

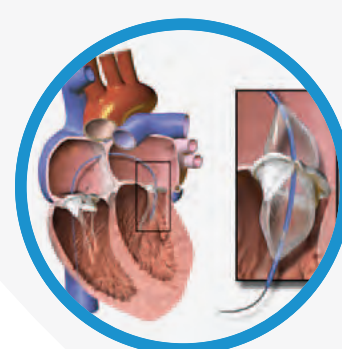
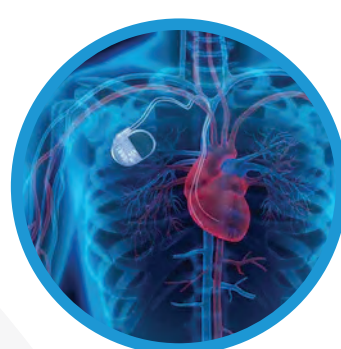


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BANK NIZWA SIGNS RO20MN FINANCING DEAL WITH ONEIC
GO TO **PAGE 14 BUSINESS**



Saudi Arabia hosts G20 summit

First G20 meet hosted by an Arab nation to focus on virus crisis and global recession

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi King Salman opened the G20 summit on Saturday in a first for an Arab nation, with the virtual forum dominated by efforts to tackle the coronavirus crisis and the worst global recession in decades.

G20 leaders, including US President Donald Trump who is refusing to concede a bitter election, popped up in multiple win-



Displayed on a projected screen at the International Media Centre in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh on November 21, 2020, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz gives an address opening the virtual G20 summit (AFP)

dows across a flickering screen, in a high-stakes webinar held amid the raging pandemic.

The leaders are huddling on-

line for the two-day 'gathering' as international efforts intensify for a large-scale rollout of coronavirus vaccines after a break-

through in trials, and as calls grow for G20 nations to plug a US\$4.5bn funding shortfall.

"Although we are optimistic

about the progress made in developing vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics tools for COVID-19, we must work to create the conditions for affordable and equitable access to these tools for all people," said King Salman, the summit's host.

"We have a duty to rise to the challenge together during this summit and give a strong message of hope and reassurance to our people by adopting policies to mitigate this crisis," he told world leaders in opening remarks.

With Saudi hopes for a grand coming-out parade dashed due to the pandemic, the event is reduced to brief online sessions of what observers call 'digital diplomacy'.

Despite having to abandon much of the usual summit pageantry, Saudi Arabia launched

the meeting with an aerial acrobatics display over Riyadh.

And denied the opportunity to take the traditional 'family photo', a montage of G20 leaders was projected onto the ruins of the historical town of Diriyah during a gala event on Friday.

Along with Chinese President Xi Jinping, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin are among leaders expected to speak at the summit, with climate change among the issues topping the agenda.

Trump is also taking part but it is unclear whether the US president, who continues to reject his election defeat, will make an address. Many G20 leaders have already congratulated his rival, President-elect Joe Biden.

AFP



US values Oman's role in regional security

Washington, US - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on behalf of his government, wished His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani people on the occasion of 50th National Day of the Renaissance.

Pompeo commended the advanced level of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. He expressed his country's appreciation for the sultanate's role in enhancing stability in the region. He said that the United States looks for more partnership with Oman in economic and security fields in the coming years under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham.

Pompeo also thanked the assistance provided by Oman, under the directives of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the United States last October when the sultanate facilitated the release of two American citizens held in Yemen.

ONA

Short musical pays tribute to Late Sultan Qaboos

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A seven-minute musical on the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said was released on National Day last week. Its creator claims *Shukran Qaboos* is the first 'semi-animation movie' that pays tribute to Baba Qaboos for his contribution towards the de-

velopment of the country.

The film was produced by Wings Production owned by Sami Sarang, a Pakistani filmmaker based in Oman. With a cast of 20 actors, the film was shot in multiple locations in and around Muscat and includes live-action and animation.

"We used animation to recreate Baba Qaboos due to lack of

footage," Sarang said. "There were several scenes that were tough to recreate and it was difficult to arrange old photographs. We felt the narration would be better through animation. Old maps and epic historical moments look more convincing in animation."

The film recognises the Late Sultan's many roles as a leader,

influential figure and teacher. "He created the foundations for education for all in Oman, and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is now carrying forward the legacy," said Sarang.

Besides filming, directing and editing *Shukran Qaboos*, Sarang also wrote the Arabic lyrics for the film. Muntasar al Balushi, Sharifa Allahbakhsh and Sama



Binat Allahbakhsh lent their voice to the soundtrack. Pre- and post-production of the film was done in a span of 30 days, involving a budget of RO2,000 and co-

production by Suhail Kausar.

Sarang hopes to screen *Shukran Qaboos* at film festivals, including the Muscat International Film Festival.

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FOOD INDUSTRY: A NATIONAL WEALTH



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The food industry has been integral to Omani culture for many generations, but with the advent of modern technology and the Blessed Renaissance, the sector witnessed significant developments. It is now considered a national wealth that touches and affects every citizen and resident, directly and indirectly.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has developed agricultural, livestock and fish production systems to facilitate increased yield. Omani dates, vegetable and fruit crops, honey, milk, table eggs, poultry meat, red meat and fish are made available not just to the local market, but also exported.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, a MAFWR official said, "The total cultivation area has increased over the last few years, from 240,283 acres in 2017 and 259,257 acres in 2018 to 262,855 acres in 2019.

"Crop production was 2,622,498 tonnes in 2017; 2,951,113 tonnes in 2018 and 3,013,826 in 2019."

One Million Date Palm Trees Project

The MAFWR has a national strategy for the development of date palms and to promote the date palm industry in the sultanate.

The Nakheel Oman Development Company was established in 2018, as an investment arm of the One Million Date Palm Trees Project, which will include an integrated factory in the wilayat of Barka and six collection centres in different governorates.

The company will purchase dates and date products from farmers to sell locally and export after processing and packaging. The cost of the project in its first stage is RO28mn, which will increase to RO75mn in the last stage.

Fishing industry

The ministry has launched several projects to support the fisheries sector by modernising boats, launching fish farms, establishing fish markets, and creating artificial breeding areas among coral reefs in Suwaiq. Following these efforts, the number of fishermen increased from 49,715 in 2018 to 50,405 in 2019.

Fish production increased by 4.8 per cent to 580,000 tonnes in



2019, compared to 553,000 tonnes in 2018.

MAFWR has stated that the sultanate's production of fish increased by 34 per cent during the first half of 2020 compared to the same period last year. Total fish production this year from January to July was 372,000 tonnes, valued at RO161mn.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, a total of 50,405 fishermen and 25,030 boats were engaged in artisanal fishing in Oman in 2019, compared to 49,715 fishermen and 23,726 boats in 2018, and 49,299 fishermen and 23,913 boats in 2017.

The ministry is aiming to increase the fishery sector's contribution to the GDP five fold, from RO225mn in 2016 to RO1.3bn in 2023. To achieve this target, the ministry expects to raise fish production from 280,000 tonnes in 2016 to 1.4mn tonnes in 2023

Treatment campaign for livestock

The MAFWR has a treatment campaign for livestock as part of its 'Preventive and Awareness Therapy' programme, which aims to provide veterinary and treatment services to farm animals.

Ministry officials also communicate with breeders to offer veterinary advice. In its efforts to offer treatment in different parts of the sultanate, 2.2mn farm animals were treated in 2018, an increase of 4.8 per cent compared to 2017.

Food investment

In 2012, the government established the Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), which is mandated to promote the sultanate's food security through partnerships with government agencies, private operators and investors.

OFIC also aims to boost economic well-being by investing in domestic and international food projects in partnership with food companies, investors and other stakeholders.

OFIC comprises several companies operating in the food sector including Al Bashayer Meat Company, Mazoon Dairy, Oman Flour Mills, Al Namaa Poultry and Oman Fisheries. Al Bashayer Meat Company is the first and largest integrated red meat project in the sultanate that was established within the framework of the national objective of achieving self-sufficiency and food security of red meat protein in Oman.

