif state, Sudan. — Reuters

involvement. Reuters has been unable to verify statements made by either side since phone and Internet connections to Tigray are down and access to the area is strictly controlled.

Since fighting began on November 4, hundreds have died, more than 41,000 refugees have fled to Sudan, and there has been widespread destruction and uprooting of people from homes. The war has spread to Eritrea, where the Tigrayans have fired rockets, and also affected Somalia where Ethiopia has disarmed several hundred Tigrayans in a peacekeeping

force fighting militants. Abiy's government said many Tigrayan combatants had responded to an ultimatum to lay down arms before a threatened offensive against Mekelle city, with half a million inhabitants. The deadline expires on Wednesday.

"Using the government's 72-hour period, a large number of Tigray militia and special forces are surrendering," a government taskforce said.

The battle-hardened TPLF, which had ruled the region of more than 5 million people, gave a different version, saying their troops were keeping federal forces at bay and scoring victories. Their spokesman Getachew Reda said an important army unit - which he named as the 21st mechanised division - was destroyed in an assault at Raya-Wajirat led by a former commander of that unit now fighting for the TPLF.

The prime minister's spokeswoman Billene Seyoum denied that. TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael has disputed the government version that Mekelle is encircled at a roughly 50km distance, telling the ultimatum was a cover for government forces to regroup after defeats.

— Reuters

■ PROTEST AGAINST SETTLEMENTS



Palestinian demonstrators gather as tear gas canisters are fired by Israeli forces during a protest against Jewish settlements in Jordan Valley in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — Reuters

LIBYA

Lockerbie bomber appeal starts in Scotland

GLASGOW: The family of Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Mohmet Al Megrahi on Tuesday began a posthumous appeal in Scotland hoping to overturn the former Libyan intelligence officer's conviction for downing a Pan Am flight in 1988, killing 270 people.

Lawyer Claire Mitchell told five judges in Edinburgh that "no reasonable jury, properly directed, could have returned the verdict that it did".

The case was referred to Scotland's highest criminal court by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) in March on grounds a



possible miscarriage of justice may have occurred.

The SCCRC said there were grounds an "unreasonable verdict" was returned in that it could not be proved Megrahi bought the suitcase containing the bomb that was loaded onto the flight. — AFP

LITHUANIA

Ingrida Simonyte approved as new Lithuania PM

RIGA: The Lithuanian parliament on Tuesday voted in Ingrida Simonyte as the new prime minister of the Baltic country, with 62 lawmakers voting in favour and 10 against the independent politician who formerly served as finance minister.

Simonyte had been nominated for the position of head of government by President Gitanas Nausėda last week, after the conservative Homeland Union emerged as the strongest force in the October 25 parliamentary elections. Although independent, Simontyte had run as lead candidate for the party, which has since formed a governing coalition with two liberal



parties, the Liberal Movement and the Freedom Party, giving them a narrow majority of 74 of a total of 141 seats in parliament.

However, the governing coalition had to do without the votes of the Liberal Movement on Tuesday, since the entire faction of the party is currently in self-isolation. — dpa

LEBANON

Car bomb in north Syria kills 5

BEIRUT: A car bomb on Tuesday killed five people, mostly local police, on the outskirts of the Turkish-controlled town of Al Bab in northern Syria, a war monitor said.

Explosives were planted in the car of a police chief from another district, killing him, two policemen accompanying him, and two civilians, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. It also wounded 19 others, the monitor added. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the car bombing, but there has been a string of attacks in Al Bab since its capture by Turkish troops from the IS group in 2017.



Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman said it was "likely that sleeper cells of the IS group" were behind the attack.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies control several pockets of territory on Syria's side of the border following three military incursions since 2016.

— AFP

EU green finance rules leaky for ships, tight for houses

KATE ABNETT AND
SIMON JESSOP

Months of EU deliberation to decide which business activities can be marketed as green investments have produced a set of draft standards some finance officials and NGOs say are lax for the polluting shipping sector and challenging for buildings. In other cases, they strike a fair balance, they say.

As the European Union pursues regulation to try to deliver the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, a powerful tool in channelling funding over the coming decades will be its financial taxonomy - in other words, a system of classifying activities that can be marketed as sustainable.

Policy-makers on Friday published draft rules following months spent collecting input from all concerned, after a Technical Expert Group (TEG) in March delivered its recommendations. The rules layout tight criteria for fossil fuel power plants and the car industry, which were well-received by some

NGOS SAY
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in the finance industry as a spur for positive change. In other areas, critics say the rules, which face a further four weeks of consultation, fall short.

One of the most contentious of the proposals is the inclusion of rules on sea freight. They were not part of the TEG recommendations and the European Commission's newly-formed advisory platform on the taxonomy had expected to develop them in the coming months.

Luca Bonaccorsi, Sustainable Finance Director for non-governmental organisation Transport and Environment, who sits on the advisory platform, said the proposed rules "will not encourage or speed investment towards sustainable shipping".

The rules say that, until 2026, ships can be classed as sustainable if they meet any one of four criteria, including for vessels to be 10 per cent more efficient than a global standard. The proposal does not specify what rules would apply from 2026.

Tristan Smith, Associate Professor at the UCL Energy Institute, said the rules lacked a requirement for ships to be capable of being retrofitted to handle zero-carbon fuel such as hydrogen, to make them sustainable in the long term. "Ships, including coastal vessels, are all using oil-derived fuels at the moment and they will have to switch to something zero, probably in about ten years' time," he said.

"So you're basically building a fleet of ships which are completely inadequate for the ten-years-plus future." Another cause for concern is the rules' treatment of bioenergy that echoes years of EU debate on whether extracting energy from waste or natural materials is good for the planet. Nathan Fabian, a former member of the TEG, who leads the Commission's new advisory platform on the taxonomy, said the proposed rules would allow whole trees and animal fats to be considered as sustainable feedstock for energy. "It is a weakening of the TEG recommendations," he said. — Reuters

SPEEDY DEEDS

Zanzibar goes digital to prove property ownership

KIM HARRISBERG

A team of Zanzibari data collectors armed with tablets have gathered enough information from hundreds of people on the Tanzanian archipelago to issue each of them a deed to their land in 20 minutes - a process that typically takes up to five years.

