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OMAN BEACH SOCCER TEAM TO BEGIN CAMP ON NOV 15



P16

CORONAVIRUS BOOSTS CLOUD KITCHENS AS FOODIE ASIANS ORDER IN



P19

SOHAR ALUMINIUM TO SUPPORT TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AL BURAIMI GOVERNORATE



OMAN

Omanisation in public companies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour on Wednesday held a meeting with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and CEOs of government firms to discuss plans for the replacement of expatriates with Omani manpower and a programme to Omanise leadership and supervisory posts in the companies. The meeting also reviewed ways to enhance cooperation between the ministry and the firms towards augmenting productivity. Besides replacing expats, it was proposed to focus on the employment of Omanis with specialist or technical qualifications in a manner that ensures the accomplishment of Oman Vision 2040 goals. The meeting was chaired by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, who laid emphasis on on-the-job training. **DETAILS ON P2**

WORLD

Air pollution killed 500,000 newborns

WASHINGTON: Air pollution killed 476,000 newborns in 2019, with the biggest hotspots in India and Sub-Saharan Africa, according to a new global study which said that nearly two-thirds of the deaths came from noxious fumes from cooking fuels. More than 116,000 Indian infants died from air pollution in the first month of life, and the corresponding figure was 236,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the State of Global Air 2020.

INSIDE



UN LIBYA ENVOY 'OPTIMISTIC' ON CEASEFIRE PROSPECTS

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BOLIVIA VOTE SUGGESTS PAN-DEMIC MAY FUEL POPULISM

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WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 22°C

SALALAH
MAX: 31°C
MIN: 25°C

NIZWA
MAX: 36°C
MIN: 18°C

SUNRISE 06.07 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:52

DHUHR: 11:56

ASR: 15:14

MAGHRIB: 17:40

ISHA: 19:51



NIGHT LOCKDOWN TO BE LIFTED ON SATURDAY

Supreme Committee confirms start of school year on November 1

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic held a meeting on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, to follow up updates on the pandemic and measures of prevention of infection and spread of the virus.

The committee studied the number of cases of infection and deaths resulting from the pandemic and other epidemiological data from different governorates of the Sultanate.



The Supreme Committee expressed extreme anxiety over the behaviour of some individuals who still participate in gatherings and causing the spread of the virus. It urged all individuals

and establishments to exercise maximum caution and implement precautionary measures aimed at curbing the rise in infections and deaths.

The committee reiterated its

plea to citizens and residents to shoulder the responsibility of protecting human life by reporting offenders to the authorities concerned.

Within the context of its follow-

up of the Education Ministry's efforts to operate schools during the forthcoming school year 2020-2021, the Supreme Committee affirmed that the school year will begin on November 1, 2020. It also endorsed the 'Blended Learning' system of education, with emphasis on combining online study.

The Supreme Committee reaffirmed that it will continue to monitor the situation through the Ministry of Education and other departments concerned to ensure a sustained educational experience, along with reports on epidemiological data from different governorates of the Sultanate.

TURN TO P2

Oman backs efforts to curb N-weapons

NEW YORK: The Sultanate reaffirmed its stand towards the importance of commitment to the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law based on respecting the sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, establishing good neighbourhood relations and cooperation, exchange of interests and peaceful settlement of differences.

The Sultanate called on the significance of commitment to those noble principles which consider the interests of all parties without any exception to make the world a safer and more stable place within the framework of mutual confidence and joint cooperation for establishing a new prosperous and stable phase for the whole humanity.

This was stated by Counsellor Ahmed bin Dawood al

The Sultanate supports establishing a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and urges the countries to join Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

AHMED BIN DAWOOD AL ZADJALI

Zadjali, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate to the United Nations, who delivered the Sultanate's speech before the first committee at the 75th United Nations General Assembly.

TURN TO P2

OMAN SAIL TO HOST WORLD'S BEST SAILORS



Oman Sail will host a 400-strong fleet of the world's best sailors when the World Championships for three Olympic classes kick-off in November 2021. Taking place in Asia for the first time in its history, sailors in the 49er, 49erFX, and Nacra 17 class will kick-start their path to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games during the six-day event.

DETAILS ON P10



PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE
BEGIN YOUR OWN TRADITION



YOU NEVER ACTUALLY OWN A PATEK PHILIPPE.
YOU MERELY LOOK AFTER IT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

ANNUAL CALENDAR CHRONOGRAPH REF. 5905R

Patek Philippe Boutique
at
القرم
Al-Qurum
MUSCAT - 22009991



Plan to speed up Omanisation in government companies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour held a meeting with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and CEOs of government firms on Wednesday to discuss plans for the replacement of expatriates with Omanis and a programme to Omanise leadership and supervisory posts in the companies.

The meeting also reviewed ways to enhance cooperation between the ministry and the firms towards augmenting productivity. Besides replacing expats, it was proposed to focus on the employment of Omanis with specialist or technical qualifications in a manner that ensures the accomplishment of Oman Vision 2040 goals.



Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, who gave a speech in which he laid emphasis on on-the-job training. He invited all to benefit from the services offered by the labour ministry in this regard.

Dr Mahad spoke about his ministry's initiative about how to remove obstacles, offer incentives and streamline procedures to enable

The Ministry of Labour held a meeting with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and CEOs of government firms on Wednesday to discuss plans for the replacement of expatriates with Omanis and a programme to Omanise leadership and supervisory posts in the companies

government companies to provide new jobs for Omanis, directly or indirectly through sub-hiring in other firms.

A presentation of data about numbers of national and foreign workers, as well as job seekers, was shown.

Government firms' officials attending the meeting expressed their

preparedness to execute plans for the replacement of expatriates and provide jobs for national manpower. Difficulties and challenges facing the private sector were also discussed during the meeting.

It was agreed to find suitable solutions that are more flexible and streamlined to overcome the challenges. — ONA

Digital strategy to spur growth hailed

CAIRO: The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) commended the Sultanate's espousal of a digital strategy that lays the foundation of novel programmes to spur economic growth, enhance self-reliance and provide more jobs through economic diversification.

In a new study titled "Digital Economy In Arab Countries.. Its Realities and Challenges", the AMF noted that Oman's economic strategy began to be developed since 2003. Since then, economic approaches have been classified into six categories towards the execution of a comprehensive Oman Economic Vision encompassing initiatives and projects necessary for supporting the realisation of the country's knowledge-based economy, said the AMF report.

It explained that digital transformation strategy in the Sultanate focused on developing society's capabilities, including individuals' skills, and circulating government applications and smart services to help establish a comprehensive system of ICT industries.

The strategy also lays emphasis on governance, developing standards, policies and a whole new generation of digital applications, in addition to

spreading cognitive awareness.

The report showed that the Sultanate enacts laws serving digital economy like the Electronic Transactions Law (2008), Law on Combating Information Technology Crimes (2009) and Law on Regulating Communications (2002).

As many as 21 national firms operate in the field of digital economy, in addition to 10 foreign firms and 6 multinational firms, said the report, adding that the Sultanate has 17 platforms and applications that offer services to different segments and finalise other civil transactions. The report pointed out that the Sultanate's digital transformation programme began in October 2012 with the approval of the Council of Ministers.

It added that various seminars and workshops were held to outline the digital transformation programme.

This is in addition to the formation of teams for e-government transformation and institutional change within each establishment, under the supervision of the Minister or the Under-Secretary, to follow up the process of digital transformation in their respective institutions, said the report. — ONA

■ FROM PAGE 1

Sultanate backs efforts to curb nuclear weapons

Al Zadjali confirmed the Sultanate's support to establishing a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, urging the countries that have not yet joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to sign the treaty without delay or conditions and to put their nuclear installations under the comprehensive monitoring system overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Al Zadjali added that among the constructive initiatives that aim at spreading peace and stability is the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction,

pointing to the Sultanate's welcome of the resolution issued in 1995 by the Review Conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons regarding creating a Middle East free zone of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

The Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate to the United Nations added that the Sultanate calls upon all countries particularly the nuclear nations for active and positive participation so as to translate the resolution into reality in order to boost confidence and coexistence among the countries and peoples.

Al Zadjali pointed to the Sultanate's



welcome of the first conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction which was held at the UN headquarters in November under the presidency of

the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He added that the Sultanate gives its full support to the second session to be held in 2021 under the presidency of Kuwait.

Al Zadjali explained that the Sultanate attaches a great importance to cybersecurity and protecting the vital establishments against cyberattacks adding that the Sultanate calls for more international cooperation and exchange of information in this field. He pointed out that the Sultanate has achieved high status at the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) ranking 16th globally out of 175 countries.

— ONA

■ FROM PAGE 1

Night lockdown to be lifted on Saturday

In response to requests to ensure the participation of individuals in national efforts to combat coronavirus pandemic, the Supreme Committee has approved the initiative of volunteering across different segments of society. The authorities concerned will announce mechanisms regulating this practice,

said the Supreme Committee in its report issued on Wednesday.

As for as the ban on nighttime movement, the Supreme Committee said that the ban will be lifted on Saturday (October 24).

In its report, the committee prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect everyone against all harm. — ONA

Business incubators empower women

MUSCAT: The National Business Centre (NBC) which works under Madayn (Public Establishment for Industrial Estates) organised a virtual discussion session entitled 'Empowering Women through Business Incubators'.

Organised in cooperation with the Public Authority for SMEs Development (Riyada), the session featured Omani women entrepreneurs including Rayan al Kalbaniyah, co-founder of Mazoon Environmental and Technological Services, Shaima al Lawatiyah, founder and managing director of destination sustainability, and Maryam al Amriyah, founder and executive director of Youth Vision.

The speakers highlighted several aspects of importance to current and potential women entrepreneurs



including the role played by business incubators in empowering them to be successful entrepreneurs, the challenges they face in their projects and how to overcome them, the challenges they are currently facing due to coronavirus pandemic, and tips on becoming successful female entrepreneurs.

The discussion session's topic, which was moderated by Fathiya al

Hakmaniya of the Public Authority for SMEs Development (Riyada), comes in line with the objectives of the National Business Centre which was launched by Madayn to offer promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

NBC aims at facilitating, supporting and contributing to the growth of investable ideas into successful businesses; building entrepreneurial skills through dedicated and focused training, coaching and mentoring; and providing business support facilities from office space, administrative support, financial support and consultancy services that are crucial in ensuring the success and survival of new ventures. — ONA



بنك التنمية العماني
Oman Development Bank

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development. The Bank provides facilities for micro, SMEs and corporates.

Oman Development Bank SAOC (ODB) seeks tenders for the following services from reputed consultant firm which specialized in financial and administrative consulting for the following scope of work:

Tender No.	Description of service	Tender fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date for Submission of Tender
03/2020	Consulting services in preparing a study of ODB development impact	RO 50 Non-Refundable	29/10/2020	12/11/2020

◆ Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (**PMO Section**) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry on any working day (**Sunday to Thursday**) between 8 AM and 2 PM on payment of non-refundable tender fee.

◆ The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to **Development Impact Study project team, Oman Development Bank SAOC**, should be submitted to the PMO Section at Ground Floor by 2:00 PM on or before 12/11/2020

◆ Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee's decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

3077, PC 122, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman 24726/983 m.yafai@odb.om www.odb.om

451 new COVID-19 cases, 15 deaths

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

The Sultanate reported 451 new coronavirus cases and 15 deaths on Wednesday. The total cases in the country have now touched 111,484 including 97,367 recoveries and 1,137 deaths, according to the Ministry of Health.

In the past 24 hours, 418 recoveries were reported. The ministry also pointed out that 47 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours. The total number of admitted COVID-19-infected patients has come down from 500 to 480, of them 198 are in intensive care.



Breastfeeding protects infants from infections

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

The Royal Hospital inaugurated recently a breastfeeding clinic to support mothers suffering from breastfeeding difficulties.

Najla al Battashi, breastfeeding specialist at the Royal Hospital, said the inauguration of this clinic came from the perspective that the Royal Hospital is a child-friendly hospital. She added that the clinic supports mothers after recovering from COVID-19 to ensure that the mother continues breastfeeding as it is the only optimal food for the newborn. It will enhance the child's immune system and reduce the possibility of infection from several chronic diseases.

Furthermore, the goal of the inauguration of this clinic is raising mothers' awareness of adverse health effects resulting from lack of breastfeeding, as well as encouraging and supporting mothers in this regard.

Najat al Ajmi, breastfeeding consultant at the Royal Hospital, pointed out that the Clinic's team is overseeing training the mothers who



admitted in maternity wards on the ideal way of breastfeeding and encouraging mothers towards breastfeeding. She highlighted the role of the clinic in raising community awareness through

organising periodical educational activities, distributing leaflets and responding to the mother's queries in this regard whether by phone or social media channels.

Translation holds key to cultural exchange

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

An online symposium on translation was organised by the Al Musanah Cultural Network on Monday to mark the International Day of Translation, which falls on September 30 every year.

"From The House of Wisdom to Artificial Intelligence, the Travel of Cultures and Bringing Nations Together," discussed the importance of translation and its effective role in transmitting and exchanging knowledge between peoples and nations.

The symposium was attended by a group of specialists and researchers in translation from across the world. They included Yahya al Sheikh, professor of Arabic literature; George Grigore,

an orientalist and professor of translation and Arabic literature at the University of Bucharest, Romania; Haytham al Nahi, Director-General of the Arab Organization for Translation; May Ashour specialist in translation from the Chinese and Turkish language translation; and Dr. Issa Hammadi, professor of Arabic and Persian literature and translation.

And from the Sultanate the participants were Hamad al Ghaithi, the winner of the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts and Literature, in translation; and the translator Ohoud al Mukhaini. This symposium was moderated by Dr Samah Hamdy, Professor of Civilization, Arabic Literature and Translation at the Higher Institute of Languages, Nabeul, Carthage University, Tunis.

In the first session of the symposium, Hamad al Ghaithi, Ohoud al Mukhaini, Haitham al Nahi and George Grigore discussed the importance of translation and its role in intercultural interaction and bringing nations together.

The second session discussed translation between Arabic and Persian, the role of translation in the dialogue of civilisations, the role of French publishing houses in introducing Arab culture through translation and Arab-Chinese cultural relations through translation.