Parents, teachers welcome education in ‘new normal’

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As students went back to their classes recently, most adopting blended education, there have been mixed reactions among parents and teachers. A majority have welcomed the move.

Balquees al Hasaani, president of Knowledge Oman and an educator, said remote learning will help children, and their level of responsibility will increase.

“In time there will be new ways and styles that will evolve. It will also add value and skills to our students,” Balquees said.

“Remote learning is good but the emotional interaction between teachers and students somehow will get faded. There will be no instant responses. But right now blended learning is the only option to deal with the new normal. The pandemic has glued us to digital screens which we previously always discouraged, but now we have to live with that.”

Khalfan al Mahrizi said, “I appreciate the Supreme Committee’s efforts in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to get students back to school safely. As a parent of a six year old daughter, I prefer my kid to attend school physically, and that is because, at this age, kids need to have physical interaction with their educators and their classmates. Kids need to socialise as it helps them develop their communication skills, teamwork, and confidence.”

Indian schools are currently conducting online classes.

Many have accepted it as a precautionary measure while



others see the need to adapt with the changing times.

Neha Sujamani, a parent said, “Children will adapt to this and in the coming years, physically attending a class will not really matter. However, one concern is that children will miss the real-time discussions and playtime which they would have in school.”

She also feels that as school facilities are not used, they should consider offering discounts on fees.

Prakash Joshi, another parent whose children study in Indian School Muscat, said he feels online education is one of the most innovative and interactive ways of learning. “I strongly recommend it in this pandemic time. It’s a convenient way to pursue children’s education.” He said it will take some time for students to adjust from traditional classroom learning to online classes.

“Every education system has its own pros and cons. We need to assess our requirements against existing options.”

D N Rao, principal of Indian School Wadi Kabir, too welcomed the move.

He said, “Considering the present situation in Oman and across the globe, online education is the only option available to learners and educators. The approach offers flexible timings and there is a chance to review the classes as and when required. The classes are enjoyable.”

Blended learning will open up a plethora of opportunities for teachers and schools to engage students meaningfully, said Dr Baby Sam Saamuel, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman.

He said, “Some amount of digitisation will make a lot of processes easier for both students and teachers, while in-person lessons will offer the social

skills and support system that children at their age require. Therefore, regardless of the end of COVID-19, blended learning is likely to be the norm for schools in coming years.”

He said when COVID-19 struck Oman and schools were closed, Indian schools were quick to make an almost seamless transition to remote schooling through various virtual platforms. “Similarly, we are confident of implementing an efficient and well-balanced blended learning model to ensure enhanced, multi-dimensional learning for our students. It will also inspire a radical, positive transformation of teaching, assessment and peer learning, as the conventional methods may seem inefficient or outdated. Given the mass adoption of digital and virtual platforms, all stakeholders may now be better aware of the possibilities and benefits offered by these media,” he added.

66 year old citizen hikes 22km on 50th National Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

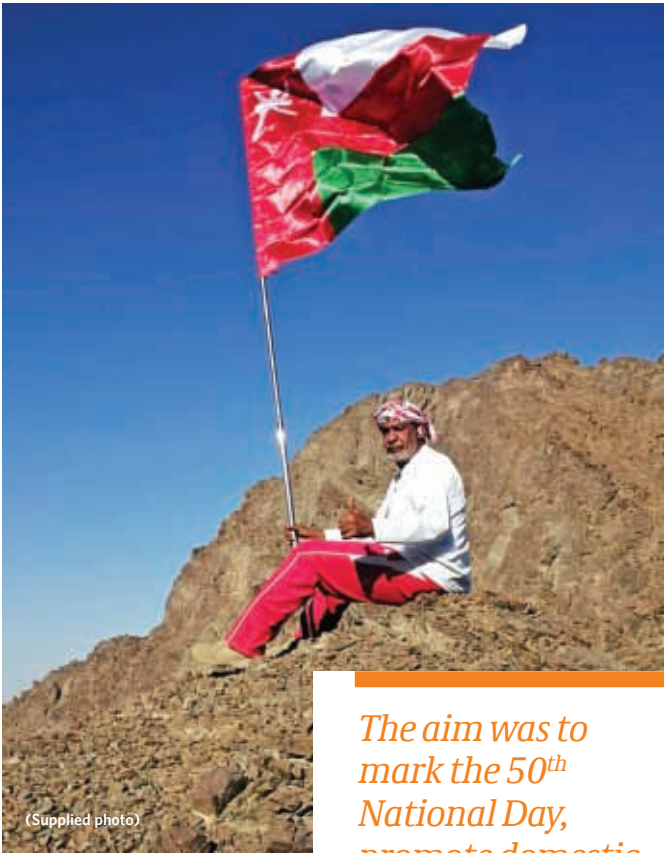
To express his love and loyalty to the country and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Saif bin Suleiman Zahir al Rawahi, 66, from the wilayat Nizwa in Dhakhliyah celebrated the 50th National Day in a unique way.

He set off on a challenging 22km hike on November 13, starting from Sama Heights Resort & Spa to the summit of Jebel Shams.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Rawahi said, “The aim was to mark the 50th National Day, promote domestic tourism, explore the mountains and encourage the culture of fitness among people. I carried the National Flag on the occasion of the 50th National Day.”

Rawahi has participated in 35 hiking and walking tours since 2015 in several parts of Oman to promote domestic tourism and cleanliness at tourist sites on the mountains.

“I have taken part in walking events on earlier National Days to celebrate the occasion. I walked from Al Barakah Palace to Musandam, a distance of 40km, to celebrate the 48th National Day. To mark the 49th Renaissance Day, I walked a distance of 40km as part of a rally from Nizwa Fort to Salalah carrying a 6m long Omani flag,”



(Supplied photo)

The aim was to mark the 50th National Day, promote domestic tourism, explore the mountains and encourage the culture of fitness among people

SAIF BIN SULEIMAN
ZAHIR AL RAWAHI

Rawahi said.

He has hiked to the top of Jebel Shams twice and Jebel Akhdar five times to raise awareness on the importance of sport and keeping the environment clean.

“I have six sons who come with me on some hiking events,” Rawahi said.

Rawahi’s celebrations for the 50th National Day will continue. He is planning a 100km cycling

campaign in some of the wilayats of Dhakhliyah to mark Oman’s golden jubilee.

NCSI starts survey on citizens’ living conditions

Muscat - The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) is conducting the fourth round of a national survey on citizens’ living conditions.

The survey, which will be carried out from November 22 to December 10, aims to identify the extent of satisfaction of Omani citizens with some aspects of their life, such as health, environmental conditions, work, employment, entertainment and their relationships. It will also survey their social participation and priorities.

It aims to identify the changes that have occurred in citizens’ situations since the last survey conducted in November 2018. The earlier surveys were done in October 2014 and October 2016.

The exercise covers a survey

sample of 3,000 individuals from all governorates of the sultanate, within the margin limit of error of not more than three per cent, and with a confidence level of 95 per cent.

The survey is based on the methodology of weighing the sample so as to correspond the sample distribution in accordance with the variables of the governorate, gender, nationality of the citizen/expatriate, educational level (less than secondary, secondary or higher than secondary), and age groups (less than 30 years old, 30-49 years, and 50 years and older).