The project run by Kenya-based technology consulting company Spatial Collective has produced official documentation for about 700 land parcels in a southern town called Shakani since it launched last year.

"With title deeds, people can get loans and they will have the security of knowing that, 'This is mine and no one will claim it,'" said Justus Muhando, 30, Spatial Collective's technical lead steering the project in Zanzibar.

Spatial Collective began work with the island's land commission in 2018 when its researchers used drone imagery captured by the Zanzibar Mapping Initiative, a project led by the island's land commission.

Using small drones, the initiative took high-resolution imagery of 500,000 buildings on the archipelago, said Muhando. Spatial Collective approached authorities about building on that data to simplify the often slow, frustrating process of applying for proof of land ownership.

JUSTUS MUHANDO

Technical lead

Now, Zanzibar's land commission is working to finalise the digitised title deeds after a consultation period and hopes to roll the process out through the whole of the island in the coming months. A lack of formal documentation and poor implementation of land laws threaten tenure in many countries, with more than 5 billion people globally lacking proof of ownership, according to the Lima-based Institute for Liberty and Democracy.

Less than 15 per cent of homeowners in Zanzibar have documentation to signify property ownership, say government officials. The hope is that the project can help overcome the hurdles that made issuing title deeds through Zanzibar's outdated, paper-based system a long and arduous process, said Shawana Soud Khamis, land adjudication officer for the local land commission.

The new system should cut down on surveyor expenses, boundary disputes and delays in residents bringing in forms and documentation, she said. It will help the government properly issue land tax, a valuable revenue generator that has been difficult to enforce in the past, Khamis added.

And the initiative could give the islanders, especially those in vulnerable groups like women, long-overdue assurance that they have legal protection against evictions, she said.

"We have seen women suffer because men take over (their) land. Women don't always have inheritance and can lose everything - their homes and their farms," said Khamis. "We need to solve this problem."

The project, called Securing Tenure on Zanzibar, goes through the same steps for issuing title deeds as the traditional process, only much faster, said Muhando. Spatial Collective trained 10 community members to assist with all the data collection and paid them for their work, he explained, with grants from organisations such as Cities Alliance, a global partnership fighting urban poverty. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

SHRINKING CHANCES

Worsening land inequality widens gender, climate change gaps

RINA CHANDRAN

Land inequality is growing worldwide, threatening the livelihoods of 2.5 billion people who directly rely on farming and widening disparities in gender, health and climate-change impacts, researchers warned on Tuesday.

The widening gap in ownership and access to land especially hurts small and marginal farmers, women, and indigenous and rural communities, according to a report by the International Land Coalition (ILC) and anti-poverty charity Oxfam.

While rural and indigenous communities are being squeezed into smaller parcels of land or uprooted entirely, the land is increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, mainly those of large agriculture businesses and investors, the research showed.

"As corporate and financial investments grow, ownership and control of land becomes more concentrated and increasingly opaque," said Ward Anseeuw, an analyst at ILC and co-author of the report. "Land inequality reduces opportunities for younger rural generations, especially girls, to improve their lives. In the longer term, it is detrimental to human development, socio-political stability, and environmental sustainability."

The study, which measured land inequality using traditional census data, as well as tenure, quality of land and other indicators in 17 countries, found that concentration of land has increased in nearly all regions worldwide since 1980. The largest 1 per cent of farms operate more than 70 per cent of the world's

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People take part in a demonstration of "Rise for Climate Belgium" ahead of next week's European Summit, on Sunday, in Brussels. — AFP

farmland, according to the study of countries including India, China, Ecuador, Guatemala, Brazil, Mexico, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Meanwhile, the wealthiest 10 per cent of rural populations control 60 per cent of the value of agricultural land, while the poorest half only have 3 per cent. Latin America is the most unequal region, according to the data that did not include corporate ownership.

"Growing inequality is the greatest obstacle to poverty eradication - in countries like Guatemala, extreme inequality costs lives," Ana Maria

Mendez, Oxfam's Guatemala Director, said in a statement.

"As we confront the coronavirus pandemic and catastrophic hurricanes fuelled by climate change, the impact of land inequality is even starker," she added. Increasing pressure on land from industry, agriculture and infrastructure projects has led to violent conflicts, with at least 212 people killed last year while defending their land, according to the advocacy group Global Witness.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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Two new VLCCs to join Oman Shipping fleet

DIVERSIFIED FLEET: State-owned multi-commodity maritime transportation services provider set to boost its fleet size from 54 vessels presently

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman Shipping Company (OSC), the wholly government-owned maritime transportation services provider, is set to shortly add a new Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) to its expanding and well-diversified fleet of commercial vessels.

According to a high-level official, the new crude carrier is due to be delivered within a week. This will be followed by delivery of a second VLCC before the end of 2021 – additions that will reinforce Oman Shipping's current international ranking among the Top 10 ship-owners of VLCCs in the world.

Ibrahim al Nadhairi (pictured), Acting CEO – Oman Shipping Company & Oman Drydock Company, said the new buildings are set to bolster the state-owned fleet to 56 vessels, up from 54 presently.

Participating in the 5th Annual Maritime Standard Tanker Conference on Tuesday, he said the



company has come a long way since its establishment in 2003 with only one LNG vessel. OSC is also ranked 29th globally in terms of the size of its LNG vessels in its fleet, and 55th as a container operator, he noted.

Speaking about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the company's operations, the Acting CEO said OSC began "thinking out of the box" in response to the challenges posed by the crisis.

"Although we were concerned about the pandemic, we decided to

respond in a positive way. We changed strategies by adopting a positive approach and thinking outside the box, and the first thing we did is to integrate OSC and Oman Drydock Company. Although they relate to two different industries, we looked at the shared services and key roles."