The Al Musanah Cultural Network is keen to spread knowledge and building a generation that is aware of culture. The symposium is part of a series of upcoming seminars and cultural events.

SUHAR TO GET FOUR SOCIAL CENTRES

SUHAR: OQ Company, the Social Development Committee at Suhar Wali's Office and Jusoor Foundation on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) to manage the establishment of OQ's social centres. This MoC will determine the cooperation areas between the three parties with regard to running these four social centres.

According to Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Refineries and Petrochemicals

at OQ, each of the four centres will include a multi-purpose hall, theatre, seminar rooms, administrative and support facilities.

"The OQ Company is keen on providing integrated amenities that serve the community individuals across all segments. These centres can be utilised for hosting various cultural and social events, conducting awareness activities, workshops, and capacity-building programs to empower community members in various fields and they can help enhance community

awareness, improve services and instil an environment of cooperation among the local community," Dr Al Hinai said.

The MoC was signed by Sheikh Badr bin Nasser al Farsi, Deputy Wali of Suhar, on behalf of the Social Development Committee, Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Advisor to CEO of the Refineries and Petrochemicals at OQ and Ahmed bin Ibrahim al-Naqbi, Acting Executive Manager of Jusoor Foundation.

— ONA

NINE ARRESTED FOR THEFT, VANDALISM

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) called on all citizens and residents not to leave valuables or money inside the parked cars as chances of theft are high.

"Do not leave your valuables or cash inside the parked car as it's not safe to keep them in vehicles outside your homes," a senior spokesperson from the ROP has said.

The General Department of Investigations and Criminal Investigations arrested 9 persons on charges of vandalism, theft and other related crimes from several vehicles, homes, and farms in Qurayat on Wednesday. Two were arrested for

stealing vehicles, while one of them caused a traffic accident with the stolen vehicle and made a futile attempt to flee from the scene of the accident.

"Committing crimes of vandalism is a crime as chargeable as theft is and they will also be charged with causing damage to public sanity."

Vandalism in Oman is a punishable offence. Setting fire, cutting trees without permission, damaging another's property or vehicles and spraying paint on others' properties are considered acts of vandalism. Perpetrators of these crimes will be punished with fines, jail and or deportation, in case the culprit is an expatriate, according to the ROP.

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#Living_with_COVID19



ART TAKES ON MIGHTY VIRUS

UNESCO SELECTS OMANI ARTIST MASK DESIGN FOR COVID-19 AWARENESS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

For Alia al Farsiya, people are the main subject of her abstract art. Her paintings communicate the links of human thoughts and feeling deeply etched in cultural settings. And her canvas can be anything from wide canvases to chairs, to poles.

And it was only natural the theme she chose to use on the facial mask in the international event of Unesco’s campaign – an initiative by MEADOWS – Mediterranean Endeavours Advancing Development of Widespread Sustainability, which saw 250 designs from 120 countries, also had faces. Unesco included Alia’s design for the mask, and the message Alia had was about staying home, being close to and being surrounded by loved ones.

“COVID-19 is very serious and everyone should be aware of it. This is the theme behind this painting. If you are safe, then your family is safe, which means your society is safe. We need to



COVID-19 is very serious and everyone should be aware of it. This is the theme behind this painting. If you are safe, then your family is safe, which means your society is safe. We need to take COVID-19 very seriously

ALIA AL FARSIYAH



take COVID-19 very seriously,” said Al Farsi.

The pandemic period has also inspired her to paint with this particular theme reflecting what everyone is going through.

The international artist feels art is not an end. This is how she described art, “ Art has means of achieving internal peace and also to serve noble causes externally and hence I want my art to serve humanity and not just myself. It has the global appeal for beauty and ability to provide a silent yet poignant

medium for expression and dialogue.”

Alia has been active in the arena of art for over 20 years and hosted several exhibitions in Oman. Her interest in art started at a young age and was mainly in literal paintings. With time her interest in abstract and figurative styles grew and now this is where she finds her expressions. There are always people standing or sitting and there is nature and their surroundings that are featured to convey her story and often features her family members, friends and people whom she observes.

Accordingly, her latest painting reflects on the lifestyle during COVID-19 and how much we now appreciate the company of family and not to forget mobile use and being online.

She has enjoyed international experience with exhibitions in Japan, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Korea, UAE, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, Sweden, China, Germany, Kuwait, Iran, Qatar, Egypt and Syria amongst other countries.



Czech Republic imposes partial lockdown to fight virus



An employee of Czech hospital beds maker Linet moves a bed to be used in the COVID-19 field hospital at Letnany in the Linet factory in the village of Zelevecice, 30 km south-east of Prague. — AFP

PRAGUE: The Czech government said on Wednesday it would curb movement and close shops and services to battle a huge spike in COVID-19 cases.

The country of 10.7 million people has recently fared the worst in the EU in terms of holding back the disease, according to the latest ranking by European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC).

Data updated on Tuesday showed the Czech Republic had by far the most new cases and deaths per 100,000 inhabitants over the past two weeks in the EU.

“The government will... curb movement and contacts with other people... with the exception of trips to work, shopping and trips to the doctor,” Health Minister Roman Prymula, an epidemiologist by profession, tweeted.

He said the government would also close all retail outlets except food shops, drugstores and pharmacies from Thursday morning until November 3.

“The growth is huge and the measures we have taken so far have failed to flatten the growth curve,” Prime Minister Andrej Babis told reporters.

To battle the second wave, the Czech government has

already ordered people to wear face masks in most places and closed schools, restaurants, bars, cinemas, theatres, museums and swimming pools across the country.

He added the country was running out of hospital capacity and that it had asked for help abroad.

“We will have about 28 American doctors coming over,” Babis said.

The government has also ordered almost 2,000 hospital beds, some of which will be used in a field hospital on the outskirts of Prague, currently under construction.

Prymula said that if the measures adopted on Wednesday work, the spike should stop within two or three weeks.

As of Wednesday, the country had registered almost 194,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 1,600 deaths.

The number of new cases reported on Tuesday — 11,984 — was a new record.

Prymula said the share of positive cases in tests was 30 per cent, which he called “an immense burden within the population”.

“In some regions, we have already seen up to 500 per cent growth in the number of infected senior citizens,” he added. — AFP

UK PM says London transport has been ‘bankrupted’

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the mayor of London Sadiq Khan had bankrupted the capital’s transport system, as the government looked to force Khan to sell off land and cut running costs as part of a fractious financial COVID-19 bailout.

Khan, from the opposition Labour Party, has called for a £5.7 billion (\$7.4 billion) package for Transport for London (TfL) after commuters deserted public trains and buses during the pandemic.

Khan says in return the government is insisting on higher fares and a raft of other revenue raising mechanisms such as increasing the size of the congestion zone which requires drivers to pay a fee to drive in the city.

“The current mayor of London had effectively bankrupted TfL before coronavirus had even hit,” Johnson, who himself served as mayor of London from 2008 to 2016, told parliament.

“Any expansion of the congestion charge, or any other measure taken to improve the finances of TfL are entirely the responsibility of the



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves number 10 Downing Street in central London to take part in the Prime Minister Question (PMQs) session in the House of Commons. — AFP

bankrupt current mayor of London,” he said, adding that TfL had been left in “robust health” in 2016.

A spokesman for the mayor did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Coronavirus lockdowns have led

to a dramatic fall in the number of journeys across London. London’s population overtook its 1939 record of 8.6 million in 2015 and, under pre-pandemic forecasts, was forecast to top 10 million by around 2030. Johnson’s government is locked in

Mayor Khan seeks

£5.7 billion pound bailout

negotiations with several city mayors over how businesses should be compensated when they are forced to close during lockdowns and how public services can continue.

Khan, who had frozen the cost of single fares, said in an earlier statement that the government’s proposals would deter Londoners from travelling, further damaging any recovery.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said it had “to resolve the fact that the mayor has bankrupted TfL and the Greater London Authority.”

“We’ve already given multiple billions of pounds to him over the last few years to bail him out,” he said. “How do we take this forwards. Well, I’m afraid it can’t keep falling back to the taxpayers of the whole of the United Kingdom.” — Reuters

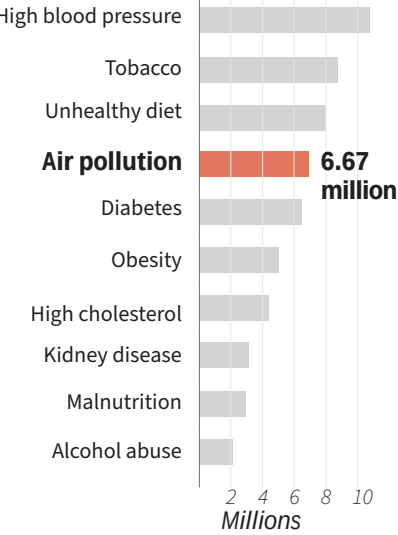
Air pollution killed 500k newborns in 2019

Deadly air pollution

Killed 476,000 newborns in 2019 according to a new study

Fourth biggest killer

Global risk factors by total number of deaths, 2019



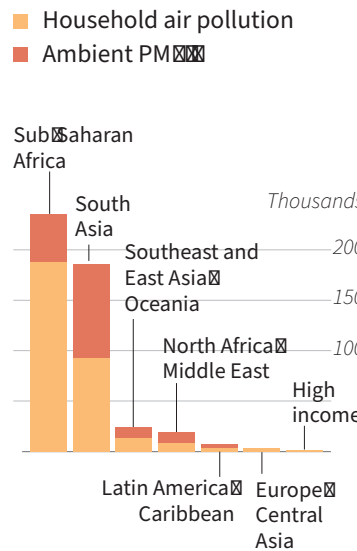
Source : *State of Global Air 2020

percentage of those deaths came from ambient and household air pollution.

“An infant’s health is critical to the future of every society, and this newest

Uneven spread of infant deaths

First-month baby deaths by region, attributed to:



evidence suggests an especially high risk for infants born in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,” said Dan Greenbaum, President of HEI.

“Although there has been slow and

Uneven exposure

Average concentration of ambient PM2.5 per person

	µg/m³
India	83.2
Nepal	83.1
Niger	80.1
Qatar	76.0
Nigeria	70.4
Egypt	67.9
Mauritania	66.8
Cameroon	64.5
Bangladesh	63.4
Pakistan	62.6

AFP

steady reduction in household reliance on poor-quality fuels, the air pollution from these fuels continues to be a key factor in the deaths of these youngest infants,” he added. — AFP

Fate of Canada PM Trudeau at stake amid standoff with oppn

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government could be toppled on Wednesday by opposition parties demanding an ethics probe into whether Ottawa handed contracts to friends as it battled the coronavirus pandemic.

Legislators will hold a confidence vote in the minority Liberal administration at around 3:15 pm, and Trudeau’s survival is not guaranteed.

Trudeau only won a minority of seats in the House of Commons in an October 2019 election and will need the support of the minority New Democrats to survive. The two parties are in talks on a possible deal to allow the Liberals to stay in power. “No developments. Trudeau really wants this election,” said George Soule, a spokesman for the New Democrats, early on Wednesday.

Party leader Jagmeet Singh, who said on Tuesday he did not want an election, is due to speak to reporters



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

at 1 pm ET. More than 70 per cent of Canadians say they do not want a snap election during the pandemic, according an EKOS Research poll.

The last general election was held exactly one year ago.

In polls, Canadians have given

Trudeau’s Liberals mostly good marks for handling COVID-19, but the country has entered a second wave and the economic outlook is clouded. Liberals would win 35% public support and the Conservatives 31 per cent if a vote were held today,

a result which could produce another minority Liberal government, said Frank Graves, president of polling company EKOS Research.

“Canadians have too many other things on their mind and too many things they think the government should be focusing on,” Graves said by phone. Wednesday’s vote could be close. The Liberals have 154 of the 338 seats in the House of Commons compared to the 153 seats held by the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois, who have both said they will oppose Trudeau.

The New Democrats say they will not vote against the Liberals. If they side with the government, Trudeau is safe but if they abstain, his fate could be determined by the Greens — who have three seats — and two independent legislators.

“The Conservatives must know that they cannot paralyze a government that is totally concentrated on people’s wellbeing,” — Reuters

Russia not planning lockdowns despite record high virus deaths

MOSCOW: Russia is not planning to impose any further lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kremlin said on Wednesday, after it notched up a record daily death toll of 317.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said no harsh restrictions were required to contain the virus, saying safety precautions, hygiene and certain curbs imposed by local authorities were key.

He said Russia was now better-equipped to respond to the pandemic. “The work that has been done has already yielded results,” Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

“The health system is ready to sustain the pressure caused by the pandemic.” Russia’s health watchdog said it was investigating after local media outlet 161ru reported that several people in a hospital in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don had died when their oxygen supply ran out.

A city official denied the report. Peskov called the report alarming.

Separately, a video clip posted on social media showed at least two dozen bodies in black bags on beds or lying on the floor in the basement corridor of a Siberian hospital for COVID-19 patients.

The Altai region’s health ministry confirmed the authenticity of the video and said the bodies had built up because doctors have to conduct post-mortems on all COVID-19 victims and were unable to keep up despite working overtime.

Russia recorded 15,700 new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, while a daily record high of 317 deaths pushed the total number of fatalities since the start of the pandemic to 24,952.

With 1,447,335 infections in total, the country of around 145 million has the world’s fourth largest caseload after the United States, India and Brazil. — Reuters



UN envoy ‘optimistic’ on ceasefire talks in Libya



Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Political Affairs in Libya Stephanie Williams attends a press conference on talks between the rival factions in the Libya conflict at the United Nations office in Geneva. – AFP

GENEVA: The United Nations’ acting Libya envoy said on Wednesday she was “quite optimistic” that ongoing talks between the warring sides would lead to a lasting ceasefire, after they agreed to reopen land and air routes across front lines.

Speaking midway through week-long talks, Stephanie Williams said the sides had also agreed to maintain “the current state of calm on the front lines and avoid any military escalation”.

“That is why I continue to be very optimistic that the parties here are going to reach a more lasting and permanent ceasefire,” she told a news conference at the UN in Geneva.

The first flights between Tripoli and the main eastern city Benghazi would resume this week, and the sides had agreed to make progress on an exchange of detainees, Williams said.