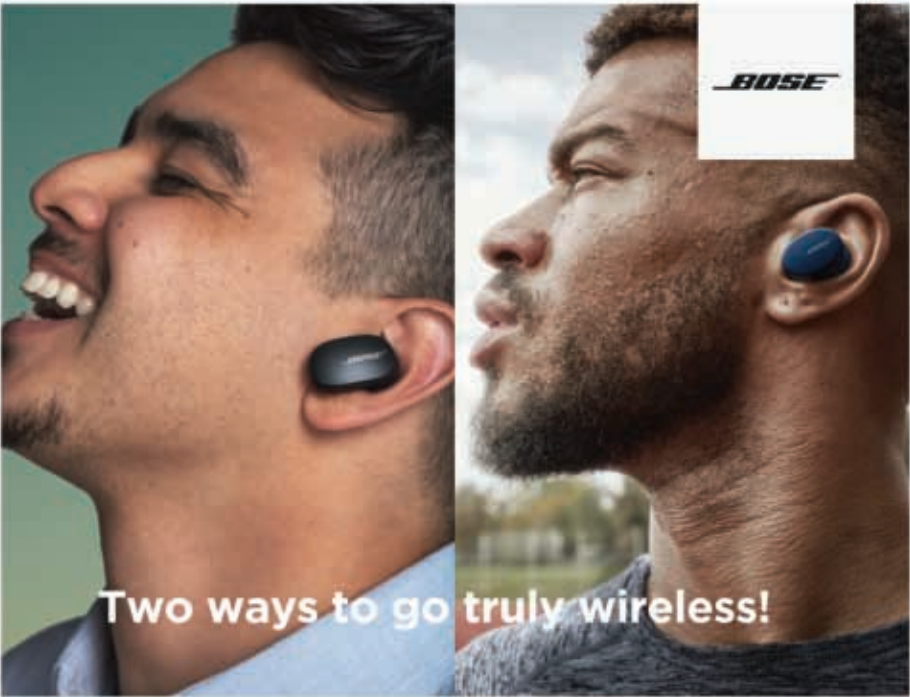
The data is being collected through telephone communications via mobile phones, as it saves time, effort and cost.

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Two films pay tribute to men on Nov 19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To celebrate International Men's Day, observed annually on November 19, and to raise awareness on mental and emotional health of men, two short films have been made in Oman.

Pitah, an experimental film addressing issues faced by fathers, is inspired by three global epics - *Mahabharata*, *Arabian Nights* and *King Lear*.

Dr J Retnakumar, who essays the role of three fathers in *Pitah*, said, "The movie is a tribute to the fathers and men around the world. Our aim was to showcase the fact that the emotions of a father for his children are the same irrespective of cultural



Cast and crew of *Pitah* (Supplied photo)

or religious settings. Technically, we wanted to follow the iconic style of Peter Brook's *King Lear*."

The film experiments technically with close-ups, dolly shots, Dutch angles, J-cuts, split screens and breaking the fourth wall. Shot in one day and edited over a course of 45 days, *Pitah* has a multinational cast.

The film was well received in social media circles, including Maryam al Zadjali, director of Omani Society for Fine Arts, who said, "This drama is an ode to all fathers around the world. He is protective, often protective of his children."

The second short film, titled *He Is*, pays tribute to the common man encountered everyday

in offices, roads and malls.

The plot revolves around a man in a mall parking lot who is hit by a woman driver and how the latter's mindset changes regarding men during the short interaction that follows.

Vinod Raghavan, production head of *He Is*, said, "The unfair idea of toxic masculinity has filled the social structure. It is time to break such norms. Misandry must be countered with the right tools and films are an excellent medium for that."

"The film doesn't portray victimisation; neither does it slam any gender. It is merely an eye-opener regarding a stereotype that the media, the ad world, news reporting and even social structures have created."

RCA issues book on values of Late HM Sultan Qaboos

Muscat - As part of the celebrations marking the 50th National Day of Renaissance and to preserve the values established by the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Royal Court Affairs (RCA) has issued a book titled *Sultanic Values of Sultan Qaboos bin Said*, authored by Dr Saleh bin Mohammed al Fahdi.

The book highlights the values of the government as established by the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos on different occasions. It also includes his speeches and analyses the Royal speeches which, the author said, were in harmony with the sultanate's policies and history.

The book will enrich Omani



libraries and assist researchers and students interested in studying the character and attributes of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. It will also set the stage for a new tradition of Royal thought to be documented.

ONA

'Glorious November around the World' launched to mark 50th National Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day, Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, launched 'Glorious November around the World' initiative in the presence of Hamoud bin Mohammed al Azri, general supervisor of Oman Qaboos Website, which is dedicated to showcase the personality of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the world in several languages.

Sayyid Badr hailed the international initiative launched by the website as it also provides an important e-window to showcase loyalty and gratitude to His



(Supplied photo)

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

He appreciated the efforts of all those working for the website

to allow people from around the world to vouch loyalty and gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan, and share in the sultanate's joy of the National Day in his/her

own language.

The initiative received wide support from the embassies of countries accredited to the sultanate, as well as Oman's em-

The initiative received wide support from the embassies of countries accredited to the sultanate, as well as Oman's embassies abroad, for inviting people to take part

bassies abroad, for inviting people to take part in the event.

The global initiative can be viewed at <http://www.oman50.net>

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94442000 (Emergency)
Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat -
24618900/1/2/3
Sohar - 26704639/49/50
Apollo Hospital Muscat, Hamriya: 24787766, 24782666, 24787780
Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat 24770800, 90999335, 90999334 (Emergency)
Starcare Hospital: 24557200
Emergency number: 24558333
Dr Harub's Clinic: 24563217, 2456381, 99254940 (Emergency)
Emirates Medical Center: 24604540
KIMS Oman Hospital: 24760105
Lama Polyclinic: CBD 24799077, 24788881, 24788577, 24707566, 24799655, Al Khuwayr 24478817, 24478818, Sohar 26751128

NATIONAL DAY HUES



The sultanate's 50th National Day decorations and lighting through the lens of Omani photographer Majid al Amri (Supplied photo)

50th National Day Celebrations

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Oman Airports develops new freighter incentive scheme for Muscat and Salalah



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - Oman Airports has developed an incentive scheme, in cooperation with its cargo handling partners Transom Handling and Transom SATS, for the next five years. It includes numerous incentives and fee reductions that support new airlines operating freighters into and out of Muscat and Salalah.

As per a statement, the incen-

tive scheme will be open to the new freighter operators commencing at any point in the next five years through to October 2025, and will support a route over a two-year period with reductions in aircraft handling charges, cargo loading/unloading, and reductions in the cost of build-up or breakdown of both arriving and departing cargo.

The incentive scheme will be open to the new freighter operators commencing at any point in the next five years and will support a route over a two-year period

'It is no understatement to say that 2020 has been an unprecedented time for all, and not least

the aviation industry. During this period, the importance of air cargo has been well recognised,

and maintaining cargo links to facilitate global supply chains has been critical to supporting communities across the world,' the statement said.

'As such, the Commercial Department at Oman Airports has continued to work closely with our business partners all through 2020, with Muscat International Airport remaining open to com-

Muscat, Salalah airports celebrate National Day

Muscat - Amidst strict COVID-19 prevention measures, the 50th National Day was celebrated at Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and its other regional airports with lights bearing the hues of the Omani flag.

Passenger terminals were lit and national songs echoed across all of the sultanate's airports, while duty-free shops at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport provided customers with special discounts in celebration of the joyous occasion. Airport employees decorated their desks and offices with the colours of the Omani flag to express their joy on the monumental day.

A concerted campaign entitled #SafeJourneyBack is also underway across Oman Airports' social media plat-

forms, marking the return of operations in early October following the prolonged closure due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

Believing in the importance of feedback in upgrading its services, the campaign was also aimed at encouraging travellers to share feedback on their travel experience through the sultanate's airports.

Oman Airports has always been keen to interact with travellers in Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and its regional airports.

Airports in GCC countries also joined the sultanate's celebrations of its 50th National Day of the Renaissance by posting greetings on social media platforms, and putting up portraits of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



(Supplied photo)

EA gets new website

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) launched a new website under the patronage of its chairman, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, on Thursday.