"We also took the opportunity to offload some unnecessary overheads to reduce cost, and took advantage of the market to expand our tanker business as well as our dry cargo and container business," he further noted.

Posting significant growth during this period was OSC's wholly-owned container business, Oman Container Line (OCL), said Al Nadhairi. The service now connects all of Oman's commercial gateways with ports in the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, as well as a facility in Iraq.

Following the slump in the international tanker business triggered by dramatic reductions in the crude oil shipments, OSC took the opportunity to send its tankers to Oman Drydock's ship repair yard



at Duqm to be fitted with scrubbers and wastewater treatment systems in compliance with emission and effluent control standards mandated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

As many as 13 vessels of the Group have been fitted with scrubbers so far this year, he said.

Oman Shipping Company is owned around 80 per cent by Oman Global Logistics Group (Asyad) with OQ (formerly Oman Oil & Orpic Group) and Oman Rail sharing the balance 20 per cent of the equity in the company.

The group has three subsidiaries: Oman Charter Company, which oversees the group's commercial operations; Oman Ship Management Company (OSMC), which provides technical management services; and Oman Container Line, dedicated to driving the goal of the group's new container business.

Government departments urged to embrace e-payment modes

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 24

As part of its ongoing efforts to support speedy and efficient, cashless and digital financial transactions, the Ministry of Finance has issued a circular requiring all ministries and government units to accelerate the roll-out of apps to facilitate mobile payments using banking services applications and e-wallets.

The circular recalled the Central Bank of Oman's (CBO) announcement in October last year with regard to the launch of its Mobile Payment Clearing and Settlement System, while also prescribing procedures for introducing fee collection services via mobile platforms and QR code-based systems.



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed stock graph and 'COVID-19' words in this illustration picture. – Reuters

Brent hits highest since March

SINGAPORE: Brent crude prices hit their highest levels since March as news of a third promising coronavirus vaccine candidate spurred hopes of a quicker recovery in oil demand, while US President-elect Joe Biden received the go-ahead to begin his leadership transition.

Brent crude futures rose 43 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$46.49 a barrel by 0522 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude added 45 cents, or 1.1 per cent, to \$43.51 a barrel. Brent rose to a session high of \$46.56 earlier on Tuesday, the highest level traded since early March before Saudi Arabia initiated a price war with Russia, which sent oil prices crashing.

Both oil benchmarks settled up about 2 per cent on Monday after gaining about 5 per cent last week. "Progress on developing and distributing a vaccine de-risks the path back to normal for oil markets," said Stephen Innes, chief global markets strategist at financial services firm Axi.

"If mobility data is a measure of oil price sentiment, in the not too distant future, the vaccine will get people back on aeroplanes and cruise ships," AstraZeneca said on Monday its COVID-19 vaccine was 70 per cent effective in pivotal trials and could be up to 90 per cent effective, giving the world's fight against the global pandemic a third

Traders also focused on a week of technical meetings by Opec and its allies to prepare the ground for next week's gathering

new weapon that can be cheaper to make, easier to distribute and faster to scale-up than rivals. This follows positive trial results from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna.

Also helping to ease uncertainty in financial markets, President Donald Trump on Monday allowed officials to proceed with a transition to Joe Biden's incoming administration, giving his rival access to briefings and funding even as he vowed to persist with efforts to fight the election results.

US crude oil inventories likely edged lower last week, while distillate stockpiles were seen decreasing for a 10th straight week, a preliminary poll showed on Monday, ahead of reports from the American Petroleum Institute and the Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Traders also focused on a week of technical meetings by Opec and its allies to prepare the ground for next week's gathering, which is set to discuss extending oil output curbs into next year due to weak demand amid the second wave of COVID-19. — Reuters



ALKESH JOSHI

The application of Value added tax (VAT) on financial services can be an intriguing subject. Margin-based financial products do not lend themselves to the application of the transaction-tax nature of VAT.

Let's start by first understanding what could be considered as a financial service for VAT purposes. While the list is long, as an overview, bank account facilities; credit cards; safety deposit lockers; loans; money exchange; insurance; equity brokerage and trading; money transfers; hire purchase leases; operating lease; wealth management services; issuing of debt and equity instruments; and cheques would generally be the most common financial services consumed around the world.

For businesses, financing, overdrafts, letters of credit (LC), bank guarantees (BG), factoring, would also be included. When providing a financial product/service, the provider would generally charge an explicit fee and/or an



campaign, will shift Treasury's focus heavily toward progressive efforts to

tackle growing economic inequality and fighting climate change and away from the Trump administration's pre-pandemic emphasis on cutting taxes and easing financial regulations.

Yellen, 74, brings Biden decades of economic policy experience and is respected by Congress, international finance officials, progressives and business interests alike.

She has called for opening fiscal

spending taps to revive an economy wracked by the coronavirus pandemic and would be the first person to head the Treasury, the Fed and the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

The post will present a host of new challenges for Yellen, whose policymaking experience in the past 20 years has largely centred on monetary — rather than fiscal — policy. — Reuters

Value Added Tax on financial services



The Oman VAT law will follow the approach adopted in the other GCC states for financial services with life insurance and financial services treated as VAT exempt, unless an explicit fee or commission is charged, which will be subject to VAT

implicit margin, the latter of which is built into the amounts recovered by the provider.

Thankfully, not all financial services are subject to VAT. In general, interest or margin earned on a financial service is treated as VAT exempt in most parts of the world.

What this means is that when one repays a loan in instalments, the interest included in a loan instalment would be VAT exempt. The portion of the principal being repaid will also be outside the scope of VAT.

Another example of margin income is when a currency exchange

house makes profits by buying and selling currency on spot rates and does not charge any fee separately.

In such a scenario the exchange house would not charge any VAT as the implicit 'profit' earned by it would be treated as VAT exempt. That leaves us with the question as to which financial services are subject to VAT.