Libya has been split since 2014 between

The first flights between Tripoli and Benghazi would resume this week, and the sides had agreed to make progress on an exchange of detainees

an internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) in the east. This year, the GNA, with backing from Turkey, halted a 14-month attempt by Haftar’s forces to capture the capital with the backing of Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

This week’s meeting between GNA and LNA military negotiators in Geneva will be followed by a political dialogue in Tunis from November 9, Williams said.

Foreign countries involved in the conflict

“need to take their hands off of Libya”, Williams said. Both sides have previously agreed that after a lasting ceasefire agreement is reached, all foreign forces and mercenaries must withdraw within three months, under UN supervision, she added.

Libyan oil output resumed in August after an eight-month blockade by the LNA, but the state producer, the National Oil Corporation (NOC), has warned of risks posed by a force that guards oil sites.

Williams said the sides had agreed to delegate commanders from both east and west to work with the NOC on a proposal to restructure the guards to keep oil flowing.

An announcement by GNA Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj that he intends to step down by the end of this month “should help end the long period of transition” and move towards a democratically elected government, she said.

— Reuters

Sudan closes Khartoum roads amid calls for protests

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces closed off major thoroughfares in the heart of the capital before dawn on Wednesday following online calls for renewed protests against a worsening economic crisis.

Police manned roadblocks on the main bridges across the Nile as well as on roads leading to army headquarters, the site of a long-running protest camp during the unrest that led to the ouster of longtime president Omar al Bashir in April 2019.

Vehicles carrying armed soldiers deployed across the city, a correspondent reported.

“We apologise to the people of Khartoum State for the impact of closing the city’s bridges as a precaution, from midnight on Tuesday until Wednesday evening,” the state government said.

The Sudanese Professionals Association, a trade union alliance that spearheaded the protests against Bashir, has called for fresh demonstrations against economic conditions that have continued to deteriorate since his overthrow.

“Transitional authorities have completed more than a year (in power), and the crises are frighteningly increasing by the day,” the SPA said in a Tuesday statement.

“Living hardship is no longer bearable, and people spend their days gasping after basic needs of bread and fuel,” it added, describing the government’s performance as “turbulent and weak.”

Sudan has embarked on a rocky three-year transition during which civilian politicians have agreed to share power with the generals who removed Bashir in a palace coup.

A chronic shortage of hard currency has led to long queues for staple foods and fuel, and power cuts lasting up to six hours a day.

The inflation rate hit 212 per cent last month, further sapping the purchasing power of ordinary Sudanese.

The transitional authorities have been pushing to end the country’s isolation and lift decades-long US sanctions that have strangled the economy.

On Monday, President Donald Trump declared his readiness to remove Sudan from a US blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism,



The ICC’s prosecutor Fatou Bensouda at press conference in Khartoum at the conclusion of her five-day visit to the country. – AFP

a move Sudanese officials hailed as a vital step towards securing debt relief and spurring economic recovery.

Meanwhile, ousted Sudanese president Omar al Bashir and other suspects wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes and genocide in Darfur must face justice without further delay, the court’s chief prosecutor said on Tuesday.

Options for prosecuting them, including a trial in Sudan and a hybrid tribunal, were being discussed with Sudanese authorities, prosecutor Fatou Bensouda told reporters during a visit to Khartoum.

“We are seeing what is possible,” Bensouda said. “They must all face justice without further delay.” The ICC has outstanding arrest warrants against Bashir on charges of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, as well as against three other Sudanese suspects. A fifth Sudanese suspect surrendered earlier this year. — AFP

As oil prices dive, Iraqi Kurds seek to diversify economy

MAM ROSTAM: Iraq’s Kurdish region has for decades lived off its oil wealth, but plummeting energy prices amid the pandemic and financial mismanagement are forcing locals to return to long abandoned farms.

Civil servants from the northern region’s bloated public sector have gone without pay and many are now turning back to agriculture and other businesses to make ends meet.

On a rugged hillside some 50 kilometres east of Arbil, the booming regional capital, vineyards are ripe for harvesting as a new source of income.

Abdallah Hassan, 51, a civil servant from the nearby village of Mam Rostam, has returned to harvest the grapes, used to produce raisins and vine leaves, for the first time in almost

The Iraqi economy, one of the world’s most oil-dependent according to the World Bank, saw its GDP contract by about 10 per cent this year

20 years.

“There is hardly any work left for us and there are no salaries,” he said, complaining that the regional government now “only pays wages every couple of months”. “It’s better for farmers to tend to their fields than wait for the payday or for charity.”

Hassan recounted how before the 2003 US invasion that toppled Saddam



Mohammed Shukri, Chairman of the Kurdistan Board of Investment, speaks during an interview at his office in Arbil. – AFP

Hussein’s regime, the Kurdish region had survived on farming during years of painful sanctions.

Since then, in its drive to secure lucrative oil revenues, the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had mostly abandoned agriculture.

Big investments from multinational energy companies have transformed the region, and Arbil has become an urban hub with skyscrapers and luxury hotels. This year, however, the COVID-19 pandemic and tumbling oil prices have taken a heavy toll, worsened by budget disputes with the central government in Baghdad.

The Iraqi economy, one of the world’s most oil-dependent according to the World Bank, saw its GDP

contract by about 10 per cent this year.

Mohammed Shukri, Chairman of the Kurdistan Board of Investment, said putting all of the regional economy’s eggs into the energy basket had proven costly.

“We’re rich when the oil price is high, and we’re poor when the oil price is low,” he said. “I wouldn’t call this a healthy economy.”

Kurdish economist Bilal Saeed also argued the region’s leaders had made a strategic blunder by letting other sectors fall by the wayside.

“Instead of using that revenue to develop the agriculture, health and tourism sectors, the government of Kurdistan has focused mostly on developing its oil sector and ignored the rest,” he said. — AFP

TEL AVIV

Erekat connected to heart-lung machine

Prominent Palestinian leader Saeb Erekat, who is seriously ill after having been infected with the coronavirus, has been connected to a heart-lung machine, the Israeli hospital treating him said late on Tuesday night.

The Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem said the 65-year-old was connected to an ECMO (Extra corporeal Membrane Oxygenation) machine to support his lung function.

The machine oxygenates the blood, allowing the lungs to rest and avoid ventilator-associated lung injury, bearing in mind that Erekat had a lung transplant in 2017. The hospi-



tal said Erekat was “well-settled and stable.” “His care continues to be co-ordinated with lung transplant specialists in Israel and abroad to provide optimum care to this patient with complications of COVID-19 infection on the background of a previous lung transplant,” the statement added.

BEIRUT

Lebanon has ample medicine reserves: Minister

Lebanon’s health minister assured anxious residents the country has not run out of essential medicines and that there are enough reserves on hand to last until the end of the year.

“Lebanon has stockpiles of medicine that will last from two to three months,” Health Minister Hamad Hassan said after meeting on Tuesday with representatives of pharmaceutical importers and distributors.

Concerns grew after some Lebanese failed to find medicines for cancer, blood pressure, heart problems and flu in pharmacies across the country.

“In the past few days we could not find even pain killers, or medicine to lower fever, as well as Vitamin C,” said Hassan Timani, a Lebanese citizen standing near a pharmacy on Beirut’s main Hamra Street.

The minister called for “rationalising” the distribution of the available quantities in a way that will ensure needs are met until the end of the year. He added that efforts will be exerted to secure an additional amount sufficient for another three months. He also vowed that his ministry will continue “to scrutinise and control” the distributors.

BEIRUT

Assad cuts tax for low-income workers

Syria’s President Bashar al Assad moved on Wednesday to exempt more low-wage earners from income tax, his office said, as the economy buckles under the weight of US sanctions and nearly a decade of war.

The legislative decree, the first such amendment in years, widens the tranche of low-income workers exempt from tax to cover those earning 50,000 Syrian pounds (\$40) or less per month, up from 15,000 Syrian pounds.

It also amends other tax tranches to “reduce the tax burden on those with limited income,” the presiden-



cy said. Syrians have suffered from steep price hikes in recent months as the collapse of the currency drives up inflation and piles on hardship.

In brief

■ HANOI

**FLOODS KILL 111
IN CENTRAL
VIETNAM**

More than 100 people have died and 20 others are missing in central Vietnam following weeks of severe flooding and landslides, authorities said Wednesday, as the country braced for yet another storm this weekend.

About 178,000 homes have been submerged by floodwaters, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with rescuers mounting a desperate bid to get food and drinking water to those cut off. Roads, infrastructure and crops in the central region have also been devastated by the floods, the charity added, warning that hundreds of thousands would need housing and income support in the coming weeks.

■ MANILA

**PHILIPPINES'
PARLIAMENT APPROVES
\$92.5 BN BUDGET**

The Philippines' lower parliamentary house Friday approved the 2021 budget after a leadership row nearly derailed debates on the spending plan aimed at helping the economy recover from the coronavirus pandemic. The record 4.5 trillion pesos (\$92.5 billion) budget bill, approved by 257 lawmakers with six voting against, now passes to the senate for further hearings.

A joint congressional session will then finalise the spending programme before it is signed by President Rodrigo Duterte, who called a special session of parliament last week for budget hearings.

Allies of Duterte dominate both chambers of congress.

■ JALALABAD

**11 AFGHAN WOMEN
KILLED IN STAMPEDE
NEAR CONSULATE**

At least 11 women were killed Wednesday in a stampede at a stadium in eastern Afghanistan where thousands had gathered to apply for visas at a nearby Pakistan consulate.

Many people were trampled when they tried to exit the stadium in the city of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, leaving 10 others injured, provincial hospital spokesman Zaher Adel said.

"Unfortunately this morning tens of thousands of people had come to the football stadium which led to the tragic incident," provincial governor's spokesman Attallah Khogyani said.

The Pakistan consulate had resumed issuing visas last week after a seven month pause because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Thai royalists confront protesters

The arrivals come as anti-government protesters continue to defy a ban on gatherings after authorities declared a severe emergency situation in Bangkok

BANGKOK: Thailand received a group of tourists from China on Tuesday, its first such arrivals since commercial flights were banned in April to combat the coronavirus pandemic, the visitors seemingly undeterred by escalating street demonstrations in Bangkok.

Thirty-nine tourists from Shanghai arrived on Tuesday night, the deputy director of the country's main Suvarnabhumi Airport, Kittipong Kittikachorn, said in a statement.

Thai public television showed masked tourists exiting the airport, with officials in full protective equipment spraying their luggage with disinfectant.

Outside, some of the tourists donned face shields and put on rubber gloves as they prepared to board buses to their hotels.

The arrivals come as anti-government protesters continue to defy a ban on gatherings after authorities declared a severe emergency situation in Bangkok. The unrest has not impacted interest in the country, Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor Yuthasak



A pro-democracy protester gives the three-finger salute during an anti-government rally at Victory Monument in Bangkok. — AFP

Supasorn said.

"There have been no cancellations or any enquiries about it so far and people are following the news," he said. Student-led rallies, sometimes drawing 10,000 people, have occupied busy intersections for hours before peacefully dispersing. In one incident last week, water cannon was used on demonstrators.

The tourism-reliant country could see just 6.7 million foreign visitors this year, the government says, less than a fifth of a record 39.8 million in 2019. The government banned commercial flights in April to keep COVID-19 at bay, and new cases have mostly been Thais returning home.

The country has reported a total of 3,700 infections. New tourist arrivals

are on special 90-day visas and must quarantine for two weeks — seven days in their hotel rooms and seven days on their hotel grounds — and test negative three times before they can move around freely.

"Once they pass that they will be able to move to other destinations (within Thailand)," Tourism Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said on

Thai PBS television.

A second batch of 147 tourists from Guangzhou, China, are due to arrive on October 26, with more due next month.

"Winter is coming so more tourists from European countries, United States, Korea and Japan would also like to come to visit us around this time," said Phiphat. — Reuters

■ REMEMBRANCE FOR SLAIN POLICEMEN



Punjab Police officers salute as they pay tribute to their slain colleagues during an event to mark Police Commemoration Day at a police station on the outskirts of Amritsar. — AFP

Pakistan considers lockdown

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani authorities on Wednesday warned that they could reimpose strict lockdown measures, as millions of people flouted guidelines despite fears of a second wave of coronavirus infections.

The warning was issued by the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC), a body that includes civilian and military leaders and oversees the country's response to Covid-19.

"If no improvement in SOPs compliance is observed, NCOC will have no choice but again revert to strict measures leading to re-closures of services," the body said in a statement.

It said public transport, markets, wedding halls, restaurants and public gatherings were "perceived high risk sectors." While the authorities have declared that people must wear face masks and practice social distancing, few people follow these guidelines. Tens of thousands of people attended several political rallies during the past week.

Experts described them as "super spreader" events. Infection numbers have spiked since schools reopened in mid-September. The authorities have since closed more than 30 educational institutes in the capital.

According to the NCOC, 660 new infections and 19 related deaths were reported during the past 24 hours.

The country has so far reported 324,744 coronavirus infections and a death toll of 6,692.

According to a survey conducted by the Gallup polling institute in September, 75 per cent of respondents in Pakistan believe that the pandemic is under control, while 46 per cent believe the outbreak is a foreign conspiracy. — dpa

5 South Koreans die after getting flu shots, sparking vaccine fears

SEOUL: Five people have died after getting flu shots in South Korea in the past week, authorities said, raising concerns over the vaccine's safety just as the seasonal inoculation programme is expanded to head off potential COVID-19 complications.

Authorities said there was no reason to believe the deaths were linked to the vaccine but an investigation, including post mortems, was underway.

"It makes it hard for us to put out a categorical statement," Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip told a briefing on Wednesday about the deaths, which include a 17-year-old boy and a man in his 70s.

Coming just weeks after the rollout of the national vaccine programme was suspended over safety worries, the deaths have dominated headlines in South Korea.

Officials last month announced plans to procure 20 per cent more flu vaccines for the winter than the previous year to inoculate 30 million people in a bid to prevent the health



A woman gets an influenza vaccine at a hospital in Seoul. — Reuters

system being overloaded by patients with flu and COVID-19 exposure.

However, the start of a free jab programme for around 19 million eligible people was suspended for

three weeks after it was discovered that some 5 million doses, which need to be refrigerated, had been exposed to room temperature while being transported to a medical facility.