The launch of the website came as part of the sultanate's celebrations of the 50th National Day. It also came as a realisation of EA's plans aimed at providing the best services to the public and serving many segments of the society including students, researchers, interested people and entrepreneurs. It aims to help keep pace with the techno-

logical progress witnessed by the sultanate in its various institutions, and economic and industrial sectors.

The website provides information about environmental activities and more than 23 electronic services.

The site includes all the Royal Decrees, laws, articles, decisions and regulations related to the environment; international agreements entered into by the sultanate in the field of environment and nature conservation, and international cooperation with various international and regional organisations in the field of the environment.

DGPADC takes part in medical devices and supplies forum

Muscat - The Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs & Drug Control (DGPADC) took part in a virtual medical devices and supplies forum organised by the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency in Japan from November 16-20.

A number of health agencies authorised to monitor medical devices and equipment participated in the five-day forum.

It discussed the latest developments in monitoring systems of these products, exchanged experiences in the field of safety and effectiveness of medical devices and equipment, as well as discussed quality systems and standard specifications of these products.

The medical devices and equipment sector is an important part on the healthcare system, as these products play a major role in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

Ministries sign pact to support disabled children's project in Salalah



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its social responsibility, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM), represented by oil and gas companies, have signed a financing agreement with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) for a building

project for the Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children in Salalah.

The ceremony was attended by Eng Hussain al Bathari, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's branch in Dhofar governorate, Ahmed al Shehri, acting director general of

the General Directorate of Social Development in Dhofar, and Eng Abdul Amir Abdul Mohsen al Ajmi, external affairs and value creation director at Petroleum Development Oman.

Mohammed ba Omar, chairman of Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children in Salalah, said that vocational re-

habilitation of the disabled is one of the important stages for employing their energies and abilities in the appropriate profession.

He emphasised that the project constitutes a model for social responsibility and social work between the government and the private sector.

Oman-UK friendship book celebrates 50 years of renaissance



London - Marking the 50th National Day of the blessed Omani Renaissance renewed under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Embassy of Oman in the UK launched a booklet titled *United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman—A Celebration of Friendship*, which perpetuates the memory of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham, in a message, thanked 'First' establishment, which compiled and published the booklet that constitutes an important reference for the global community.

Meanwhile, Queen Elizabeth II of Britain expressed her thanks

The booklet includes private letters from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Queen Elizabeth II, and articles by various dignitaries

to First in a 'message of commitment' that she sent to His Majesty Sultan Haitham on the 220th anniversary of relations between Britain and Oman, as

well as her thanks to all in charge of such a glorious occasion.

The booklet includes private letters from His Majesty Sultan Haitham and Queen Elizabeth II, and articles by various dignitaries, in addition to a detailed account of achievements made by the sultanate, the challenges it addressed within the context of different geographic, cultural, historical, diplomatic and economic scenarios.

The booklet also touches on the success and progress made in relation to the friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

ONA

Bank Muscat wins prestigious awards

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won two prestigious awards at Asia-money Middle East's Best Bank Awards 2020. The bank won these awards for the Best Domestic Bank 2020 (Oman) and the Best Corporate and Investment Bank 2020 (Oman). These awards are a recognition of Bank Muscat's outstanding contributions to the sultanate's banking sector across all customer segments. The evaluation was conducted based on a number of criteria, including the product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, IT systems and offerings.

Ahmed Faqir al Balushi, chief corporate banking officer, Bank Muscat, said, "In line with our Vision, 'To serve you better, everyday', our commitment of providing the best banking services and solutions to each of our customer is more than ever. Our 'right from the start' approach involves putting our customers at the center of everything we do



and developing a greater understanding of their businesses, needs, perspectives and behaviours to deliver reliable, dynamic and innovative banking services. This award is a testimony of the excellent all-round performance of the bank across all aspects of its operations."

As the foremost bank in Oman, Bank Muscat has created an organisation that centers on customers, rather than products and services, and continues to develop its internal capability to design the best customer experiences, and deliver tailor-made



services. In the Corporate Banking segment, Bank Muscat's Global Relationship Management Programme has made a significant difference in enhancing services and strengthening relations with its large base of clients.

The bank is committed to supporting large governmental clients, institutions and corpo-

rates in smoothly transitioning towards efficient technology-focused processes. While the bank was already well on its way to achieving the digital banking goals, the demands of the current environment have further spring-boarded these efforts. In fact, this emphasis has resulted in excellent growth in the value of transactions through the cor-

porate payments and collections e-channels, which crossed RO1.5bn in the first nine months of 2020.

The bank has also been playing a vital part in several large-scale and key infrastructure projects.

The key to Bank Muscat's project finance proposition is the constant endeavour to add value

to projects through innovative financial structuring, sectoral expertise and sound due-diligence techniques. The bank has been maintaining its emphasis in supporting feasible projects in core sectors including oil and gas, petrochemicals, telecoms, water and power, large-scale industry, shipping and aviation, hospitality and integrated

tourism projects.

The bank also offers integrated funding solutions, covering the full spectrum of advisory, structuring and funding solutions including private placements and public offers and quasi-equity structured products for as equity solutions and debt syndications, DCM, subordinated debt, and preferred structures in conventional and Sharia'a-compliant format as debt solutions.

As a validation of its success, the bank's investment banking department has been successfully advising and arranging funding worth billions of rials for its government and corporate clients over the past few years.

Bank Muscat has been consistently recognised on the international stage in line with its role as the leading financial services provider of the sultanate.

The bank has won a number of other accolades over the past few years, being awarded by top-rated international publications like The Banker, Global Finance and Euromoney time and again across multiple categories.

OIH salutes His Majesty the Sultan on National Day



On the joyous occasion of Oman's 50th National Day, Oman International Hospital (OIH) - the newest addition to Oman's healthcare sector - congratulated His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman.

Manuel Carvalho, COO of Oman International Hospital, said, "We, the Oman International Hospital team, convey our warmest wishes and felicitations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on this great occasion. This marks the 50th year of the Omani renaissance, and we are honoured to be able to witness

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik continue in the footsteps of Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said (may he rest in peace) by leading the sultanate with great vision towards further progress and prosperity."

He added, "The healthcare sector has always been a focus of the government, and this is evident in the country's 9th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) which prioritises and emphasises the importance of the development of integrated medical services and further investment in medical training of human resources. The government has also en-

couraged the participation of the private sector in the healthcare sector in order to aid the country in reaching its healthcare goals."

OIH, a super specialty hospital envisioned by Oman Brunei Investment Company in association with Oman's largest private business conglomerate, Suhail Bahwan Group, is managed by Idealmed GHS, which is part of IGHS, an integrated health group that was born in the city of Coimbra, Portugal. The hospital is expected to open its doors during the first quarter of 2021 and will provide world class healthcare services and treatments.

LG launches wearable air purifier

Following its unveiling at IFA 2020, LG Electronics (LG) has announced the upcoming availability of its personal air solution in the sultanate - known as the LG PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier.

As a global leader in clean air solutions, LG has long been associated with empowering healthy, hygienic lifestyles and this reputation has resulted in the creation of an entire new category of wearable air purifier technology to deliver a new level of portable protection. LG's ever-expanding line-up of PuriCare air purifiers includes single and double tower models for residential spaces, a commercial model for offices and even a portable device for use on-the-go.

With its latest edition to the PuriCare family, LG seeks to ensure that clean air and optimal breathing comfort are maintained from wherever the user may be.

While the importance of maintaining healthy air quality is a topic receiving more widespread attention now, discussions around air quality have been a major concern for nations and individuals around the world for a number of years.

LG's PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier has been in development since 2017 - undergoing three years of extensive R&D and product testing.



Ensuring comfort

Within its research, LG identified common challenges for mask-wearers, including regulating air flow without becoming too warm or claustrophobic and having glasses periodically fog up. Additionally, as people become more conscious of the environment, the need for a more sustainable solution was clear.

The PuriCare Wearable has been ergonomically designed, based on extensive facial shape analysis. The device fits snugly around the user's face, minimising air leakage around the nose and chin area.