Across the GCC (and many other countries around the world), explicit fees charged by financial service providers have been made subject to VAT. Charges such as: annual debit card fees; cheque-book issuance fees;

international remittance fees; annual safety deposit locker fees; and loan processing fees are subject to VAT.

When it comes to trade finance services availed by businesses, charges including: acceptance fees; bill negotiation fees; underwriting fees; BG issuance fees; and LC opening fees are subject to VAT.

Premiums charged for general insurances such as health insurance, motor insurance, fire insurance are also subject to VAT, although life insurance (as a saving product) is VAT exempt.

Shariah-compliant Islamic financial arrangements should attract the same VAT treatment as applicable to their non-Islamic counterparts, so that there is no distortion or difference in the tax treatment.

Thus, profit earned under Islamic financial products should be VAT exempt and explicit application or processing fees charged would be subject to VAT.

The Oman VAT law will follow the approach adopted in the other GCC states for financial services with life insurance and financial services treated as VAT exempt, unless an explicit fee or commission is charged, which will be subject to VAT.

The detailed list of financial services that will be VAT exempt or taxable in Oman will be clarified in the impending VAT Executive Regulations. [The author is Partner, Oman Tax Leader & MENA Energy Tax Leader at EY. He can be reached at Alkesh.Joshi@om.ey.com]



CEO turnover in companies has hit a record high

One way or another, the dreadful COVID-19, it can be said, has affected most people from households to the place of employment. The pandemic-driven upheaval across global offices has gone all the way to the top, with a record number of chief executive changes at FTSE 100 firms already this year.

Companies, under increased pressure from investors, are shuffling their executive teams like never before, in the hope they can better steer them through the crisis. Investment director at AJ Bell, Russ Mould, said the FTSE 100's figure for CEO turnover this year — 18 changes already made or announced — is the highest this century, beating the previous peaks of 17 a year, seen in both 2007 and 2013.

Meanwhile, the 18 changes of chief financial officer, according to figures for the first half of this year, is second only to 2014, when 19 finance chiefs at UK blue-chips were replaced.

Mould thinks, however, the pace of change in the FTSE 100, and apparently, the US, seemed to have slowed as the pandemic has worn on.

He said: "Investors will be looking for executives to show that shareholders and stakeholders 'are all in this together' and having someone walk out on you during a time of great uncertainty — when experience, steady hands and cool heads are needed — would be far from ideal."

SquareWell, a shareholder advisory company, tracked changes across "close to 500" companies listed on the major European, UK and US indexes over a period of 18 months from



ANDY JALIL
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COMPANIES, UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE FROM INVESTORS, ARE SHUFFLING THEIR EXECUTIVE TEAMS LIKE NEVER BEFORE, IN THE HOPE THEY CAN BETTER STEER THEM THROUGH THE CRISIS

January 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020.

It found that, while just 7 per cent of executives were formally dismissed, almost a third (29 per cent) were ousted from their roles because of poor performance, a scandal or strategic disagreement.

The remaining 66 per cent of executives quit. The trend, according to financial news, is most pronounced in America, where firms have experienced higher levels of departures from the C-Suite (highest-ranking executives) than their counterparts in both the UK and Europe, the research found.

Analysts, employment agencies and investors have highlighted several reasons for the turnover, including pressure from shareholders frustrated with underperformance and the need for better governance during the crisis, while other

departures have taken place as executives reach the end of their tenure.

Some departures have been accelerated by the pandemic. For instance, in May, Royal Mail abruptly replaced CEO Rico Back after less than two years in the job, after clashes with unions over a £1.8 billion restructuring plan aimed at turning around the struggling UK postal delivery company.

Buck was also criticised for remaining in his country of residence, Switzerland, during the pandemic. SquareWell's report showed that 40 per cent of those executives dismissed during the period had recorded negative share price performance during their tenure. Some companies have changed power-sharing agreements to allow for clearer decision-making during the crisis.

For instance, Europe's largest

software group SAP abandoned its dual-CEO structure to provide clarity in the face of business challenges posed by COVID-19. It meant co-CEO Jennifer Morgan, who was appointed to the role alongside Christian Klein in October 2019, left at the end of April, while Europe was in the grip of coronavirus.

However, SquareWell's report noted that for some companies, continuity was key: "Faced with difficult economic times, many boards put business continuity first and shun a leadership change for fear of destabilising the company."

CEO transactions tend to fall to their lowest level in the year after a recession hits bottom. This trend is most pronounced in America and Europe, but it also held true in Asia during the recent crisis." *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

PRESS RELEASE

BANK MUSCAT CELEBRATES 50TH NATIONAL DAY WITH SPECIAL MAGAZINE TITLED 'A STORY IN BUILDING OMAN'

Coinciding with the Sultanate's 50th National Day celebrations, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has issued a special magazine that charts the bank's success, achievements and contributions to the Sultanate's Blessed Renaissance.

Over the last 38 years, the bank has contributed tremendously across the economic and social sectors in the building of modern Oman.

The 48-page special magazine was launched in Arabic and English, in print and electronic editions. It includes several sections including chapters on the history of the bank and important milestones, its contributions to the National Economy, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability, its contributions to the Government and Private sectors including the special efforts made in developing small and medium-sized enterprises.

Also included are chapters on the bank's various initiatives and programmes to develop national human resources, especially Omani youth. It also introduces the public to the integrated banking and e-banking services and facilities provided by the bank, and its contributions to the housing and education sectors.

The magazine also introduces the readers to the excellent distribution of the bank's branches across all governorates of the Sultanate and the bank's world-class contact centre which



ensures that customers can reach the bank 24/7.

A whole section has also been devoted to Meethaq Islamic Banking, which has dramatically changed the banking landscape in the Sultanate after its launch in 2013.

Meethaq is playing a major role in the development of Islamic banking and in the provision of world-class Islamic banking services and facilities to both individuals and corporates in line with the provisions of Islamic Sharia.