Boosting public trust in vaccines has become a major global challenge this year, as some countries rush to approve experimental COVID-19 vaccines before full safety and efficacy studies have been completed. South Korea's flu vaccines are supplied by different drugmakers, including LG Chem Ltd and Boryung Biopharma Co Ltd, a unit of Boryung Pharm Co Ltd.

A Boryung official said the company was aware of the reported deaths, but had no immediate comment. LG Chem said the company would follow government advice.

A 17-year-old boy who died on Friday was the first death noted by officials to follow receipt of the vaccine.

The boy died two days after receiving the flu shot in Incheon, near the capital Seoul. A man in his 70s, who had Parkinson's disease and arrhythmia, was the most recent case. He died in Daegu on Wednesday, a day after receiving the flu vaccine. — Reuters



Nigeria in shock after deadly shooting



A general view of a building on fire near the Lekki-Ikoyi Toll Gate in Lagos. — AFP

LAGOS: Lagos was under a round-the-clock curfew on Wednesday enforced by police roadblocks, as smoke rose from a flashpoint area in Nigeria's biggest city where soldiers shot at protesters the previous evening, witnesses said.

The Lagos state governor said 30 people were hurt in the shooting at a toll gate in the Lekki district, a focal point of nearly two weeks of nationwide protests against allegations of systematic police brutality. Four witnesses said soldiers had fired the bullets and at least two people had been shot.

Two of the witnesses said the lights were turned off at the gate shortly before the shooting began. One said he saw soldiers remove bodies. In a Twitter post, the Nigerian Army said no soldiers were at the scene. Authorities imposed the curfew on Lagos on Tuesday after the governor said the protests had turned violent.

President Muhammadu Buhari, appealing for "understanding and

calm", said on Wednesday he was committed to providing justice for victims of brutality, and that police reforms also demanded by the demonstrators were gathering pace. His statement, disseminated by his spokesman, did not refer to the shooting at the Lekki toll gate, from where a witness saw smoke rising on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, police set up roadblocks in Lagos and were not allowing vehicles to pass, although there were a few cars and people walking, two witnesses said. They said some of the police were armed and wore body armour, and many were in plain clothes. Witnesses also heard the sound of gunfire in the Okota and Ebute Metta areas of mainland Lagos.

Thousands of Nigerians have demonstrated in protests that initially focused on a police unit, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), that rights groups had for years accused of extortion, harassment, torture and murders. — Reuters



A Florida resident casts his mail-in ballot at the Winter Garden Library polling station as early voting begins ahead of the election in Florida. — Reuters

Officials: Intimidation e-mails to Florida voters may be scam

TALLAHASSEE: A string of voter intimidation e-mails that were purportedly sent by the Proud Boys, a self-described militia group, were reported to state and federal law enforcement officials on Tuesday morning, according to Alachua Supervisor of Elections Kim Barton.

Alachua County officials were made aware of the e-mails. In one of the e-mails, the sender told a voter to "vote for Trump on Election Day or we will come after you," according to a copy obtained by the *Miami Herald*.

"Change your party affiliation to Republican to let us know you received our message and will comply," the e-mail said. "We will know which candidate you voted for. I would take it seriously if I were you." The e-mail shows a sender with the address, info@officialproudboys.com. But officials have not pointed to any

evidence that the e-mail came from the far-right group. "The e-mail appears to be a scam and we will be initiating an investigation into the source of the e-mail along with assistance from our partners on the federal level," Alachua Sheriff's Office officials said in a Facebook post on Tuesday.

Make informed choices in upcoming local elections with our Voter Guide. Subscribers can access in-depth surveys chronicling local candidates' positions on the issues important to your community. CBS News and Vice News have each reported that the source code embedded in seven e-mails shows the message originated from IP addresses linked to servers.

Proud Boys Chairman Henry "Enrique" Tarrio Jr said the e-mail was "spoofed" and he notified the FBI and Barton to tell them the group was

not behind the e-mails. "There is no reason for us to send an e-mail like that. To whoever did this, I condemn these people," Tarrio told the *Herald*.

Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler, a member of the Alachua County canvassing board alongside Barton and other county officials, said the e-mails were a "disruption" during a busy early voting day.

"It took up time and energy that we didn't really have," Wheeler said in a phone interview on Tuesday evening. Barton was trying to make sure ballots were processed properly while calling law enforcement officials to make sure the voter intimidation tactic was handled appropriately, Wheeler said. "It was just a nuisance," she said.

Wheeler was in the room when Tarrio called Barton to tell her it had not been them. "They called and said that it wasn't them and we all just

rolled our eyes and laughed at it," Wheeler said.

Wheeler said the group was really concerned about voter intimidation when they first heard more than a dozen citizens had received the e-mails. As time went by, it became difficult to discern the source, adding that she would not be surprised if foreign governments were tied to the e-mails. "It is time to find out who is doing this, and if necessary press charges to the point that other people are dissuaded from doing it," she said.

"There is no room for this kind of hanky panky and do it for fun because there are people who can really mess with us," Barton said her office was working with local, state and federal law enforcement officials, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US Department of Homeland Security to look into the e-mails. — dpa

EU countries back binding green farming schemes

BRUSSELS: European Union agriculture ministers agreed on Wednesday to set aside part of the bloc's massive farming policy budget for programmes that protect the environment.

The EU is nearing the end of a two-year struggle to overhaul its agriculture policy, to attempt to align it with the bloc's climate change commitments, while supporting farmers' livelihoods.

The common agricultural policy (CAP) as a whole will suck up roughly a third of the EU's 1.1 trillion euro (\$1.30 trillion) budget for 2021-2027, to be split between direct payments to farmers and other support for rural development.

Ministers agreed that 20 per cent of the payments to farmers will be earmarked for green schemes such as organic farming or agroforestry.

Farmers will not be able to access the cash for other purposes. The policy kicks in from 2023 and



German Minister of Food and Agriculture Julia Kloeckner addresses a news conference in Berlin. — Reuters

ministers agreed a two-year pilot phase for the green schemes, meaning they would become binding from 2025.

Some countries had raised concerns that tying cash to environmental aims would mean the money was left unspent. "We can't simply leave it up to member states to decide whether or not eco-schemes are used and, if so, what money will be made available," said German agriculture minister Julia Kloeckner, who chaired the meeting.

With agricultural sites comprising



Cattle graze in a field near Frankenberg, Germany. — Reuters file photo

40 per cent of all EU land, farming has a large influence over the health of Europe's natural habitats. Agriculture is the most frequently reported threat to nature in Europe, amid intensive

farming techniques including pesticides and irrigation, the EU environment agency said on Monday.

Campaigners said the 20 per cent share for green schemes was

too low. "Agriculture ministers are largely perpetuating a farm policy which will throw taxpayers' money at polluting, industrialised agriculture until at least 2027," said WWF

senior policy officer Jabier Ruiz.

Martin Haesling, agricultural spokesman for the Greens in the European Parliament, criticised the agreement, saying about two-thirds of subsidies would still be paid according to hectares farmed, without significant environmental protection conditions. French Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie welcomed the deal "which will avoid any distorting of competition" as it applies to all member states.

"This is a greener but above all a fairer CAP," he said. German farming association DBV saw the agreement as an "acceptable compromise", said DBV President Joachim Rukwied.

The farming policy negotiations do not end with Wednesday's deal. EU countries must now strike an agreement with the European Parliament and the European Commission on the rules. Parliament is voting on the policy throughout this week. — Reuters

LONDON

Another 1.4m in UK under tough virus curbs

More than a million people in northern England will be banned from mixing with other households under tougher new coronavirus rules announced by government minister Robert Jenrick on Wednesday.

The county of South Yorkshire, which includes the city of Sheffield, will enter into "very high alert" restrictions from 12.01 am on Saturday.

"Given rates are amongst the highest in the country, I am pleased that we were able to reach an agreement that ensures swift action is taken in accordance with the public



health advice," Jenrick said.

Under the new rules, many pubs, bars, casinos and other venues will be closed for at least four weeks and residents will be barred from meeting anybody outside their household

BRUSSELS

Nato to set up space centre in Germany

Military alliance Nato will create a new space centre in Germany to counter threats by China and Russia, the organisation's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

The space centre would be set up in Ramstein, a Nato-US airbase in southwestern Germany close to the French border, he said. "Some nations, including Russia and China, are developing systems which could blind, disable or shoot down satellites," Stoltenberg said. "Space is essential for our ability to navigate, communicate and detect missile launches. And fast, effective and secure satellite communications are vital for our troops."

To this end, Nato defence ministers would decide during a meeting on Thursday to establish the new centre, he said. This would be used to share information about potential threats to satellites and to coordinate activities, he said. "Our aim is not to militarise space, but to increase Nato's awareness of challenges in space and our ability to deal with them," Stoltenberg said. The defence ministers are also expected to discuss training missions in Afghanistan and the COVID-19 pandemic.

BERLIN

Mysterious vandal attacks at Berlin museums

Vandals have damaged more than 70 artworks and artifacts at some of Berlin's most renowned museums, police said on Wednesday, in a targeted attack kept quiet by authorities for more than two weeks.

Valuable paintings, stone sculptures and sarcophagi at three institutions on the German capital's UNESCO-listed Museum Island were sprayed with an "oily liquid", leaving visible stains, Berlin police said.

German media called it "one of the biggest attacks on art and antiquities in German post-war history".



"The state criminal investigation office of the Berlin police has opened a probe over property damage to artworks and artifacts on display," spokesman Martin Dams said in an e-mailed statement.

VAT a necessity, not a choice...

With keen interest, I followed different reactions regarding the value-added tax (VAT). This tax will be levied with effect from April 2021. We could see all sorts of ideas which have emerged on the subject. It is natural in a lively and vibrant society which enjoys wider space for expression of views. Despite all these divergent views which have appeared on the subject, the important thing was that everyone realised that things have changed completely by 180 per cent from where the country stood before the recent crisis. The fall in oil prices and implications of the coronavirus pandemic has made everything different. These issues have affected all aspects of our lives. They need to be deal with confidence, trust, realisation of issues and in realistic manner.

First of all, we must acknowledge and recognise that when the financial and economic condition of the country was good, the government did not hesitate in offering everything to the country and its people without expecting any returns. There were no taxes and obligations on the people of the country during all those years. This is why the idea of tax itself is



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THE VALUE-ADDED TAX APPLIED IN MORE THAN 160 COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD IS AT A RATE VARYING BETWEEN 5-27 PER CENT

alien to us.

Non-oil revenues in the state's general budget did not exceed two and a half billion rials. But the government did not impose any taxes. What was offered in the form of services was far more than we demanded. This is a reality which people cannot deny. They will release everything sooner or later.

Now, with the huge decline in oil revenues, the government is left with no option but to levy taxes. This is important to create balance between the returns and spending. There is a situation when there will be reduction in the country's development budgets. The interest rates will increase more than what is seen in international markets as a result of the debt-to-GDP ratio and other financial factors.

In such situations, it is very natural for any country to reformulate its policies to protect its financial position among countries and to sustain basic developments and other related areas which are important for states.

The value-added tax applied in more than 160 countries around the world is at a rate varying between 5-27 per cent. It is not new. But it remained alien for us all these years.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the last countries in the Gulf Cooperation

Council to impose such a tax, but that too the rate of very low. There are some countries in the region which have imposed VAT at a whopping rate of 15 per cent. All this is to maintain the financial position of the country.

The most important thing is that when the government applies a tax or fee or a duty on non-oil revenues, it is aimed at returning the money of the citizens in the form of essential services such as education, health, social welfare, infrastructure etc. These services have been provided everywhere in the country in all its governorates, wilayats and villages.

When VAT is imposed now, it is also important to note that essential items were exempted from the tax net. People should think realistically and should be mentally prepared to cooperate so that they can continuously get the quality services they have been enjoying now.

There are people in the developed world who pay 40 per cent of income tax. They have seen the things realistically and adapted accordingly.

We are looking forward to a greater and better understanding of the situation with which the government is dealing. The realisation of the local, regional and international circumstances is key to change in our behaviour, practices and expectations.

DEMAND FOR CHANGE

Bolivia vote suggests pandemic may fuel populism in Latin America

MARCELO ROCHABRUN AND CASSANDRA GARRISON

A landslide win by Bolivia's socialist party at weekend elections may herald a year of dramatic shifts in Latin American politics as the painful economic impact of the pandemic discredits incumbents and fuels demand for change.

Bolivia's former economy minister Luis Arce won Sunday's vote in the Andean nation, pledging to protect welfare spending as he takes over next month from a conservative interim government.

"The pandemic has caused the Bolivian people to suffer and this government did not know how to handle it," said Nicanor Baltazar, a leader of Bolivia's largest workers group, the COB.

"The people have understood that." With Latin America one of the hardest-hit regions in terms of COVID-19 deaths and impact on economic growth, analysts said the outcome in Bolivia could mark a shift towards populism as more elections loom in 2021.

Voters will elect new presidents next year in Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras and Nicaragua, with major legislative votes also due in Mexico and Argentina. Even before the coronavirus struck, violent protests had rocked countries including Chile and Colombia, fuelled by anger over inequality and political scandals. With Latin America's \$5.7 trillion regional economy forecast to contract more than 9 per cent this year and poverty indicators for its



Aymara women from Huachacalla wearing face masks wait for a meeting at the La Casa Grande del Pueblo after the election day in La Paz, Bolivia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

THE PANDEMIC HAS CAUSED THE BOLIVIAN PEOPLE TO SUFFER AND THIS GOVERNMENT DID NOT KNOW HOW TO HANDLE IT

650 million people due to surge back to rates last seen in 2005, tensions are already mounting. The pandemic's economic fallout will leave Latin American governments burdened by crippling deficits and facing angry demands from voters for action on poverty and public services, said Benjamin Gedan, director of the Wilson Center's Argentina Project in Washington.

"The pandemic's toll in Latin America is a godsend to outsiders

and populists, who will promise to repudiate debt, reject budget cuts and fight corruption," said Gedan.

With several countries staggering under heavy debt burdens, a backlash against the international financial system in the form of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is already under way. In an interview on Tuesday, Arce rebuffed the idea of an IMF loan for Bolivia and vowed to dole out social payouts "as many times as necessary." — Reuters

AFTER 4 YEARS OF TRUMP

Europe pins hopes on Biden win to repair ties

ALVISE ARMELLINI

As a president elected under the slogan "America First," Donald Trump did not make an easy partner for Europe, so if he fails in his re-election bid on November 3, there probably won't be too many sorry faces on the other side of the Atlantic.