The face guard also features a silicone pad which seeks to promote comfortable fit for hours on

end and reduce the fogging up of glasses, while the inner cover prevents internal contamination.

"Over the years, LG has demonstrated its commitment to positively impacting people's lives through the power of technology. As the PuriCare line-up continues to expand, we are particularly excited by the potential of this product, which reimagines the possibilities of air purification and is sure to resonate with health-conscious consumers across Oman. We believe that the new wearable air purifier will provide people with greater peace-of-mind," said Sudhir M, CEO, OTE Group.

To deliver a new level of personal protection, the LG PuriCare

Wearable Air Purifier harnesses two H13 HEPA filters, which work to prevent up to 99.95 per cent of harmful airborne matter, such as viruses, bacteria and common allergens from entering the wearer's respiratory system.

LG's patented Respiratory Sensor detects the cycle and volume of the user's breathing, automatically adjusting the PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier's DUAL Fans accordingly via three speed settings. The dynamic fans are able to speed up when the wearer is inhaling, and slow down to reduce resistance upon exhaling. The LG PuriCare Wearable Air Purifier will be available at select retail stores in Oman from late December.

Shangri-La resort celebrates National Day in unique way

Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Resort and Spa celebrated the 50th National Day of Oman with a grand reveal of the largest ever collection of flags on its premises overlooking the Sea of Oman. One thousand national flags of the sultanate were raised on 1,444sqm on the Shangri-La's 500m beach.

This larger than life-sized mosaic marked a significant milestone in celebrating the 50th Omani National Day.

To mark this special day, Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Resort and Spa had organised a virtual ceremony, where guests and partners were invited to watch the 'Live Stream' of the celebration of this special day in accordance with the current health and safety restrictions.

Of all the landmark days in the history of Oman, November 18, 2020 is a significant date for the

nation to remember.

The special ceremony was attended by chairman of the board and members, and general manager and a number of senior employees of the Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Resort.

The afternoon started with a social distanced photo of all the attendees in front of the fluttering flags on the Shangri-La beach.

The objective of the event was to salute Oman on this significant day and to reflect the feeling of national pride from the attendees of Shangri-La Resorts in Oman.

The celebration was rounded off with a mega cake-cutting ceremony.

The 24sqm cake was placed around the Al Bandar lawn area overlooking the flags by the beach.

The cake weighed 550kg and



it required 50kg of pure chocolate, 150kg of sugar to create five sumptuous flavours.

This masterpiece took five days to assemble. On this National Day, Oman celebrated re-

newed renaissance with further milestones planned for the years to come.

Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Resort and Spa continues to be amongst the leaders in the

tourism renaissance since 2006.

Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, an iconic flagship brand of the Shangri-La Group, currently operates over 80 deluxe hotels and resorts with a room inventory of over 35,000.

Renowned for its distinctive Asian hospitality, the company has properties in Australia, Canada, Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan, Fiji, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, The Sultanate of Oman, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

The group's award-winning Golden Circle loyalty programme extends to all properties of Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts worldwide.

For more information, visit www.shangri-la.com.

Nissan Oman gives 0% interest up to 3 years on some models

Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has launched a special offer and attractive rate of interest on a range of its models to deliver the best possible value with amazing offers and value propositions.

As part of the scheme it will be extending 0 per cent interest up to three years on select models. Other Interest slabs include 1.99 per cent for 4 years or 2.49 per cent for 5 years or 2.99 per cent for 6 years. The scheme is applicable on select stock of Kicks, X-Trail, Altima and Pathfinder.

The special promotion will be available till January 16, 2021 on applicable models purchased for personal use. As part of the special offer, Nissan Oman is also offering free fuel card, periodic maintenance service, cash gift, free registration and free insurance.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "On the special occasion of Oman's National Day we are dedicating this scheme to customers who aspire to own a Nissan vehicle. This scheme is designed to be flexible and customers can choose special interest rates as per their convenience. Our customers stand to benefit much from this special offer."

"The offer will enable buyers



to purchase Nissan cars at attractive EMIs. The offer varies across models and variants."

Special interest rate

Special rate of interest is available on popular Nissan models - Kicks, X-Trail, Altima and Pathfinder. On select MY19/MY20 stocks of Kicks, X-Trail, Altima and Pathfinder customers can get 0 per cent up to three years or 1.99 per cent for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years.

For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to Finance/Credit approval. Customers can opt for only one of the interest rate options. EMIs will be highest for 0 per cent for three years scheme. This offer is

valid till stocks of these units last. This benefit will be applicable for financing through select finance companies only. Customers purchasing in cash, LPO, credit will not be eligible for special interest rate benefit.

EMI for popular models

Customers can avail low EMI rate as part of the offer. Starting EMI for Nissan Altima is RO156. For Nissan Kicks starting EMI is RO111. For Nissan X-Trail starting EMI is RO180 and for Nissan Pathfinder starting EMI is RO246. These EMIs are calculated basis 2.99 per cent rate of interest for 6 years loan tenure and the special interest rates are applicable on select stocks of these models.

Free insurance

Nissan customers can enjoy free insurance in Oman and UAE for first year for private registration

on models like Nissan Micra, Sunny, Sentra, Maxima, Kicks, X-Trail, Pathfinder, Altima, Patrol Falcon, Patrol Safari, Patrol Navara, Patrol Pickup and Patrol.

Service package

Customers can enjoy free periodic maintenance service package for 3 years/ 60,000km on Nissan Micra, Sunny, Sentra, Maxima, Kicks, X-Trail, Pathfinder, Altima, Patrol Falcon, Patrol Safari, Patrol Navara, Patrol Pickup, Patrol and Urvan. This offer is valid for 10,000km service intervals.

Assured cash gift

Under the special promotion, customers can avail assured cash gift of RO1,200 on Nissan Micra, RO1,200 to RO1,500 on Nissan Sunny; from RO1,600 to RO1,800 for Nissan Sentra; RO3,100 on Nissan X-Trial, from RO2,200 to RO2,600 on Nissan Altima; from RO1,700 to

RO2,000 on Nissan Kicks; from RO4,000 to RO4,500 on Nissan Pathfinder; RO2,200 to RO2,700 on Nissan Navara, RO2,500 on Nissan Maxima, RO4,000 on Nissan Patrol, RO3,000 on Nissan Patrol Falcon, Nissan Patrol Safari and Nissan Pickup, and RO2,700 on Nissan Urvan.

Fuel card

Customers of Nissan Micra 20MY will get a fuel card of RO500. Customers of 19MY Nissan Maxima, 19MY Nissan Patrol Falcon, 19MY Nissan Patrol Safari and 19MY Nissan Patrol are entitled for a free fuel card of RO1,000. Customers of Nissan Navara (18MY/19MY) are entitled to a fuel card of RO500.

For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011. For more details on Nissan vehicles visit their new website: www.nissanoman.com.

NBO launches special edition of its Badeel card

As part of a string of initiatives to mark the occasion of the sultanate's 50th National Day under the theme 'From the Nation's Bank, to the Nation', National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched a special edition of its popular Badeel Prepaid Card.

Available for a limited time only, the card features exclusive offers and discounts, starting with 5 per cent cash back when using it to pay at particular fuel stations across Oman and online shopping.

Both NBO customers and non-NBO customers can get their hands on the card for just RO5 until December 10. Adding to the unique benefits of its award-winning Badeel portfolio, NBO continues to be at the forefront of innovation in the sultanate's banking industry.

Maha al Raisi, head of Products at NBO, said, "As the sultanate's national bank we are proud to be celebrating this remarkable milestone in our coun-

try's history. To spread the joy, we launched this very special limited edition Badeel card, which features the official 50th National Day logo. As well as serving as a memorable keepsake, it boasts a wide range of exciting features, offers and discounts to add value to our customers lives."