The special magazine ends with a selection of photos from the bank's history, with many of the photos being shared with the general public for the first time. The magazine stands out thanks to some excellent illustrations and infographs within a modern and contemporary layout and design. The special issue is available for all readers in its electronic format at https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Documents/pdf/BankMuscat_En.pdf.

German economy grew by 8.5 per cent in third quarter, but recession fears grow

The reading marked an upward revision to an earlier flash estimate of 8.2 per cent growth, and followed a 9.8 per cent plunge in the second quarter



Employees work on a Computed Tomography 'CAT scan' at the manufacturing plant of Siemens Healthineers in Forchheim near Nuremberg, Germany. – Reuters

The stronger-than expected rebound was mainly driven by higher household spending and soaring exports

BERLIN: Germany's gross domestic product grew by a record 8.5 per cent in the third quarter as Europe's largest economy partly recovered from an unprecedented plunge caused by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring, the statistics office said on Tuesday.

The stronger-than-expected rebound was mainly driven by higher household spending and soaring exports, the office said.

"This enabled the German economy to make up for a large part of the massive decline in the gross domestic product caused by the coronavirus pandemic in the second quarter of 2020," it added.

The reading marked an upward revision to an earlier flash estimate of 8.2 per cent growth, and followed a 9.8 per cent plunge in the second quarter.

The outlook is clouded by a second wave of coronavirus infections and a partial lockdown to slow the spread of the disease.

Restaurants, bars, hotels and

entertainment venues have been closed since November 2, but shops and schools remain open.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional state premiers are planning to extend the "lockdown-light" on Wednesday

until December 20, according to a draft prepared for their meeting.

A contraction in the service sector is expected to weigh heavily on gross domestic product in the fourth quarter, while lockdown measures in other countries

are likely to hit export-oriented manufacturers as well.

DIW economist Claus Michelsen said a decline in economic output was therefore on the cards, with initial estimates indicating a GDP drop of around 1 per cent in the final quarter.

"Germany and many important trading partners are likely to slide back into recession," Michelsen said. — Reuters

HANOI

Vietnam to extend jet fuel tax cut to help its airlines

Vietnam plans to extend a 30 per cent reduction in environment tax on jet fuel by one year until the end of 2021 to help local airlines weather the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, its finance ministry said on Tuesday.

The ministry cut the tax from 3,000 dong (\$0.13) per litre to 2,100 dong for five months starting from August this year, it said. "The aviation industry has suffered seriously," the ministry said in a statement. "The domestic market is expected



to gradually recover for this year and next, but the international market will take a longer time."

Vietnam's National Assembly earlier this month approved a government plan to boost the capital of state carrier Vietnam Airlines. — Reuters

ROME

Italy economy seen shrinking in Q4

Italy's economy is likely to contract in the fourth quarter and recovery next year is expected to be slower than initially forecast, the Bank of Italy said during a parliamentary briefing on Tuesday.

"In any case, it is likely that the result for the year will be in line with what was forecast in October," the central bank said in a speech before the government's budget committees.

"However, in 2021 the recovery will likely be slower



than expected."

In October the Bank of Italy estimated a GDP contraction of less than 10 per cent in 2020. The Italian government's official forecasts are for a GDP drop of 9 per cent this year and growth of 6 per cent in 2021. — Reuters

BENGALURU

Toyota halts operations at Indian plant again

Toyota Motor Corp again halted operations at its car plant in southern India from Monday, as the majority of members of its workers' union continued a sit-in strike, the automaker said.

Both the Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) factories in the industrial hub of Bidadi, Karnataka, had declared a "lockout" on November 10 after the union went on strike, saying that their demand to withdraw the suspension of a worker was not met.



The local state government's labour department had prohibited the strike by the workmen, as well as the "legal lockout" declared by the management from November 19 and directed operations to resume. — Reuters

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‘HUMBLE’ WARNER SAYS HE WON’T RESPOND TO INDIA TAUNTS

SYDNEY: Australian opener David Warner vowed Monday to keep his temper in check during the upcoming series against India, predicting Virat Kohli’s men will try to wind him up with verbal taunts.

Warner once revelled in his reputation as Australia’s attack dog during on-field confrontations but said he had toned down his antics as he matured.

The 34-year-old expected some barbs to be thrown his way during the upcoming India tour, which begins with a one-day international in Sydney on Friday, but said he would let his bat do the talking.

“The last time we toured in

India they really engaged us like that,” he told a conference call.

“We’re learning over time, especially myself, that if you look not to engage in that you’re almost reversing the effect by ignoring it, trying to take it in, and using your bat.”

Warner said he planned to use any taunts as motivation, while refusing to retaliate in kind and maintaining a positive attitude.

“You don’t know the effect (losing your temper) will have on your teammates, so you have to be a bit more humble and be more respectful to the opposition,” he said.

Warner’s milder approach appears to coincide with his return from a ban over the 2018

“
The last time we toured India they really engaged us like that. We’re learning over time, especially myself, that if you look not to engage in that you’re almost reversing the effect by ignoring it, trying to take it in, and using your bat

DAVID WARNER

Australia

ball-tampering scandal, although the batsman attributed the laid-back demeanour to fatherhood.

“You have to be patient, not get too aggressive, not get angry when the kids aren’t listening,” he said.

“So I’m getting tested on and off the field.”

Warner also backed his out-of-form Test partner Joe Burns, who faces a stiff challenge from rising star Will Pucovski for a spot at the top of the batting order against India.

“I’ve spent a lot of time with Joe Burns in the middle, I know exactly what we’re about when we’re out there,” he said.

“Obviously, we won a lot of games last year. So for me, you

don’t break something that’s actually working.”

Test greats such as Michael Clarke, Ian Chappell and Mark Waugh have been clamouring for Pucovski’s inclusion after the 22-year-old plundered back-to-back double centuries for Victoria.

Warner acknowledged Pucovski’s claims but said Burns, 31, “did not to anything wrong” to warrant dropping him for the first Test in Adelaide next month.