"Most European countries would very much welcome a (Democratic Presidential candidate Joe) Biden victory," Ulrich Speck, a senior visiting fellow at The German Marshall Fund of the United States in Berlin, wrote in a recent policy brief.

This was because of "their widely shared perception of the Trump presidency as marking the lowest point in post-World War II transatlantic relations," Speck said. Nathalie Tocci, director of the IAI think tank in Rome and a special adviser to EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, said: "the picture (of the current transatlantic relationship) is really disastrous, I don't know what else to call it."

The Trump presidency has torn up EU-backed international agreements like the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear deal, pulled out of the Geneva-based World Health Organization in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, and called into question the usefulness of Nato.

The picture (of the current transatlantic relationship) is really disastrous, I don't know what else to call it

JOSEP BORRELL
Adviser to EU foreign policy chief

The sitting US president also wrong-footed Europe on the Middle East peace process and Syria, triggered a trade-sanctions row with the EU, called the bloc "a foe" on par with China and Russia, and said he had a "big problem with Germany," the continent's largest economy.

When asked to mention an area where Europe and the US cooperated successfully in recent years, Tocci struggled, before saying that Nato matters "did not go as badly as they could have done maybe because he (Trump) did not follow the dossier personally."

Trump's go-it-alone, nationalist and erratic approach to foreign policy — perhaps, to policy in general — was difficult to square with the multilateral, gradualist model championed by the European Union.

"All that the EU represents, by definition, goes against (Trump's) vision of the world," Tocci argued. The problem is "not only his visceral antipathy for multilateralism, of which the EU is the highest expression, but also his antipathy, equally visceral, for Germany."

Joe Biden — a former chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and two-term vice-president under the Obama administration, with decades of foreign policy experience — is expected to be far more attuned to European sensitivities.

"The Biden foreign policy agenda will place the United States back at the head of the table, in a position to work with its allies and partners to mobilise collective action on global threats," the Democratic presidential nominee wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine.

One of his advisers, Tony Blinken, talked last month about ending the "artificial trade war" with the EU, while promising that a Democratic administration would still want to address imbalances in agricultural exports. A Biden presidency would be expected to be more cooperative with Europe on various other fronts, starting with climate change, with a return to the Paris accords, and a renewed commitment to the Nato military alliance. — dpa

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

sport



OMAN TO HOST TOP SAILORS NEXT YEAR

Musannah to witness 2021 49er, 49erFX and Nacra 17 World Championships

MUSCAT: Oman Sail will host a 400-strong fleet of the world's best sailors when the World Championships for three Olympic classes kick off in November 2021. Taking place in Asia for the first time in its history, sailors in the 49er, 49erFX and Nacra 17 class will kickstart their path to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games during the six-day event.

The championship will run from November 16–21, 2021, at Al Musannah Sports City, driving tourism in the governorate and further enhancing Oman's pedigree as a world class host of major international events. It is anticipated that Olympians continuing their racing careers will take part at the Championship alongside the next generation of high-performance doubles sailors, all looking to start their 2024 Olympic

campaign in good form.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO, said, "Hosting the 2021 49er, 49erFX and Nacra 17 World Championships is another opportunity for the Sultanate to share its warm hospitality with the international sailing community. The regatta forms an important component of the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040 in terms of boosting sports tourism and unlocking opportunities for local businesses and the community to deliver positive economic return for the country. This is an incredibly exciting event for Oman Sail and we look forward to welcoming sailors from across the world to our shores."

Marcus Spillane, Nacra 17 Class President, said, "We are very pleased to be heading to Oman next year in November for the 2021 49er, 49erFX

and Nacra 17 World Championships as our sailors continue their global adventure. Oman has a great reputation for organising world class regattas and we are confident that the event will be a great test for the teams as they embark on the road to Paris 2024."

Oman Sail's Olympic hopeful in the 49er class, Musab al Hadi, said, "As the first global sailing event after the Tokyo Olympic Games, this will be a strong test of every bit of international experience the Oman Olympic Sailing team has gained against the very best in class. The conditions will be perfect for the sailors and coaches and we hope that our fellow sailors enjoy visiting Oman as much as we enjoy hosting them."

Al Hadi along with Waleed al Kindi, along with duo AbdulRahman al Mashari and Ahmed al Hasni have

all returned to training intensively in preparation for the 2021 ASAF Asian Sailing Championships, an Olympic qualification event for 49er planned to be held in Abu Dhabi.

Building on the long-held affinity for the sea, the Sultanate has gained a reputation in the sailing world as an accomplished host of events where Omani sailors compete against the very best in the world. Combining excellent sailing conditions with powerful sea breezes and pleasant waves and a fully-equipped marina in the heart of a sports city purpose-built for the 2010 Asian Beach Games offer ideal surroundings for another outstanding event in 2021 following the success of events such as the 2013 Laser World Championships, the 2015 RSX world Championships and the 2019 Asian and Oceanian Optimist Championships.



RASHFORD SINKS PSG AGAIN

PARIS: Marcus Rashford once again sank Paris Saint-Germain after netting the decisive goal in a 2-1 Champions League win in the French capital, while Barcelona sent a message with a thumping 5-1 victory over Ferencvaros. Rashford, who scored the winning spot-kick when United knocked PSG out in 2019, drilled home a low shot three minutes from the end which won a thrilling Group H contest at a near-empty Parc des Princes. United had taken the lead in the 23rd minute when Bruno Fernandes slotted home from the spot at the second attempt, but Anthony Martial inexplicably

headed Neymar's corner into his own net 10 minutes after the break. The rest of the match was an end-to-end affair with both sides opting to go for the win rather than hold on for the draw, and Rashford took the points after twice being denied by Keylor Navas earlier in the match. "Of course it's a nice feeling. More importantly we win the game and we're in a strong position now in the group," Rashford told BT Sport. "It's the first game, the concentration and intensity we showed today we have to take forward in the next games in the

Premier League." The win sets United up nicely for next week's home clash with RB Leipzig, who are top of the group after beating Istanbul Basaksehir 2-0 in Germany. Ronald Koeman got his first Champions League campaign as Barcelona coach off to a winning start with a confident win over Ferencvaros. The Hungarians, the first team from their country to make the group stage in 11 years, started brightly and even had the ball in the net via Tokmac Nguen only for the powerful 12th-minute strike to be ruled out for offside. Messi won and converted the

penalty to give the Catalans a 27th-minute lead and the match was as good as done when Ansu Fati clipped home Frenkie de Jong's sumptuous pass just before the break. Philippe Coutinho lashed home the third before Ihor Kharatin pulled one back from the penalty spot after Gerard Pique was sent off for pulling back Nguen as he charged towards goal. Pique's red card means he will miss next week's game away at Juventus, a greater test of Barca's capabilities. Pedri and Ousmane Dembele finished the scoring for the 10-man hosts as they took control of

Uefa Champions League results On Tuesday:

Group E
AT LONDON
Chelsea (ENG) 0 Sevilla (ESP) 0
At Rennes, France
Rennes (FRA) 1 (Guirassy 86-pen) Krasnodar (RUS) 1 (Ramirez 59)

Group F
AT ROME
Lazio (ITA) 3 (Immobile 6, Hitz 23-og, Akpa Akpro 76) Borussia Dortmund (GER) 1 (Haaland 71)
At Saint Petersburg, Russia
Zenit Saint-Petersburg (RUS) 1 (Horvath 74-og) Club Brugge (BEL) 2 (Bonaventure 63, De Ketelaere 90+3)

Group G
AT BARCELONA, SPAIN
Barcelona (ESP) 5 (Messi 27-pen, Fati 42, Coutinho 52, Pedri 82, Dembele 89) Ferencvaros (HUN) 1 (Kharatin 70-pen)
At Kiev
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 0 Juventus (ITA) 2 (Morata 46, 84)

Group H
AT PARIS
Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 1 (Martial 55-og) Manchester United (ENG) 2 (Fernandes 23-pen, Rashford 87)
At Leipzig, Germany
RB Leipzig (GER) 2 (Angelino 16, 20) Istanbul Basaksehir (TUR) 0

Group G, finishing the opening round top but level on points with Juve.

IMMOBILE DOWNS DORTMUND
Andrea Pirlo's side looked

comfortable in their 2-0 win at Dynamo Kiev in what was the Juve coach's first-ever Champions League match in the dugout, with Alvaro Morata scoring twice to take the points for the Italians. It was a good night for Italy as Ciro Immobile got revenge on his old club Borussia Dortmund by scoring in Lazio's 3-1 win over the Bundesliga club in Rome, their first Champions League match in 13 years. Immobile managed just three goals in 24 Bundesliga games for Dortmund in 2014/15, but last season's European Golden Shoe winner outshone Dortmund's star forward Erling Braut Haaland by netting the opening goal for the hosts after just six minutes. Lazio went two ahead midway through the first half thanks to Marwin Hitz deflected Luis Alberto's whipped corner into his own goal. Haaland pulled one back with a thumping finish but Immobile laid on an easy finish for Akpa Akpro to hand Lazio a big win. Simone Inzaghi's are level on three points with Club Brugge in Group F following their dramatic 2-1 win at Zenit Saint Petersburg earned thanks to Charles De Ketelaere 93rd minute winner. Chelsea are still waiting for a £220 million (\$284 million) spending spree to pay off they began their campaign with an uninspiring 0-0 Group E draw with Sevilla at Stamford Bridge. The Blues have now won just two of their opening six games of the season and the only consolation of a cagey encounter for Lampard was a rare clean sheet. All four sides in the group are on a single point after Rennes drew 1-1 with Krasnodar in their first-ever Champions League match in front of 5,000 passionate fans in Brittany. Sehrou Guirassy gave those supporters hopes of a dream start when he opened the scoring from the penalty spot 10 minutes after the break. However, Cristian Ramirez levelled almost instantly with a powerful drive to secure a good draw for the Russian side. — **AFP**



Oman beach soccer team to begin camp on Nov 15

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

The national beach soccer will have a busy schedule in the forthcoming year as many of the beach soccer events were postponed to 2021 due to the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The AFC Beach Soccer Championship 2021 finals which will take place in Thailand from March 13 to 21 is ranked as one of the top assignment for the national team. The Asian event also acts as the qualification route for Asian nations to the upcoming edition of the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Russia from August 19 to 29. Another challenge for the national beach soccer team is the 2020 Asian Beach Games which will be staged in Sanya city, Hainan Island, China,

during April. This event was scheduled for November 28 until December 6 but was rescheduled by the Olympic Council of Asia and the organisers to April 2 to 10 in 2021. Experienced national coach Talib Hilal told *Oman Daily Observer* that the team will back to action in mid of November after a break of more than seven months due to the ongoing pandemic. "The team like others was affected by the current coronavirus crisis and had been stopping action for more than half a year. We will be back with an internal camp in November. As per the plan, the domestic preparatory camp will begin on November 15 to 20. The squad will be the same which took part at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay. The plan was to get some

“
The plan was to get some new players but due to the pandemic, we could not organise some events to select new faces for the team
TALIB HILAL,
Oman beach soccer coach



new players but due to the pandemic, we could not organise some events to select new faces for the team. We will depend on the fitness part at this initial camp besides some technical training," he said. The last participation of the Sultanate's beach soccer team was at the global showpiece event at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay in December. The third participation of the team at the world high-profile beach soccer tournament had registered a crucial win for Oman against Nigeria. The national team suffered two losses against Portugal and Brazil. Talib, a former Fanja player, led Oman to the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup for the first time in history in 2011 in Ravenna, Italy. Oman had crashed out

in the first round as the team suffered three defeats against Portugal, Salvador, and Argentina. The second participation for the team at the global level was in Espinho in Portugal in 2015. The team ended their campaign again in the first round as they lost to Italy and Switzerland and registered a win against Costa Rica. The 45-year-old will be leading the team in its sixth participation at the 2020 Asian Beach Games. Oman beach soccer team had managed to win the gold medal after beating UAE in the final clash. The team had finished as runners-up twice in Muscat 2010 edition and Danang, Vietnam in 2016. Oman were crowned as champions of the Asian Championship in 2015 and positioned as runners-up in the 2009 edition.



OOC signs deal with Ibtihal Al Zadjali Foundation

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) signed a marketing agreement with Ibtihal Al Zadjali Foundation for Trade and Services on Wednesday.

The deal will help the OOC Board of Directors to build partnerships with private sector bodies to generate additional income sources to enhance the OOC budget in order to implement the plans and programmes.

The agreement was signed by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidi, OOC Chairman, on behalf of OOC, and Ibtihal bint Ghazi al Zadjali, the company's president.

Based on the agreement, the company will market and promote the activities of OOC and all various programmes as well as manage the activities in coordination with the concerned sub-committees according to the objectives of each committee.

The OOC chairman said the OOC board of directors had launched a tender for companies in Oman specialised in managing and marketing events, with the aim of contracting with one of them to assist OOC searching for partnerships in the private sector bodies through marketing and commercial



sponsorships. This will help the OOC find new finance sources and innovative ideas that serve the goals, especially in light of reducing government budgets in general and the importance of engaging the private sector in supporting the committee's programmes.

"We have selected a company specialised in managing and marketing events to help in this regard, wishing the company all success in its duties and all OOC sub-committees," he said.

He concluded by encouraging the private sector to believe in the values adopted by the Olympic movement and OOC regarding the use of sport as an important means for community development in health, psychology and intellectual

challenge.

Ibtihal al Zadjali, who had set up the Foundation, thanked the OOC Board of Directors for their confidence in the proposal made by the Foundation.

She added, "We are eagerly looking forward to working with the OOC sub-committees and the executive board to implement the targeted programmes and events. Despite the challenges that COVID-19 imposes on everyone, we are confident that sports awareness and education programmes must continue with the various available means, and sports activities have become a necessary part of our daily life, which opens up new opportunities for creating partnerships with private sectors, wishing the best for all."

Shaikh Hammad honours Indian envoy at Naqvi museum

MUSCAT: Dr Shaikh Hammad Hamed al Ghafri, a member of State Council, felicitated Munu Mahawar, Indian Ambassador to Oman, during the second anniversary of the Naqvi sports museum recently.