As the sultanate's first-ever prepaid card, Badeel uses the latest card security which allows it to provide contactless technology to help conduct quick, easy and secure transactions.

It is indeed an innovative payment tools to manage day to day local and international POS purchases along with online transactions.

The Badeel Prepaid Card allows users to manage the household finances by monitoring the spend of up to six cards, setting a daily spending limit by retail category or by individual card and being able to distribute to any linked card.



Travel Point organises blood donation camp

In celebration of the Sultanate of Oman's 50th National Day, Travel Point LLC, Oman's largest travel and hospitality company, conducted a blood donation drive at the Department of Blood Banks Services in Muscat.

"As a gesture of gratitude towards the loving country of Oman, we decided to organise a blood donation camp; wherein 50 members of the Travel Point team volunteered for this noble cause," stated Travel Point.

"In light of the current ongoing pandemic, we wanted to make a contribution that would help the medical sector in the sultanate while showing our desire to stand with Oman in solidarity."

Travel Point also conveyed the company and its staff's heartiest well wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the people of the Sultanate of Oman on the occasion of the celebration of the glorious 50th National Day.

Qatar Airways helps passengers to reconnect with their family and friends this winter

Qatar Airways is making it possible for travellers to reconnect with their family and friends this winter season as they return home, visit friends or enjoy a new destination.

While the winter season is traditionally the time to travel and discover the world, this year families and friends who spent a long time separated from loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic will have an opportunity to come together and cherish memories for years to come.

The national carrier of Qatar operates two weekly flights from Muscat and another two weekly flights in codeshare with Oman Air, offering more options and enhanced connectivity to the most popular destinations in Europe, the United States, and South East Asia via Hamad International Airport.

Qatar Airways vice president



of Sales for Gulf, Middle East, Levant, and Caucasus region, Bennet Stephens, said, "During these unprecedented times, when millions of people have been separated from their loved ones, Qatar Airways is working relentlessly to make sure families

and friends are able to get together and celebrate this special festive season once again."

Throughout 2020, Qatar Airways was the largest airline flying consistently throughout in order to fulfil its mission of taking people home as COVID-19 re-

stricted global travel. As a result, Qatar Airways gained unrivalled experience in passenger safety. The airline ensures the highest levels of hygiene standards, recently including Honeywell's Ultraviolet (UV) cabin system, which can inactivate viruses and

bacteria. Qatar Airways also provides Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for cabin crew and a complimentary protective kit and disposable face shields for passengers, who can be sure their journey is safe and seamless.

To learn more about Qatar Airways stringent safety and hygiene protocols, visit qatarairways.com/safety.

Furthermore, Qatar Airways continues to apply its flexible booking policy, available for all tickets booked before December 31, 2020. Passengers can hold onto their tickets for two years, benefit from unlimited date changes, or exchange their tickets for a future travel voucher with 10 per cent extra value.

Moreover, passengers whose travel plans were affected by factors outside their control can change their original destination anywhere.

Z-Corp's team distributes masks and sanitisers in Buraimi

To emphasise the importance of wearing masks and maintaining hygiene in public, The Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp)'s 'collaboration team' distributed masks and sanitisers in all schools in the Buraimi governorate.

The 'collaboration team' stressed on the importance of using hand sanitisers and face masks and how they play a very vital role in personal hygiene and protection from germs and other deadly infections.

On her part, Dr Fathiya bint Khalfan al Sadia, director general of the General Directorate of Education in Buraimi governorate, said, "At the outset, we would like to thank the collaboration team at the Z-Corp for this initiative in contributing to the provision of masks and sterilisers to all schools in Buraimi governorate.

The directorate conducts awareness programmes everyday, especially in schools that have opened. We make sure through school administrations that they follow healthy habits that will contribute to limiting the spread of the virus.

"The health authorities in Oman and World Health Organization (WHO) have mandated the use of face masks and hand sanitisers in all the public places and let us all continue to do so. The private sector collaborating with the Ministry of Education to spread awareness about COVID-19 virus is an important gesture."

The 'collaboration team' comprises of a group of employees of Z-Corp and its subsidiaries who participate in community initiatives which are planned and con-



ducted by them. The 'collaboration team' undertakes projects that bring to focus Z-Corp's continued and evolving socially relevant strategy to make a positive difference in the society. This initiative comes within the framework of the corporate social

responsibility strategy of Z-Corp and displayed the group's commitment to support the community it operates in.

Faisal al Mandhari, a member of the 'collaboration team' said, "We believe that wearing a mask and practising hygiene by wash-

ing hands or using sanitiser is an act of compassion. It indicates that individuals who do that care about the community, and country. We are pleased to distribute masks and encourage every member of community to cover up and sanitise. Our collabora-

tion team distributed masks and sanitisers in the Buraimi governorate schools to create awareness about the importance of wearing masks and use of hand sanitiser to check the spread of the COVID-19."

He added, "Through initiatives such as this we remind each other about the community responsibility we have to keep each other safe. During COVID-19 we do so by wearing mask and using sanitiser. We are happy that our collaboration team has taken up an important initiative. An important strategy at Z-Corp is that it encourages employees to get involved in their local communities by actively contributing their time for worthy causes and projects. The Zubair Corporation will continue to cultivate its employees' sense of responsibility

and encourage them to indulge in meaningful activities.

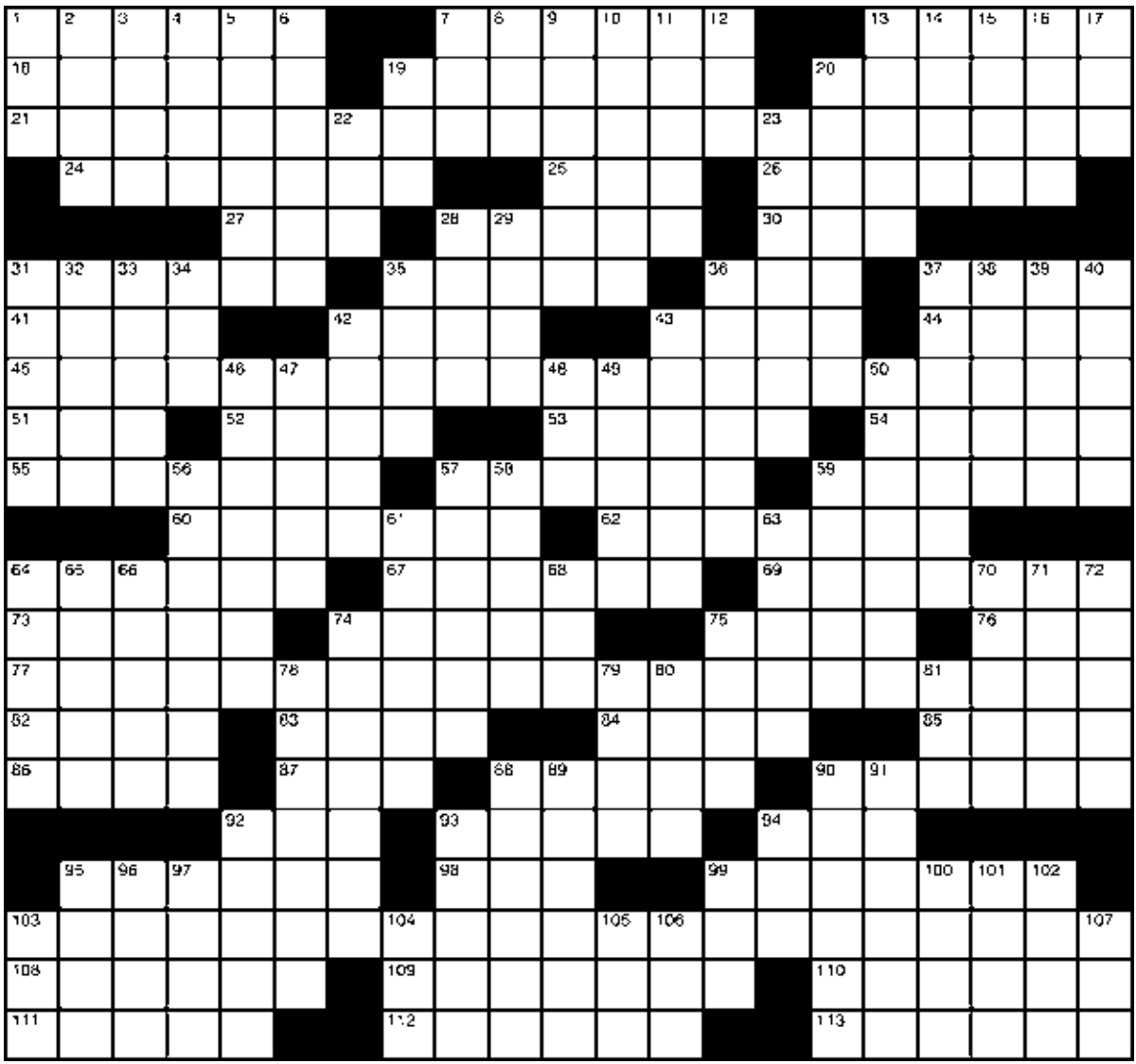
"We encourage everyone to follow all health and safety protocols. Z-Corp continue to strictly follow all protocols, guidelines, instructions, advisories, directions issued by Oman's Supreme Committee and health authorities with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Z-Corp is implementing several safety measures.