“Will is an exceptional talent and [will be] a great player for years to come,” he said.

Australia and India will play three one-dayers, three Twenty20 matches and four Tests during the tour. — AFP



Taylor keen to play until 2023 WC

WELLINGTON: New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor gave his side a boost ahead of their T20I series against West Indies after he said he hoped to play until the 2023 World Cup in India.



Stone, Root shine in T20 warm-up

Paarl, South Africa: Fast bowler Olly Stone and Test captain Joe Root played leading roles in an England intra-squad Twenty20 warm-up match at Boland Park in Paarl on Monday.



‘NZ focus on T20 may change’

WELLINGTON: New Zealand’s Twenty20 series against West Indies starting on Friday should be a springboard for the home side to look to improve their results and build a squad.

SRI LANKA’S T20 LEAGUE TAKES OFF AFTER TURBULENT BUILD-UP

COLOMBO: The organisers of Sri Lanka’s new Twenty20 league are bullish about the franchise-based tournament despite a slew of teething problems that preceded its scheduled start on Thursday.

Multiple postponements, venue uncertainties and late withdrawals marred the build-up for Sri Lanka Cricket’s (SLC) ambitious tournament which was originally scheduled to begin in late August.

SLC vice president Ravin Wickramaratne dismissed suggestions that the board should have waited for the COVID-19 pandemic to subside before launching the league.

“The game of cricket was stopped for a while following the pandemic outbreak, however, we cannot keep it on hold for more than this,” Wickramaratne, also the league’s tournament director, said in an e-mail interview.

“None of us know for sure when this is going to end... this is the ‘New Normal’, we need to adapt to it. “A T20 league of this nature has been a long-felt need for Sri Lanka Cricket, and postponing this for a further year or two is not going to help SLC’s forward journey.”

The SLC even considered hosting the five-team league in Malaysia



or the United Arab Emirates while finalising quarantine arrangements with the country’s health ministry.

Nothing illustrated the league’s chaotic build-up like Herschelle Gibbs’ association with it. The

former South Africa player was first unveiled as a commentator but ended up being the Colombo Kings head coach following a series of coincidences.

Dav Whatmore was initially

named the Colombo coach but following his withdrawal, the job was offered to former England bowler Kabir Ali.

Ali then contacted COVID-19 and was unavailable and Gibbs was

“None of us know for sure when this is going to end... this is the ‘New Normal’, we need to adapt to it. A T20 league of this nature has been a long-felt need for Sri Lanka Cricket, and postponing this for a further year or two is not going to help SLC’s forward journey”

RAVIN WICKRAMARATNE
SLC vice-president

was dropped as a second venue as SLC decided to host the entire tournament in a bio-secure bubble in Hambantota.

League promoters Innovative Production Group (IPG) said they hardly had any choice. “These are tough times for everyone,” IPG chief executive Anil Mohan said.

“Every country is doing their best to keep their people safe. Whatever is the protocol, we have to follow.”

The tournament lost some sheen with the late withdrawals of players like South African Faf du Plessis and West Indian Chris Gayle. However, the league landed a title sponsor last week and lined up an impressive list of domestic and international broadcasters.

Sony Pictures Networks will broadcast the league through much of south Asia, including India, while Sky Sports have taken the rights for United Kingdom, Mohan said.

The league will be played behind closed doors with the final scheduled on December 16.

“Most of the countries have used such leagues to build their teams in the shortest format of the game and I am sure LPL is going to build that path for Sri Lanka Cricket,” said SLC’s Wickramaratne.

— Reuters



Barcelona’s Lionel Messi and Antoine Griezmann during a warm up session. — Reuters

Barcelona’s Griezmann denies rift with Messi

BARCELONA: Barcelona forward Antoine Griezmann has dismissed talk of a rift with team mate Lionel Messi and said he had nothing to do with recent comments about the Argentine forward from his former agent and his uncle.

Earlier this month, Griezmann’s former agent Eric Olhats said Messi’s “reign of terror” had made life difficult for Griezmann, while the French forward’s uncle said it was not easy to play in the same club as the six-time Ballon d’Or winner.

Messi hit back last week, saying he was tired of being blamed for problems at Barcelona. Griezmann said he could no longer remain

silent on the matter.

“I have been putting up with comments for a long while and now it’s time to say enough,” he was quoted as saying in an interview with Movistar. “My agent is my sister, but she doesn’t speak. Neither do my parents. As no one speaks, Eric offers an opinion but that can do a lot of damage and create doubts about my relationship with Leo. Leo knows I have a lot of respect for him. I learn from him. “My uncle doesn’t know how football works. A journalist wants a phrase out of you ... I told Leo I have nothing to do with them. I don’t speak to them.”

— Reuters

India’s fabulous five can overcome pink-ball inexperience, says Shastri

NEW DELHI: India coach Ravi Shastri acknowledged his team lack Australia’s pink-ball experience but is convinced their “fabulous five” pacemen can bowl the tourists to a second successive Test series victory Down Under.

Australia have played seven day-night Tests, the most by any country, since 2015 and won each of them. India were late to embrace the innovation and played their only pink-ball test against Bangladesh in Kolkata last year.

A mouth-watering four-Test series between the top two teams in the World Test Championship standings will get underway with a pink-ball contest at Adelaide from December 17.

“We begin with pink-ball cricket where we lack experience,” Shastri told the *Sportstar* magazine.

“We have played just one pink-ball test, but there is a qualitative difference between them (Bangladesh) and Australia. It is like cheese and chalk. “Our boys have not played much of pink-ball in domestic cricket, but I just want them to go and enjoy their game.”

Skipper Virat Kohli, who led India to their maiden Test series victory in Australia two seasons ago, will return home after the Adelaide Test to attend the birth of his first child.

While it would take some sheen off India’s batting lineup in the last three tests, Shastri was confident India’s five-member pace attack,



Ravi Shastri, India coach

which includes Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, could defend decent totals.