Ahmed Hammad Hamed al Ghafri, CEO of the Future Group, and Osama Rawat, General Manager of Oriental Pharmacy, had joined the event conducted according to the protocol suggested by the government due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Museum host SAS Naqvi, former coach of Oman and India hockey teams, received the guests with bouquets.

Shaikh Hammad presented a traditional Omani 'khanjar' to Mahawar, who returned the gesture with a golden coloured Omani khanjar.

Ahmed Hammad and Osama Rawat were also honoured on the occasion.

Naqvi presented a special memento of hockey stick and a ball to the Indian ambassador.

Mahawar took a round at the museum and appreciated the rare collection of Oman's political, sports and Olympic movement,



which includes the history of Oman Olympic Committee.

Oman's history of participation in the Olympics, Asian Games and other international events are also showcased.

Rare pictures of Indian hockey

maestro Dyan Chand and records from India's golden generation of hockey are other attractions at the museum set up by Naqvi.

The sports, Olympics and hockey museum is situated at the Al Noor Building, Ruwli.

Dhawan ton in vain as Punjab down Delhi

DUBAI: Shikhar Dhawan on Tuesday became the first batsman in the Indian Premier League to hit two successive centuries but his Delhi Capitals lost by five wickets to Kings XI Punjab.

The left-hand opener smashed an unbeaten 106 off 61 deliveries to guide Delhi to 164 for five, a total that proved insufficient as Punjab won with one over to spare in Dubai.

The KL Rahul-led side moved up to fifth in the eight-team table as Nicholas Pooran scored 53 and Chris Gayle hit 29 off 13 balls.

But Dhawan, who hit his first IPL ton of the season in a match-winning knock on Sunday, was named man of the match for his 57-ball hundred.

"The boys have been playing well in other games. Today I had to take the responsibility on myself," said Dhawan.

"It is good that I am scoring consistently so you carry it into the next games. We are going to have a discussion and see where we can improve.

"Of course, it is going to be a learning. This is not going to put us down. Just take our lessons, and come back stronger."

Dhawan used the sweep and the slog sweep to great effect as he hit 14 fours and three sixes, but the rest of the Delhi batting failed to fire, with skipper Shreyas Iyer (14) and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant (14) as the next best. Punjab lost early wickets, including Rahul for 15 and Gayle,

“
This is not going to put us down. Just take our lessons, and come back stronger

SHIKHAR DHAWAN
Delhi Capitals player

bowled by Ravichandran Ashwin, but Pooran kept the chase on track in his 28-ball knock.

Delhi quick bowler Kagiso Rabada sent back Pooran and then Glenn Maxwell, for 32, to put Punjab in a spot, but Deepak Hooda, on 15, and Jimmy Neesham, on 10, took the team home. Earlier Punjab paceman Mohammed Shami returned figures of 2-28 from his four overs to keep Delhi's scoring rate under check.

Shami gave away just 13 runs from his final two overs and got two wickets of Marcus Stoinis and Shimron Hetmyer.

"Shami obviously is coming in with confidence from the last game," Rahul said of his paceman who defended five runs in a super over to help his team beat Mumbai Indians in the Sunday match that witnessed IPL's first double super over. "He is our senior bowler, and an international, and he is getting better and better every game." — AFP



Nicholas Pooran of Kings XI Punjab hits a six against the Delhi Capitals during the IPL match in Dubai. — BCCI

SCOREBOARD

DELHI CAPITALS	
P Shaw c G Maxwell b J Neesham	7
S Dhawan not out	106
S Iyer c L Rahul b M Ashwin	14
R Pant c M Agarwal b G Maxwell	14
M Stoinis c M Agarwal b M Shami	9
S Hetmyer b M Shami	10
Extras (Ob 1lb Onb Open 3w)	4
Total (20 overs)	164-5
Fall of wickets: 1-25, 2-73, 3-106, 4-141, 5-164	
Bowling: Glenn Maxwell 4-0-31-1, Mohammed Shami 4-0-28-2, Arshdeep Singh 3-0-30-0, Jimmy Neesham 2-0-17-1, Murugan Ashwin 4-0-33-1, Ravi Bishnoi 3-0-24-0	
KINGS XI PUNJAB	
L Rahul c D Sams b A Patel	15
M Agarwal run out R Ashwin	5
C Gayle b R Ashwin	29
N Pooran c R Pant b K Rabada	53
G Maxwell c R Pant b K Rabada	32
D Hooda not out	15
J Neesham not out	10
Extras (Ob 1lb 1nb Open 6w)	8
Total (19 overs)	167-5
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-52, 3-56, 4-125, 5-147	
Bowling: Daniel Sams 4-0-30-0, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-27-2, Axar Patel 4-0-27-1, Tushar Deshpande 2-0-41-0, R Ashwin 4-0-27-1, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-14-0	

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Chennai's Bravo out of IPL with groin injury

West Indies all-rounder Dwayne Bravo has been ruled out of the rest of the Indian Premier League with a groin injury, his Chennai Super Kings team said on Wednesday.

Bravo could not bowl the last over in Chennai's game against Delhi Capitals on Saturday and missed the following match. The three-time champions who are struggling, bottom of the eight-team table.

"Bravo is ruled out with a groin injury and flying back home," CSK chief executive Kasi Viswanathan said. "The team management has yet to decide whether to seek a replacement or not."

The 37-year-old played six



games and scored seven runs in two innings. He claimed six wickets with his pace bowling.

Skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni admitted after his team's seventh loss from 10 games on Monday that their tournament is virtually over. — AFP

DUBAI

Seifert replaces khan in Kolkaa team

New Zealand wicketkeeper-batsman Tim Seifert has joined the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League to replace injured bowler Ali Khan.

Seifert, who has played three one-day internationals and 24 Twenty20 matches for the national side, joins the Eoin Morgan-team just when they are still in a chance to reach the IPL play-offs.

Khan became the first US national to join the lucrative T20 league after being signed by Kolkata last month after an impressive show in the Caribbean Premier League. He did not play a game, however.



Kolkata are fourth on the eight-team table with five wins and four defeats.

They changed captains last week when Dinesh Karthik handed over the reins to Morgan. — AFP

MUSCAT

ITPF sets Oct 27 as tent pegging day

The board of directors of the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) and the general assembly of ITPF agreed to announce 27th October as international day for tent pegging. This decision came inline of the ITPF efforts in boosting the sport in different parts of the world.

On this occasion, the ITPF published a competition on its social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The first part of the competition is sending a recent photograph or video related to the tent pegging events. It should reflect the safety standards of the horses and riders. The second part of the competition is sending any photo or video related to the tent pegging



events prior establishment of ITPF which means before October 27, 2013.

ITPF, which based in Muscat, is headed by Mohammed Issa al Fairuz. During the last seven years, ITPF delivered essential efforts for the development of the tent pegging sports in the tournaments, championships, events and different activities.

features

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Breaking the music scene with fusion of hip hop and R&B

While independent artists are struggling to push their careers during the time of COVID-19, some are using the power of social media and different streaming platforms to bring their music to a much wider audience. The same has been the case for Muscat-based artist Hussein who was able to push his music career forward with the help of raw passion, grit, and talent and the power of digital media... **P19**



DAILY PICKS

FOOD



CORONAVIRUS BOOSTS CLOUD KITCHENS AS FOODIE ASIANS ORDER IN

Singapore's Ebb & Flow Group took an unusual route to creating one of its most popular food items: analysing more than 200,000 data points to predict customer preference and potential demand. Story on **Page 16**

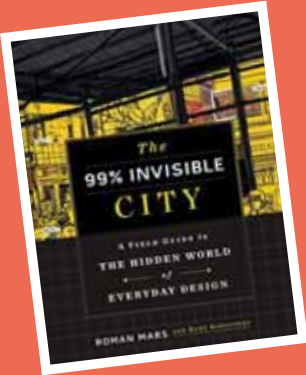
TRAVEL TALES



EATING LIKE THE ENGLISH? FRENCH CURFEW PUTS EARLY DINNER ON MENU

Restaurateur Pascal Mousset has a new menu he hopes will persuade his patrons to change the habit of a lifetime in response to Paris's coronavirus curfew, by - perish the thought - eating dinner as early as the English.... Story on **Page 15**

READ



THE 99% INVISIBLE CITY

BY ROMAN MARS AND KURT KOHLSTEDT

A look at the design and architecture of various and sometimes unexpected elements that make cities function.

CONSERVATION



LUCKY BABY ANTEATER ESCAPES BIRDS, FALLS FROM TREE INTO CARE OF AUSTRALIAN ZOO

A lucky echidna puggle, or baby spiny anteater, that survived an attack by birds and fell from a tree is taking its first steps as zookeepers in Australia hand-feed the young mammal... Story on **Page 15**

CELEBRATE



INTERNATIONAL STUTTERING AWARENESS DAY

Stuttering poses real problems in both the personal and professional lives of those suffering from it. To celebrate today, check out some individuals who managed to use their stutter to their advantage and learn how they navigate their way into its many complications.



Breaking the music scene with fusion of hip hop and R&B

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY
@needstoshutup

He hit the street running in October 2018 with his first official single. Hussein (Hussein Al Nabulsi) was born in Donetsk, Ukraine and in 2006, moved to Muscat where he began his musical journey in 2008 as a rapper and a songwriter making Hip Hop and R&B remixes as a hobby. In 2009 Hussein teamed up with two Sudanese artists to form a Hip Hop group “Swagger Surferz” with whom he released a self-titled mixtape. Lasting less than a year, the members of the group went their separate ways and

Hussein continued releasing mixtapes as a solo artist. In 2015, Hussein decided to take a break from music, focusing on graduating from college and starting a professional career, before long coming back to the scene in 2018, with his first official single “Designer Love” with Qyce as the second main artist and Triple B as the producer of the hit single, making it available on all major platforms like iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify, Deezer, Anghami and many more, following it up with another hit single “Trippin” again with Qyce as the second main artist, featuring an Omani Vocalist (Mambosh) and Triple B as the producer. This return brought with it a new side of Hussein, as he added an R&B vibe to his music and started singing as well. Having found his new

With the help of some YouTube video lessons on music marketing by Adam Ivy, Hussein refined his music marketing strategy, and his music reached more fans and listeners across the globe

sound, he spent most of 2019 making a fusion of Hip Hop and R&B music on various beat types such as Trap, Soul and Afrobeats. And in September, last year he released an oriental R&B single “Girls in Dubai” which skyrocketed the streams and gave him a world of exposure with around fifty thousand streams across the streaming platforms. This single’s performance motivated him to create more music and stay consistent. With the help of some YouTube video lessons on music marketing by Adam Ivy, Hussein refined his music marketing strategy, and his music reached more fans and listeners across the globe. Aiming for the stars, he succeeded at catching the attention of a few celebrities such as Mystikal (rapper), Francesca Farago (Model /

Public Figure), Alessandra Sironi (Model) and Tyrone (Public Figure). His hard work and dedication opened up new opportunities for him with local artists like SG, Aziz, Swagger Boy, Sam37, Solo, Murphy 2Wizzle and Sameeh, as well as international artists and producers such as Cierra Dean, 7FIFTY7, Lonely Together, Zane 98, Shawty Chris, Gimi Productions, OGE Beats, Dystinkt Beats and many more. Hussein’s unique sound and song quality also caught the attention of a few radio stations in the United States, most notably Power214.com where some of his singles were aired. To check out Hussein and his work, visit his website at <https://husseinofficial.com> or follow him on Instagram: @nameishussein. You can also listen to his music on Spotify, Apple Music or Anghami.



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Eating like the English?
French curfew puts
early dinner on menu

PARIS : Restaurateur Pascal Mousset has a new menu he hopes will persuade his patrons to change the habit of a lifetime in response to Paris's coronavirus curfew, by - perish the thought - eating dinner as early as the English.

They can order his 19-euro "After Work" offering of foie gras, boar pate and calamari until 8:00 p.m., an hour before the lockdown takes effect in the capital and eight other cities - and just when they might normally be contemplating their starters.

Mousset, whose restaurant Chez Françoise is popular with lawmakers, throws in two glasses of spirits to help wash the food down.

"We said to ourselves we have two options: close in the evenings and turn off the lights or do something positive," he said, after last week's announcement of the new curbs gave the trade just 48 hours to adapt.

The French have long considered themselves more culinarily sophisticated



ed than their British neighbours.

They tend to balk at the prospect of having to eat their evening meal too early or rush their wine and, for some, the jury's still out on whether such behaviour might now be permissible.

"We'll see if we can get used to the Anglo-Saxon habit of eating out at 7.30 p.m.," said self-employed Denis Alexandre, 53, lunching with a friend in a favourite restaurant in the affluent 16th arrondissement.

Others like Xavier

Others like Xavier Denamur, who owns five bars and restaurants, are turning to takeout deliveries - permitted post-curfew - to make ends meet .

Denamur, who owns five bars and restaurants, are turning to takeout deliveries - permitted post-curfew - to make ends meet during the six weeks for which the night-time shutdown is scheduled to last.

He says his staff are struggling to adjust. "My barmen have become delivery-boys. Logistically, it's a bit of a mess."

But they still have at least one resolutely un-British touch of refinement to fall back on - delivering the meals on porcelain plates. — **Reuters**

ANIMAL PLANET

Lucky baby anteater escapes birds, falls from tree into care of Australian zoo



SYDNEY: A lucky echidna puggle, or baby spiny anteater, that survived an attack by birds and fell from a tree is taking its first steps as zoo keepers in Australia hand-feed the young mammal.

Members of the public brought the young echidna to the Taronga Zoo in Sydney last month after it fell 4 m (13 ft) from a tree onto their balcony, somehow escaping becoming supper for the winner of a clash between a raven and a magpie.

"He was lost from his mum and the story is that some people were just sitting on their balcony one nice afternoon and they heard this thud and they looked down and they saw this little guy on the balcony," said Taronga Zoo Senior Keeper Sarah Male.

"And they've looked up into the tree and seen a raven and a magpie there."

After recovering from

scratches and peck marks, the puggle - grey, sharp-nosed and easily held in the palm of one hand - has put on weight and started to develop fur, Male said.

"While the puggle is improving every day, it is still very young and in the wild would still be dependent on mum, so will require ongoing care for the next few months," she said in an emailed statement.