To ensure the safety of its employees, the company complies with various government guidelines including wearing of masks, following of social distancing rules and temperature checks.

Additionally, the company has installed hand sanitiser stations at the entrance and other points in the office.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 East Indian sailor

7 Echo

13 Shirley, of “Goldfinger”

18 Audrey, in “Love in the Afternoon”

19 Librarian’s request

20 Conjure

21 Start of a Valentine verse

24 Jewish school

25 ___ mouse

26 Seventh from the sun

27 Yoko

28 Mall unit

30 Wee bit

31 Weeds wearers

35 Give a buzz

36 Arti or parti ending

37 Secretary

41 Burden

42 Make tea, e.g.

43 Cartoonist

Silverstein

44 Needle case

45 More of verse

51 Explosive inits.

52 Askew

53 Gray and Moran

54 Throw out

55 Heckled

57 Attacking with a
- spray

59 Bronzed from the sun

60 Communications satellite

62 Most astute

64 Leave high and dry

67 Stamen part

69 Meantime

73 Poe’s middle name

74 ___ Detoo, of “Star Wars”

75 Take the lead

76 Way preceeder

77 More of verse

82 Brubeck or Garroway

83 Harem rooms

84 “No sweat!”

85 Gilpin, of “Frasier”

86 Flanders stream

87 1st state

88 Yoga posture

90 Daisy type

92 Admiral’s ser.

93 Actress Verdugo

94 R.R. stop

95 Death: Ger.

98 Twice VI

99 O’Hare, for one

103 End of verse

108 UN agency

109 “The Bald Soprano”
- playwright

110 ___ oneself: be aloof

111 Aromatic wood

112 International actress Landi

113 Piaf’s “La Vie ___”
- DOWN**

1 Varnish substance

2 Like ___ of sunshine

3 Math ratio

4 Bounders

5 Haphazardly

6 Sticky stuff

7 Shred

8 Building wing

9 “___ Place”

10 Whole

11 Severe

12 Trillion: comb. form

13 Inward: anat.

14 Stratford’s river

15 Bean curd

16 Trappist cheeses

17 Clear, as profit

19 Wee, to Burns

20 1948 Arab-___ War

22 Nobelist ___

Andric

23 Tiny treats for squirrels
- 28 Mets arena, 1964–2008

29 Suburban area

31 Value

32 “Comin’ ___ Wing and...”

33 Powders lightly

34 Chemical suffix

35 Quarry

36 Mutate, evolve, etc.

37 International accord

38 Wharton’s Frome

39 Urbane

40 Bounced a check

42 Canaries or chats

43 Black eye, sl.

46 City ESE of Naples

47 Resided

48 12th month

49 Three-wheeler

50 India’s prime minister, 1964–66

56 Soft-shell clam

57 Praying ___

58 Trump’s “The ___ the Deal”

59 Midmorning hr.

61 Of a foot bone

63 ___-gritty

64 Warbucks, to Annie

65 Kazan and Lamb
- 66 Spartacus, notably

68 ___ polloi

70 Actor’s quests

71 Unmoving

72 Radio, television, etc.

74 Book additions

75 Slugger Sammy

78 Dozes a bit

79 Signify

80 Dad’s mother

81 Resort baths

88 ___ generis: of another kind

89 Trawler’s nets

90 Pet lovingly

91 Occur

92 Say

93 Praise highly

94 Terse letter-opener

95 Thoroughly cooked

96 Novelist Bagnold

97 Cape near Lisbon

99 Fuss

100 Frankfurt’s river

101 Take back, for short

102 Makes lace

103 Title at Versailles

104 Lace up

105 CIA forerunner

106 Sony rival

107 Stag’s mate

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Sunday’s skies offer a classic Sunday feel. The moon dives into deep-feeling Pisces early this morning, softening the day and prioritising rest, comfort, and release. You’re likely to be in a more introverted, quiet-seeking mindset, so give yourself the space to unwind. The moon has a pleasant meet-up with changeable Uranus, helping you activate your talents in a refreshed way.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You’re likely to feel torn between two modes of operation. On one hand, the sun’s recent entrance into Sagittarius has you wanting to get creative, playful, and unwind in a self-expressive manner. On the other, the moon’s dip into Pisces has you tugged towards introversion. The moon is likely to win out, so lean into the quiet. Use it to explore relationship matters.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Pull away from the hustle and bustle. You need an unadulterated day of rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation on the home front. The moon tiptoes through spacey Pisces, urging you to reconnect with your roots, check in with your emotional state, and spruce up your home environment. Luna’s connection to Uranus can deliver new ways of approaching old work problems.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You tend to naturally be something of an introvert. It’s not that your shy or wary of others, you’re just selective about who keeps your company. Today’s cosmos urge you to reach out and reconnect with those who matter most, as the deep-feeling Pisces moon increases your need for contact. Luna’s playful link to unconventional Uranus helps you self-express in a new light.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

All eyes are on your partnership story. The moon treks into your opposite sign of Pisces, directing your emotional energy towards the current happenings in your partnership story. It’s an ideal day to let loose with a lover and go off on an adventure to somewhere uncharted, as Luna’s link to Uranus offers spontaneous fun and a craving for novelty.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Sunday’s skies have you busier than usual. The moon prances through Pisces all day, turning your attention towards matters concerning self-expression. It’s an ideal day for conversations that need a gentle approach, or for activating the written or spoken word in some other capacity. The moon’s happy link to Uranus helps stir up new creative approaches too.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You’re likely to be up and at ‘em with your ambitions today, Gemini. Sunday’s usual sleepiness is no match for your drive to get ahead in some capacity today, as the Pisces moon centres your focus around career and reputation matters. The moon spends the day in a helpful union with change-bringer Uranus, allowing fresh insights around your current trajectory to emerge.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Sunday’s usual lazy feel is not fitting your vibe. This morning’s Pisces moon likely has you feeling primed for action, productivity, and taking care of business. Luna usually runs on low energy when she travels through Pisces, so try not to take on more than is necessary. Fortunately, the moon’s pleasant link with Uranus offers some playful opportunities on the intimacy front.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Sunday’s cosmos have you in a mindset for productive action. The productivity you seek is actually a craving for activation regarding your most cherished talents. Turn to a favourite hobby or a skill that’s been sitting on the sidelines. This will help you find the calm sense of ease you crave. Luna’s synchronistic link to Uranus stirs up helpful changes on the home and family front.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Cancerians are classified as the homebody of the zodiac. While you wouldn’t contest that, you also wouldn’t deny that you need more room for exploration. Today’s skies emphasise this need for movement and adventure, as the moon treks through dreamy Pisces. Luna’s playful link to pioneering Uranus makes it an ideal day to break routine with a good friend or two.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Put your to-do list aside. You’re in no mood for heavy lifting when it comes to laborious tasks. The moon treks through sensual Pisces, directing your attention to your sex life, creative visions, and self-expressive activities that activate your artistic side. Prioritising fun should be easy, as Luna’s link to mix-it-up Uranus adds some sparks to the partnership department.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Don’t be afraid to put yourself first. Your body and soul are crying out for attention, as the nourishing moon visits your sign. The moon’s stay should help to attune you to your health, your individuality, and the comfort you currently have around active self-expression. It’s an ideal day to pamper yourself or state your case to someone waiting to hear your side.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Mother Teresa received the Magsaysay Award in 1962 in the area of