“We have a fabulous five ... You put up runs on the board and watch these fast bowlers hunt the

opposition. They can beat Australia in their own den.”

There was no pressure on the team and India would play “fearless cricket” against an opponent Shastri considered the toughest. “Ask any

international player and he will tell you that it is different. It is challenging. Toughest used to be the West Indies in the ‘80s and post that it has been Australia.”

— Reuters

Eriksen set for Inter Milan exit as dream Italy move turns sour



MILAN: Christian Eriksen's dream move to Inter Milan looks over with the former Tottenham Hotspur playmaker requesting to leave the Italian giants after just 10 months.

The Danish international arrived on a four-and-a-half-year contract worth 20 million euros (\$23 million) plus 7.5 million euros in bonuses in January.

But during a year overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic, the 28-year-old has been unable to reproduce his form with Spurs, where he scored 69 goals and had 89 assists in 305 appearances, or recently with Denmark.

"It wasn't what I had dreamed of," admitted Erikson, who has fallen down the pecking order under coach Antonio Conte.

"People would like to see me play and I would like to do the same, but the coach has different ideas and I have to respect them."

The Dane has played seven times this season — four as a starter — with no assists or goals.

In total, he has scored four goals for Inter in 33 games.

"We must never hold back a player who asks to be transferred," club CEO Giuseppe Marotta said Sunday, confirming Eriksen's impending exit.

Conte insisted Eriksen "has had many opportunities and played more than others".

"My choices are always made for the good of Inter," said the former Chelsea coach.

"When I deem it appropriate he'll be able to play in the starting 11 or during the game."

One of the problems facing Eriksen has been that Inter have many options in central and attacking midfield.

Chilean Arturo Vidal arrived from Barcelona last summer, with Radja Nainggolan, Marcelo Brozovic, and Ivan Perisic also in the position.

Conte has insisted he will not change Dane's position to a more defensive one.

"Eriksen has an important role and style of play, both on the left and the right," said Conte.

"If you take that away and play him deeper in front of the defence you run the risk of distorting the player. It's a technical decision."

Eriksen has not featured in Inter's last two league games and also looks set to miss their Champions League Group B clash against Real Madrid at the San Siro on Wednesday.

The Italians are bottom of the group, and lost the away leg 3-2, despite coming from two goals down to equalise before Real snatched victory. — AFP

MUELLER FOCUSES ON BAYERN DESPITE CALLS FOR GERMANY RECALL

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller admitted he watched Germany's humiliating loss to Spain with horror, but insists his focus remains on European champions Bayern Munich despite demands the playmaker be recalled to the national side.

At 31, Mueller proved he is in his prime with a Bundesliga record 21 assists last season, serving as the perfect foil to Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski.

The pair will be hunting more goals at home to Red Bull Salzburg on Wednesday as Bayern chase their 15th straight win in Europe and a fourth victory from four games in Group A.

Mueller created two goals and Lewandowski netted twice in a 6-2 win at Salzburg earlier this month.

Yet in the wake of Germany's record 6-0 defeat by Spain last week, pundits and former players insist Mueller can provide the impulse the national team is lacking.

With five Bayern teammates in the Germany side routed in Seville, Mueller admitted the debacle made painful viewing.

"Of course, you suffer along with your fellow players in the club and former national team colleagues as much as the fans," he said after Saturday's 1-1 draw against Werder Bremen.

"German football fans long for things to go well again.

"At the moment there is a lot of negativity around the topic, it hurts, but my main focus is on the club."

In March 2019, Germany coach Joachim Loew told Mueller and fellow 2014 World Cup winners Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng that their international careers were over.

Now, Bastian Schweinsteiger is leading the calls for his former Bayern team-mates to be reinstated before the European Championship starts next June.

"Such players like Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller have won the treble with the best team in Europe," said Schweinsteiger.

"They are the first choice, have the quality and are German players - why are they not in the national

team?"

As Mueller points out, "none of us (him, Hummels and Boateng) have retired" from Germany duty, "but after a 6-0 defeat like that, we should be talking about other things."

ONE-CLUB CAREER

For now, Mueller is letting his performances this season do the talking with eight assists and six goals in Bayern's 14 games.

Germany's loss is Bayern's gain, as far as coach Hansi Flick is concerned.

"He's got a very good sense of the game tactically and is very important on the pitch - he's the coach's right-hand man," Flick said.

"He leads the team and plays at a very high level. Thomas is a player that would do any team good."

When Flick replaced Niko Kovac in November 2019, he immediately reinstated Mueller from the bench to the starting line-up. — AFP



Of course, you suffer along with your fellow players in the club and former national team colleagues as much as the fans. German football fans long for things to go well again.

THOMAS MUELLER

Germany



Victories for Landmark, Aflag, Y Horizon and TCM

MUSCAT: Mohammed Farzan's match-winning 79 not out and Asanka Deepal's 4 for 32 were instrumental in helping Landmark Group to a huge 9-wicket victory against Danmark in an E Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality 4 in Amerat on Friday.

Syamlal Sasidharan's fluent 55 was the highlight of Danmark's total of 179 all out in 19 overs. Asanka was the pick of Landmark bowlers, followed by equally impressive Ajay Kumar who claimed 3 for 25.

Farzan's brilliant batting made sure Landmark Group secured victory with considerable ease, reaching 175 for 1 in 17.1 overs. Opener Kydesi Krishna remained unbeaten at 49.

Brief Scores (E Division): Danmark 170 for 10 in 19 overs (Syamlal Sasidharan 55 - 9x4, 2x6, Sajeev Kathiresan 25 - 3x4, Asanka Deepal 4-32, Ajay Kumar 3-25, Hemant Magar 2-34) lost to Landmark Group 175 for 1 in 17.1 overs (Mohammed Farzan 79 - 9x4, 1x6, Krishna Kydesi 49 - 5x4) by 9 wickets.