"I've hand-raised lots of animals throughout the years at Taronga but such a young echidna puggle is a new experience."

The echidna will remain at the Taronga Zoo Wildlife Hospital until it grows spines and can feed itself. The zoo said it hasn't made plans for the animal beyond that.

Echidnas and platypuses are the only two species belonging to the monotreme order of egg-laying mammals. Their young are known as puggles. — **Reuters**



Coronavirus boosts cloud kitchens as foodie Asians order in

Singapore's Ebb & Flow Group took an unusual route to creating one of its most popular food items: analysing more than 200,000 data points to predict customer preference and potential demand.

The result, launched shortly before the coronavirus sent the city into lockdown, was Wrap Bstrd - wraps with fillings such as chicken satay rice and beef bulgogi, borne from the insight that customers preferred Asian flavours in a fuss-free fashion.

"We were able to combine advanced behavioural data capabilities and pattern analyses with the expertise of our chefs to create a brand and menu that was specifically tailored for our customers," said chief executive Lim Kian Chun.

"It is Singapore's first food and beverage brand that is driven entirely by insights derived from artificial intelligence," he said.

Ebb & Flow Group is one of a growing number of companies operating restaurant kitchens known as "dark", "cloud" or "ghost" kitchens, which have no physical presence, and offer delivery-only services from a centralised location through a mobile app.

Often operating out of warehouses and semi-industrial buildings on the outskirts of cities, dark kitchens allow for burgers and biryanis to be made in the same location, and delivered directly to consumers ordering online. While food delivery was already on the rise in recent years with aggregators such as Zomato, Uber Eats and foodpanda, coronavirus lockdowns and concerns about eating out have precipitated a boom in these services lately, analysts say.

"The cloud kitchen model was already gaining momentum, now it is at a tipping point for the model to be fully utilised because of the shift



to at-home consumption," said Ali Potia, a partner at consulting firm McKinsey. "We are now starting to see data-driven menu design and pricing for greater personalisation. It is the future," he said.

ROBOT CHEFS

The coronavirus has upended how people live, work and experience leisure, with urban experts predicting that cities will look very different as more people work and shop from home. The cloud kitchen market is seen as one of the biggest beneficiaries of this trend, with Allied Market Research in India estimating that the global industry could be worth about \$71 billion by 2027 compared to \$43 billion last year.

Autonomous vehicles and drones that can lower delivery costs will fuel the industry's growth, the research firm said in a recent report. Swiss bank UBS, in a 2018 report, had forecast that deliveries would make up 10% of the global food services market by 2030, or

Ebb & Flow Group is one of a growing number of companies operating restaurant kitchens known as "dark", "cloud" or "ghost" kitchens, which have no physical presence, and offer delivery-only services from a centralised location through a mobile app.

more than \$350 billion, helped by dark kitchens, robot chefs, cheaper deliveries and younger people who do not cook. But with coronavirus, "food delivery has become a necessity rather than a luxury" for even older people, said Phuminant Tantiprasongchai, co-founder of Singapore-based TiffinLabs, which aims to have 1,000 cloud kitchens in cities worldwide.

The company has created nine brands so far in Singapore - from pasta to "mind blowing" fries - with each brand based on analytics of consumers in the delivery zones of its kitchens.

"Data touches every aspect of our business - right from conceptualising restaurants, to testing and creating menus that match consumer preferences, to even identifying the right locations for our kitchens," Phuminant said.

"We also use analytics to predict demand - as a result we've seen little waste in our kitchens," he added, as a counter to the argument that cloud kitchens are fuelling an explosion in plastic waste.

With data key to success, ride-hailing and delivery apps such as Uber, Grab and Gojek are partnering with dark kitchen operators. Gojek has tied up with Indian virtual kitchen company Rebel Foods to create 100 cloud kitchens in Indonesia. Uber Eats invites restaurants to launch "delivery-focused concepts" from their current kitchen, based on its data that can identify dishes and cuisines that customers are searching for.

The data - which will need to be "stored safely and managed effectively" - can also be used in other ways, said Potia. "Can you pay a lower insurance premium if you order healthy food often, for example? Smart operators will find ways to use the data optimally," he said.

—Thomson Reuters Foundation



In brief

■ MOSCOW

RUSSIA'S NOVAK SAYS PREMATURE TO TALK ABOUT OPEC+ DEAL BEYOND 2020



Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak (pictured) said it was too early to discuss the future of the global oil output cuts deal by the Opec+ group beyond December 2020.

In comments made via the Energy Ministry's press service, he said "we need to understand" how the situation develops in the coming month before taking any decision,

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other producers led by Russia, a group known as Opec+, is scheduled to relax its output cuts further from January 1. Opec and its allies next meet on November 30 to December 1. — Reuters

■ WASHINGTON

US HOUSING STARTS REBOUND IN SEPTEMBER



US homebuilding rebounded in September as the housing market continued to be the star of the economic recovery, driven by record-low interest rates and a migration to the suburbs and low-density areas in search of more room for home offices and schooling.

Housing starts increased 1.9 per cent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.415 million units last month, the Commerce Department said on Tuesday. Data for August was revised down to a 1.388 million-unit pace from the previously reported 1.416 million.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast starts increasing to a rate of 1.457 million units in September. — Reuters

■ TOKYO

OIL FALLS AFTER US INVENTORY BUILD FEEDS OVERSUPPLY FEARS



Oil prices fell on Wednesday after a surprise climb in US crude stockpiles added to concerns about a global supply glut as a spike in global COVID-19 cases fuels demand fears and production returns in Libya.

Brent crude futures for December delivery were at \$42.94 a barrel, down 22 cents, or 0.5 per cent, as of 0035 GMT, while December US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CL1 futures slipped 23 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$41.47 a barrel.

Both benchmarks gained the previous session.

Crude inventories rose by 584,000 barrels in the week to October 16 to about 490.6 million barrels, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute showed, compared with analysts' expectations in a poll for a draw of 1 million barrels. — Reuters

EU makes bond market history with record \$275bn demand for SURE issue

The bonds attracted investors as they offer a yield higher than safe-haven German bonds, which have very similar credit ratings, and also higher than French bonds, which are rated lower than the European Union

AMSTERDAM: The European Union attracted the highest demand ever for a bond sale at over 233 billion euros (\$275 billion), bankers involved in the deal said, as it kicked off fund raising for its SURE unemployment scheme.

Demand was nearly 14 times the 17 billion euros the EU aims to raise from the issue, comprising 10 and 20-year social bonds, bankers said.

"I can't think of a major account that's not in the (investor order) book," said Jamie Stirling, global head of sovereign, supranational and agency debt capital markets at BNP Paribas, one of the lead managers.

Tuesday's sale is the first stage of the EU's ambitious plan to increase its debt pile 15-fold in less than a decade to fund its two coronavirus support programmes for member states, which brings it closer to debt mutualisation than ever before.

In time the EU, until now a tiny borrower on a par with Slovakia, will become one of Europe's biggest borrowers.

Tuesday's sale was closely watched to see how successful the bloc might be at ramping up its borrowing at such speed and how much it would cost.

With the sale the EU has already



The EU is rated Triple A – the top credit rating – by two of the three main ratings agencies. — Reuters

funded over half of the 30 billion euros of debt it expects to sell this year.

The shorter bond, which will raise 10 billion euros, attracted over 145 billion euros of final demand on its own, also a record high for a single European bond tranche, lead managers said.

"This is sending a strong signal that they can upsize their issuance without much difficulties," said Antoine Bouvet, senior rates strategist at ING.

The bonds attracted investors as they offer a yield higher than safe-haven German bonds, which have very similar credit ratings, and also higher than French bonds, which are

rated lower than the EU.

The EU is rated Triple A — the top credit rating — by two of the three main ratings agencies.

"It's really on that valuation basis that they appear attractive to us," said Gareth Hill, a fund manager at Royal Asset Management who put in orders for both EU bonds on Tuesday.

Another factor boosting demand was the European Central Bank, which currently underbuying bonds from supranational institutions, should Hoover up a good deal of the debt in the secondary market.

The social bond format, a type of sustainable debt to fund spending beneficial to society, also helped

attract demand, bankers said. Up to 100 billion euros of issuance to back SURE by the end of 2021 will triple the outstanding social bond universe, according to ING.

The 10-year bond was due to price for a yield of around -0.25 per cent and the 20-year at around 0.12 per cent. The 20-year bond, which will raise 7 billion euros, received over 88 billion euros of demand, lead managers said.

After SURE the EU will start financing its larger programme, an 800 billion euro recovery fund next year, although it has yet to be ratified by member states divided over tying disbursements to the rule of law.

— Reuters

China to balance need for stabilising growth and preventing risks

BEIJING: China will strike a balance between stabilising economic growth and preventing risks, even as debt was allowed to temporarily rise this year to support the coronavirus-hit economy, central bank governor Yi Gang said on Wednesday.

Yi told a financial forum in Beijing that he expected China's macro leverage ratio to stabilise next year as the economy expands, after the debt gauge rose in 2020.

Bank lending in the first nine months totalled 16.26 trillion yuan (\$2.44 trillion) as policymakers



A woman walks past the headquarters of the People's Bank of China in Beijing. — Reuters

looked to reboot economic activity, beating a previous peak of 13.63 trillion yuan in the same period last year.

"Monetary policy needs to guard the 'gates' of money supply, and properly smooth out fluctuations in the macro leverage ratio, and keep it on a reasonable track in the long run," Yi said.

Ruan Jianhong, head of the statistics department at the People's Bank of China (PBOC), said in July that the country's macro leverage ratio jumped 14.5 percentage points in the first quarter and climbed further in the second quarter.

The central bank has not given further details. — Reuters

Port of Rotterdam sees recovery in trade in Q3

AMSTERDAM: Freight volumes in the Port of Rotterdam improved in the third quarter after the deep slump caused by the coronavirus pandemic in the first half of the year, Europe's largest sea port said on Wednesday.

Throughput of agribulk, iron ore, biomass and goods transported by trucks on ferries showed a marked improvement at the end of the third quarter, the port said, while the number of containers that arrived in Rotterdam also increased.

"Many segments showed a marked improvement in their throughput volumes in comparison with the second quarter", the port authority said. Overall, however, throughput in



the first nine months of the year was 8.8 per cent lower than a year earlier, at 322.3 million tonnes.

The port in April had warned that traffic could fall 20 per cent this year due to the pandemic. "It is still too early to determine whether we have left the worst behind us in economic terms," port CEO Allard Castelein said. — Reuters

■ INTEREST RATES

Investors left guessing as money market rates sink

LONDON: A widely-used benchmark for US short-term interest rates has dropped to record lows, joining its European peers, in the latest sign that massive central bank stimulus has suppressed borrowing costs.

The three-month US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor) hit a record low at around 0.21 per cent on Tuesday and held near those levels in London trade.

It is down more than 100 basis points from highs hit in March at the peak of market volatility triggered by the coronavirus crisis.

Libor is a global interest rate that forms the price reference embedded in derivatives contracts and loans worth \$400 trillion globally.

"There is a disconnect between the peak we saw in Libor in

The three-month US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor) hit a record low at around

0.21%

on Tuesday and held near those levels in London trade on Wednesday.

March and the record lows we are seeing now," said ING senior rates strategist Antoine Bouvet. "What is confounding us is that credit risk is being underpriced."



British five pound banknotes are seen in this picture illustration. — Reuters

Interbank lending rates should reflect some credit risk but that

has been suppressed by the weight of central bank stimulus, analysts

said, a development that also been reflected in tighter corporate bond spreads this year.

The transition in Libor rates to a new interest rate benchmark may help explain the move down as one rate converges with another.

And the move speaks to the bigger fall across money market rates in major economies, triggered by the pumping of cash into markets by central banks to offset the impact of the coronavirus shock, analysts said.

"What you are seeing now in the US and euro money markets is that we are in an environment of extremely low market liquidity which is pushing rates low, there is no risk that we saw earlier this year," said Jan von Gerich, chief analyst at Nordea. — Reuters

Pandemic takes huge toll on jobs globally

With the global COVID-19 pandemic raging on,

unemployment rates are rising in every part of the world. Arab countries, whether oil producers with large sovereign funds or those with other sustainable economic resources, have not been immune from this trend.

All of them have been impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic, which has resulted in a dramatic decline in employment across a number of industrial, tourism and other economic sectors.

This outcome has boosted

jobless numbers with new graduates being deprived of the opportunity to join governmental and private institutions.

Today, many industrialised countries, including the United States, UK and those in the European Union, which were once leading labour markets of the world, are suffering record unemployment rates due to the continuing pandemic.

In Britain, unemployment rates reached 4.5 per cent in the third quarter of this year due to layoffs and termination of services, resulting from the closure of businesses in the wake of the second wave of infections, official records show.

Perhaps the only exception is



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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TODAY, MANY INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES ARE SUFFERING RECORD UNEMPLOYMENT RATES DUE TO THE CONTINUING PANDEMIC.

China, which is trying to stay a step ahead of the pandemic and its impacts.

It has boosted the production of goods for export to countries that need them to combat the effects of the epidemic. Chinese exports recorded an increase of 10 per cent during the past month, while imports grew 13 per cent during the same period, confirming that its economy is heading towards recovery, unlike many industrialised countries whose people are losing their jobs.

Besides causing huge job losses, the outbreak of coronavirus has impacted the work of educational and academic institutions, while imperilling the jobs of those

working in these institutions.

For several years, industrialised countries competed with each other to attract talent from amongst migrant labour to work in their leading institutions. Germany is one such example of a country that opened its doors to foreign workers, but today suffers 13 per cent unemployment due to COVID-19. It has also reduced working hours in response to the crisis.

These impacts will ultimately lead to a contraction in the economies of these countries, a slowdown in inflation rates and a halt in economic activities.

The figures of the European Union, for example, indicate a decline in the economic output of

19 members during the past six months, ranging from 5 to more than 10 per cent.

The situation is no different in the United States, where unemployment rose to around 15 per cent due to the pandemic — the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Generally speaking, the pandemic has upended businesses and shuttered many economic activities, imposed restrictions on the movement of people and led to a rise in bankruptcies.

What we can do in our region is to gradually offer more work opportunities to nationals by replacing foreign labour wherever possible.

Al Mazunah FZ and Dhofar Customs review traffic solutions



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

Al Mazunah Free Zone, which is managed and operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), held a meeting with the Directorate-General of Customs of the Royal Oman Police at Dhofar Governorate to discuss the importance of formulating a mechanism to facilitate traffic flow to and from Al Mazunah Free Zone and developing effective solutions to tackle the challenges faced by the investors and business owners in the free zone.

The meeting also highlighted the procedures followed by the customs clearance offices, the significance of implementing specifications and standards of the handling companies, and the free zone's security system project.

General incentives are offered to investors in the free zone, including customs' exemptions, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no minimum capital requirements, Omanisation rate stands at 10 per cent, and simplification of procedures for non-Gulf Cooperation Council investors to obtain residency in Oman.

Sohar Aluminium to support technological education in Al Buraimi Governorate

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

Sohar Aluminium and the Directorate-General of Education in Al Buraimi Governorate signed on Wednesday a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support technological education in the governorate's schools.

The MoU was signed during a ceremony that was held under the auspices of Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Governor of Al Buraimi, in the presence of Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiab al Rubaie, Wali of Al Buraimi, and Ahmed bin Faris al Azzani, Member of the Majlis AshShura representing the Wilayat of Al Buraimi.

As per the agreement, Sohar Aluminium will fund the purchase of smart educational electronic equipment and devices for the governorate's schools. This collaboration aims to enhance and enrich the educational



environment, contribute to building the technological capabilities of the teaching staff and students, upgrade their competencies and skills in this aspect, as well as encourage and stimulate the use of new educational technologies in schools.

The agreement was signed by

Ahmed bin Mohammad bin Nasser al Kharusi, General Manager of Human Resources and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, and Dr Fathia bint Khalfan al Saddiah, Director-General of Education in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Commenting on the signing

ceremony, Ahmed al Kharusi said, "This agreement comes as we seek to implement the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to dedicate this year as the year of blended learning. Sohar Aluminium is proud of its contribution to translating Oman Vision 2040 and development plans in the Sultanate into reality. We hope that this step will have a clear and direct impact and contribute to achieving the objectives of the education sector, which is one of the most important aspects and enablers of Oman 2040 Vision."

The agreement is expected to cover all schools in the governorate namely in the wilayats of Al Buraimi, Mahdha and Al Sunaina (30 schools). It includes the purchase of interactive boards and tables, 3D printers, smart screens, overhead projectors, learning disability tools and robot bags. It is hoped that these devices will benefit more than 14,500 students in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Middle East's spotlight on green finance



BADAR CHAUDHRY

A new era of energy finance is emerging — and it's a greener one. Seismic shifts in nations' low carbon plans are highlighted by the carbon neutral goal by 2060 announced last week by China, the world's largest energy consumer.

And in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia's new Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) roadmap has just received support from the G20, while Dubai said it cut CO2 emissions by 22 per cent in 2019. So, how does finance fit into this new picture? In short, it's a critical vehicle to making the Middle East's energy transition an economic and environmental success.

This means rethinking the traditional and more linear investments into fossil fuels to instead craft a melting pot of financings for fossil fuels, renewables and low-carbon growth projects. Regional appetite for green financial support is growing — loud and clear.

Ramping up

It's been a busy month, with a lot of firsts. For one, Saudi Arabia completed its first green bond sale. The world's biggest oil exporter and OPEC linchpin made



its mark in green finance with state-controlled power giant Saudi Electricity Company's (SEC) \$1.3 billion deal with regional and international lenders in September.

To the west, Egypt secured the Middle East and North Africa's (MENA) first green sovereign bond last month. The Arab world's most populous country pulled in orders of nearly five times the \$750mn size1 — a coveted nod of global confidence in the region's plans.

These recent deals are building on a foundation of significant progress in recent years. Last year saw the UAE's Noor Energy 1 secure \$2.7 billion to develop a 950MW concentrated solar plant (CSP) and photovoltaic (PV) project south of Dubai.

This marked the first certified deal under the Climate Bonds Standard in the Middle East.2 And in recent years, the UAE's Barakah nuclear power plant is the first in the Arab world, while Abu Dhabi's Al Reyadah carbon, capture and storage (CCS) project, is the world's first for a

steel production plant.

Leadership potential

The green finance market has taken new shape in recent years. In 2019, global green bond market issuances hit a record high of \$258.9 billion — up 51 per cent year-on-year, according to the Climate Bonds Initiative.

As this historically niche area of finance moves into the mainstream, the Middle East has an opportunity to position itself as an influential player. For one, Frost & Sullivan's recent analysis reveals that solar PV will generate \$182 billion investment in the Middle East's renewables market by 2025.

Of this rising demand, the Middle East's influence so far is greatest in green sukuk, which are sharia-compliant bonds.

Total green sukuk volumes worldwide more than tripled year-on-year to \$4.3 billion in 2019, the Climate Bonds Initiative detailed.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia spearheaded this growth, followed by

Indonesia and Malaysia. To give a sense of scale, the UAE's volume roughly quadrupled that of Malaysia.

For now, the US, China and France top the leaderboard of activity in the global green bonds market. Can a nation from the Middle East — a region eager to become a leader in green energy — add its name to the top ten more active market participants this decade? With the right financial guidance, we believe so.

ESG matters — a lot

The value of environmental, social and governance (ESG) in investment processes is also gaining strength in the Middle East, especially among regional sovereigns, revealed a global study by Invesco. The study found that 67 per cent of sovereign wealth funds in the region have an ESG policy — up from 30 per cent in 2017.

Ramping up ESG in the investment environment — be it for fossil fuels or renewables — means quickly improving the quality of ESG data. More than half (57 per cent) of Middle East sovereigns cited this as their main hurdle.

Importantly, don't let talk of green finance draw all the attention away from investing in the Middle East's fossil fuel market. Despite increasing talk of peak oil within the next decade, giving fossil fuels a cold financial shoulder would seriously jeopardise global energy security — a cornerstone of our civilisation. For now, financiers have a delicate balance to master; spur both green and traditional energy finance as the Middle East's melting pot finds its feet.

[The writer is Senior Vice-President, Sector Head — Energy, Mashreq Bank]

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

BANK MUSCAT OPENS NEW BRANCH AT MADINAT SANDAN

In line with Bank Muscat's vision "To serve you better, everyday", the bank has announced the opening of its new branch in the Sandan Industrial City in Halban.



The new branch, which features state-of-the-art facilities and the 'best in class' security practices, will further strengthen the largest bank network in the Sultanate. The expanding branch network, especially in areas where developmental activities are gaining momentum, highlights Bank Muscat's focus to remain the nation's bank of first choice.

Madinat Sandan is the first integrated city for light industries in the Sultanate and its strategic location will help the industrial city cater to businesses in Muscat and Batinah.

MUSCAT

DRIVE YOUR ULTIMATE DESIRE WITH LINCOLN LUXURY

Lincoln luxury has been inspiring the industry with its keen attention to detail and exceptional craftsmanship, that make every journey in a Lincoln, outstanding.



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business

MUSCAT STOCK MARKET

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CRUDE OIL PRICE

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Oman VAT Law sets penalties of up to RO 10,000 for offences



DETERRENT ACTION: To combat tax evasion, the Tax Authority is empowered to take necessary action in cases where it is proven that a taxable entity has committed fraud

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A new Value Added Tax (VAT) that was promulgated by Royal Decree recently prescribes a range of penalties in the form of fines and prison terms for tax evaders and other offences related to the new levy.

The Oman VAT Law is expected to come into force with effect from around April 16, 2021, which marks 180 days from its publication in the Official Gazette. The latter event happened on October 18, 2020, effectively providing businesses covered by the remit of the new tax with a six-month timeframe to get their accounting and IT systems in readiness for the implementation of VAT.

As with other tax-related statutes, the VAT Law too enshrines relatively stiff penalties for defaulters. Well-known tax, audit and consultancy firm KPMG Oman, the new VAT Law prescribes prison terms of not less than two months and not exceeding one year or fines ranging from RO 1,000 to 10,000 or both. The penalty is doubled for repeat offences, although the prison term may be increased by no more than half of this limit.

An advisory issued by KPMG lists as many as a dozen different types of offences or other forms of non-compliance that are liable to attract the penal provisions of the law. Liable to be penalised are taxable entities that, among other things, deliberately fail to identify

the “responsible person” – the company’s designated point of reference on tax matters.

Similarly, legal action may be initiated if “the responsible person deliberately fails to notify the Oman Tax Authority and obtain its consent to appoint another responsible person during the period of his absence for a period of more than 90 days”, according to KPMG. Also liable for action are followings acts: unauthorised fudging of data, failure to tax returns, failure to maintain tax invoices and documents in the prescribed order, failure to respond to a summons, and submission of inaccurate data in order to secure a refund.

Furthermore, belated tax payments will attract an additional tax at rate of one per cent of the tax due for every month or part of the month the tax remains due, according to KPMG.

To deter tax evasion, the Tax Authority is empowered to take necessary action in cases where it is proven that a taxable entity has committed fraud, according to the multinational professional services firm. Action may also be taken if the primary objective of any transaction effected, or activity carried out, before or after the effective date, is to avoid the tax due for any tax period, in full or in part.

Recently, Oman became the fourth member of the GCC to implement VAT, following in the footsteps of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which have since introduced the new levy. Oman’s Tax Authority has been granted up to six months after the tax comes into force to issue the Executive Regulations. This effectively means that the Tax Authority has until October 13, 2021, to issue the Executive Regulations, KPMG points out.

CMA approves framework for governance of state-owned firms

KEY FEATURE: State-owned companies must operate according to commercial and economic principles

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

Shaikh Abdullah al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), has approved a special code for the governance of state-owned companies.

Issued in response to the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the new Code of Corporate Governance seeks to improve the performance of State-Owned Companies and raise their efficiency.

Al Salmi explained that the CMA had prepared the Code for Corporate Governance for state-owned companies based on Article 20 of the Commercial Companies Law promulgated by Royal Decree 18 / 2019. The Code was formulated in consultation with the relevant entities and will broad societal participation.

These principles are based on the concept that the state-owned companies are companies that operate according to commercial and economic principles and are subject to all laws that regulate the work of commercial companies in the Sultanate unless the government specifies other principles.

Therefore, the Code stresses the importance of stating and reviewing the purpose of these companies, he said.

The principles of the Code set out the minimum practices that must be followed as a frame of reference in drafting the governance systems for state-owned companies of various legal names.

This would help these companies to formulate their internal governance systems to include a series of clear and specific policies, processes and procedures that are consistent with



The Code stresses the importance of stating and reviewing the purpose of these companies

SHAIKH ABDULLAH AL SALMI
CMA Executive President

the provisions of this Code provided that these companies are concerned with following up the implementation of the provisions of the Code.

Significantly, the Code is based on best practices adopted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), while also taking into account the legislative and regulatory

environment of the Sultanate. The principles recommended by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) emphasise the importance of unifying the ownership of state assets and the state-owned companies under one specialised umbrella that acts as a holding company and has sufficient power to set governance standards for its subsidiaries and the group, and follow up implementation of these standards.

In this context, CMA sought to establish principles for corporate governance for state-owned companies where a general national framework that represents the minimum of governance practices on which some entities such as the Oman Investment Authority will rely on.

Oman Investment authority as a sovereign investment entity that enjoys broad powers and specialisations would use this framework in setting its own standards for companies under its management consistent with these principles.

Al Salmi indicated that state-owned companies will be obligated to

disclose their unaudited quarterly or annual audited financial statements to the public through the company’s website or through the electronic publishing platform that the CMA will approve for disclosure purposes.

Transparency and disclosure are one of the fundamentals in the implementation of corporate governance due to its importance in enhancing levels of integrity and in highlighting the financial position of companies in a way that contributes to obtaining facilities and contracts from the relevant parties.

The Code includes eleven principles of good governance, notably (a) that the state-owned companies are commercial companies, and they must operate according to commercial and economic principles and are subject to all laws that regulate the work of commercial companies in the Sultanate. (b) a government company must have an effective regulatory and legal framework, and that it should be applied with care and diligence (c) the government is considered an owner and a shareholder in the company and has the right to act according to this principle.

World trade rebounding slowly, outlook uncertain

GENEVA: The value of global trade is set to fall by 7 per cent to 9 per cent in 2020 from the previous year, despite signs of a fragile rebound led by China in the third quarter, a United Nations report said on Wednesday. No region was spared by an estimated 19 per cent year-on-year plunge in world trade in the second quarter, as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted

economies, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said. Global trade recovered somewhat in the third quarter when it was estimated at about 4.5 per cent less than in the same period a year ago, the agency said in its latest update. “Trade in home office equipment and medical supplies has increased

in Q3, while it further weakened in the automotive and energy sectors,” UNCTAD said. Growth in the textiles sector was also strong. Its preliminary forecast put year-on-year growth for Q4 2020 at 3 per cent less, but the report said that uncertainties persisted due to how the pandemic would evolve. If the pandemic resurges in coming

months, that could lead to a deteriorating environment for policy-makers and sudden increase in trade-restrictive policies, it said. China’s exports rebounded strongly in the third quarter after falling in the early months of the pandemic, and have posted year-on-year growth rates of nearly 10 per cent, UNCTAD said —**Ruitters**

BRIEF BITES INSIDE

BONDS

EU MAKES BOND MARKET HISTORY WITH RECORD \$275BN DEMAND FOR SURE ISSUE



The European Union attracted the highest demand ever for a bond sale at over \$275 billion, as it kicked off fundraising for its SURE unemployment scheme. Demand was nearly 14 times the 17 billion euros the EU aims to raise from the issue.

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BANKING

CHINA TO BALANCE NEED FOR STABILISING GROWTH AND PREVENTING RISKS



China will strike a balance between stabilising economic growth and preventing risks, even as debt was allowed to temporarily rise this year to support the coronavirus-hit economy, central bank governor Yi Gang said on Wednesday.

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FUNDING

SOHAR ALUMINIUM TO SUPPORT TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AL BURAIMI



Sohar Aluminum and the Directorate General of Education in Al Buraimi Governorate signed an MoU to support technological education in the Governorate’s schools. Sohar Aluminum will fund the purchase of smart educational electronic equipment and devices for the schools.

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