In another E Division game, Aflag Group registered its second successive win in two games, beating Ghantoot Group by 4 wickets in a lowing scoring contest at Muscat Municipality ground 3.



Ghantoot could only manage a lowly 124 for 7 that saw major contributions from Maharaja Revathi (32) and Tejesh Shetty (26). Aflag found itself on a bumpy road and struggling at 48 for 4 in 10 overs but finally made it in the

19th over, scoring 127 for 6 thanks to valuable knocks by Haris Alam (37) and Thiyagu Subramanian (27). Saravanan Manickam bagged 3 for 19. Brief Scores (E Division): Ghantoot Group 124 for 7 in 20 overs (Maharaja Revathi 32 - 3x4, Tejesh Shetty 26 - 2x4, Abbas Shah 2-12)

lost to Aflag Group CT 127 for 6 in 18.1 overs (Haris Alam 37 - 4x4, Thiyagu Subramanian 27 - 2x4, 1x6, Manickam Saravanan 3-19) 4 wickets. Rudhi ton lifts Y Horizon to victory A magnificent 112 off 66 by Rasheed Rudhi powered Y Horizon to

a thumping 66-run win over Muscat Young Stars in an F Division game at OAC 3 ground in Seeb. Rudhi's strokeful essay helped Y Horizon to a commanding 197 for 7 in 20 overs. Arjun Mandalia claimed 3 for 24. Stars failed to shine, collecting only

131 for 7 in 20 overs that saw main scores from Rajeev Tejas (50) and Devansh Sampat (31). Prashant Rana and Zubair Ali bowled exceptionally well, taking three and two wickets respectively.

Brief Scores (F Division): Y Horizon 197 for 7 in 20 overs (Rasheed Rudhi 112 - 13x4, 1x6, Arjun Mandalia 3-24, Prathiesh Ramesh 2-30) beat Muscat Young Stars 131 for 7 in 20 overs (Rajeev Tejas 50 - 8x4, Devansh Sampat 31 - 4x4, Prashant Rana 3-32, Zubair Ali 2-9) by 66 runs. Arjan takes TCM to victory In another F Division match, Arjan Halai's vital contributions with bat and ball steered Team Coorg Muscat (TCM) to an exciting 7-wicket victory against Mazoon Dairy Company at OAC 3.

Brief Scores (F Division): Mazoon Dairy 143 for 7 in 20 overs (Shuhaib 58 - 9x4, Arjan Halai 2-29) lost to Team Coorg Muscat (TCM) 144 for 3 in 19.3 overs (Milind Bhujwala 31 - 3x4, Arjan Halai 30 - 5x4, Mayoora Krishnakutty 2-19) by 7 wickets. Shuhaib top-scored with a superb 58 in Mazoon's total of 143 for 7. Arjan bowled well, taking 2 for 29. TCM went about its chase slowly but steadily, crossing the line in the final over at 144 for 3. Milind scored 31 while Arjan made a vital 30. Mayoora Krishnakutty claimed 2 for 19.



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola looks dejected.
— Reuters

CAN GUARDIOLA ARREST MAN CITY DECLINE?

ALBEIT WITH A GAME IN HAND, GUARDIOLA'S MEN ARE LANGUISHING IN 13TH IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE. A RETURN OF 12 POINTS FROM THEIR OPENING EIGHT GAMES OF THE CAMPAIGN IS THE LOWEST SINCE 2008/2009, JUST MONTHS AFTER AN ABU DHABI TAKEOVER STARTING POURING MILLIONS INTO THE CLUB

LONDON: Pep Guardiola has committed to Manchester City for the long-term but for the first time in his managerial career, results may determine the Catalan's future rather than his desire for a new challenge or break.

City's board showed how fully they remain committed to the Guardiola project by extending his contract to 2023 last week.

There is good reason for the club's faith. Guardiola is responsible for two of the three highest point tallies in Premier League history among six major trophies in his first four seasons in charge.

But a 2-0 defeat by Tottenham on Saturday that left City already eight points off the top of the table continued the malaise that has set in since the beginning of last season.

Albeit with a game in hand, Guardiola's men are languishing in 13th in the Premier League table. A return of 12 points from their opening eight games of the campaign is the lowest since 2008/2009, just months after an Abu Dhabi takeover starting pouring millions into the club.

City even have a negative goal difference after scoring just 10 times in the league, their lowest at this stage of the season since 2006/07 when they finished 14th under Stuart Pearce and failed to score a single goal at home after New Year's Day.

"The reality is we are struggling to score goals this season," admitted Guardiola. "10 goals in eight games is not good enough."

The Champions League has normally been the nadir of Guardiola's time in Manchester. In four seasons he has not even been able to match City's best run in the competition to the semi-finals under Manuel

Pellegrini in 2015/16.

So far this season, Europe has been a blessed relief as the English side have swept aside Porto, Marseille and Olympiakos, scoring three goals in each game to take a firm grip on Group B.

SAME MISTAKES

Another victory away to Olympiakos on Wednesday will guarantee qualification for the last 16 for the eighth successive season.

But City have shown little this term to suggest they have learned from the mistakes that have repeatedly cost them in the knockout stages of the Champions League once the level of opposition improves.

The manner of defeat against Spurs was almost an exact replica of the 2-0 victory for Jose Mourinho's men when the sides last met in February.

Over the two matches at the Tottenham Hotspur stadium, the visitors had 41 attempts on goal without scoring, while Spurs netted with four of their five shots on target.

Lyon, Mauricio Pochettino's Tottenham, Liverpool and Monaco have also cracked the City code in the Champions League by defending deep and counter-attacking at speed.

Guardiola remains confident City will soon start scoring goals with the frequency they have become accustomed to.

"We have scored in two seasons more than 100 goals. Eighty or 90 per cent of the players are the same, especially up front," he added.

But it is without the ball the biggest questions remain. The intense press to get the ball back of the City sides that accumulated 198 Premier League points in two seasons between 2017 and 2019 has gone. — AFP