a. Community leadership

b. public service

c. journalism and literature

d. international understanding

2. Of the various non-conventional energy sources that are being tapped, which has the largest potential?

a. Water power

b. Wind power

c. Solar power

d. Biomass power

3. Microphone is used to convert

a. sound waves into electrical energy

b. sound waves into light rays

c. electrical energy into sound waves

d. sound waves into magnetic currents

Answers: 1: d 2: c 3: a

KIDS COLOURING

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

	6	2				5	9	
8			2		9			3
		9				4		
	8			4			2	
2		1	8	9	7	6		4
	3			2			5	
		3				2		
4			1		6			9
	9	8				3	1	

BOGGLER

A	P	O	R
H	L	R	S
E	O	A	D
R	E	Y	L

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

6	1	3	2	7	4	8	6	9
8	7	9	8	1	4	2	5	3
6	4	2	5	2	8	6	3	1
7	5	8	1	2	9	4	5	6
4	3	9	7	6	8	1	5	2
2	1	6	3	4	5	4	9	7
2	7	4	8	9	1	5	2	6
3	9	1	6	5	2	7	4	8
8	6	9	4	1	7	2	9	3

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (NOVEMBER 19)

WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

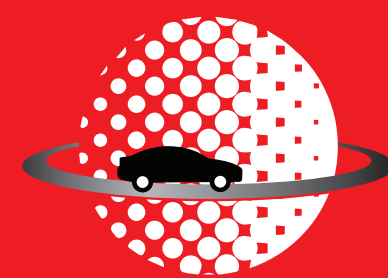
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don’t count

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Gutsy Argentina earn draw with Australia



Australia's Ned Hanigan (centre) is tackled by Argentina's Rodrigo Bruni during the Tri-Nations match in Newcastle, Australia on Saturday

TRI NATIONS RUGBY
Newcastle, Australia - A courageous Argentina battled back to earn a dramatic 15-15 draw with Australia in the Tri Nations Rugby Championship on Saturday and reinforce their credentials after an epic win against the All Blacks last week.

The Pumas looked in trouble when they slipped nine points behind in a brutal second half in Newcastle, north of Sydney, but the golden boot of Nicolas Sanchez rescued them to keep the tournament wide open.

After his 25 points against New Zealand, the Stade Francais playmaker again bagged them all, with his Australian opposite number Reece Hodge missing a

penalty in the dying minutes which could have secured a win for the Wallabies.

Mario Ledesma's side came into the match on a high after their first win against New Zealand in 35 years last weekend, and their passion, along with a feast of Wallabies mistakes, carried them through.

"We trusted in ourselves, in our system. They were nine points ahead but we were still doing our system," said Pumas skipper Pablo Matera after the try-less game.

"It was not our best performance but it was a good effort from our team. It was really physical.

"Australia played a great

game, they put us under a lot of pressure, but we defended really well. We didn't have a lot of chances to score tries but we were very disciplined and I think that's why we tied."

It left all three teams on six points on the Tri Nations ladder, but Argentina are in the box seat with a game in hand. They have a return clash against the All Blacks in a week's time before facing Australia once more.

Australia coach Dave Rennie kept the same backline that helped orchestrate their own upset of the All Blacks two weeks ago and they dominated possession in the first half at a sell-out McDonald Jones Stadium.

But they were plagued by poor

execution that saw two tries disallowed and other chances wasted.

Australia nevertheless took a 9-6 advantage into the second stanza and stretched their lead to nine points, but the Pumas refused to give up.

"We tried to dominate territory and I think we won that, but we were just unable to convert in the second half and there was some ill-discipline late in the game," said Australia captain Michael Hooper.

"We tried to punch through them but they did well to slow the ball up and get men in the defensive line, so it made it hard. We put some smart kicks in but we couldn't crack it tonight."

The odds were stacked against Argentina, who went into the game having lost 17 of their last 19 against the Wallabies, including 14 of the previous 15 in Australia.

But they were buzzing with confidence as they searched for a fourth win in five Tests.

Australia applied the early pressure and Hodge nailed his first of five penalties after just three minutes, only for Sanchez to cancel it out almost immediately.

In the hunt

The Wallabies began stringing together attacking runs and centre Jordan Petaia was unlucky to have an acrobatic try disallowed after his foot strayed onto the chalk chasing a deft Hunter Paisami grubber kick.

Argentina were forced to absorb intense pressure as Australia made all the territory only for errors to creep in at critical times.

Ill-discipline cost the Wallabies another penalty against the run of play, with Sanchez converting before Hodge levelled the scores.

It set up a frantic finish to the first half as tempers frayed and scuffles broke out.

Wallaby Marika Koroibete had a try disallowed for a forward pass just before Hodge landed another penalty for a 9-6 lead.

He bagged his fourth soon after the restart as Pumas hooker Julian Montoya was sent to the sin bin for persistent offending and made it five out of five to further extend their lead as drizzle came down.

But the irrepressible Sanchez booted three consecutive penalties to level the scores and set up a tense finale. Hodge had a golden opportunity to win the game with two minutes left, but sent his kick veering off to the right.

AFF



Yves Jean-Bart, president of the Haitian Football Federation

Haiti football chief banned for life by FIFA

Lausanne, Switzerland - Haiti's football federation president Yves Jean-Bart was banned for life by FIFA and fined over a million dollars on Friday.

The 73 year old Jean-Bart was found guilty by FIFA of having abused his position and having sexually harassed and abused various women players, including minors, the independent Ethics Committee of world football's governing body ruled.

Jean-Bart, who earlier on Friday was cleared by the Haitian justice system, reacted via a statement calling FIFA's decision 'a travesty of justice and a purely political move'. He said the body had 'failed to review actual evidence'.

In making public its decision to dismiss the case against Jean-Bart, the Haitian authorities said in a five-page document that 'no evidence and no (victim's) name were found'.

In contrast, FIFA's Ethics Committee said it had banned Jean-Bart for life 'from all football-related activities (administrative, sports or any other) at both national and international level'. He was fined US\$1.1mn.

It said the investigation concerned 'acts of systematic sexual abuse against women football players between 2014 and 2020' and said proceedings were still pending into

other officials at the Haitian federation.

FIFA's ruling was hailed by global players' union FIFPro, which called it a 'landmark decision made possible by the extraordinary courage of the survivors, victims and witnesses who came forward'.

"The lifetime ban of Jean-Bart can only be the start," said FIFPro general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann.

"We will continue to support FIFA's investigations to ensure all those who abused their positions in Haiti are held to account."

The investigation followed a report in British newspaper The Guardian in April that Jean-Bart sexually abused young women footballers at the country's national training centre.

The accusations led to the opening of the criminal investigation in Haiti, as well as the suspension of Jean-Bart by FIFA on May 25.

According to girls and former officials quoted by The Guardian in articles in April and August, Jean-Bart raped many underage players.

FIFA suspended two other Haitian football officials, Nella Joseph, supervisor of girls' football at the training centre, and Wilner Etienne, technical director of the Haitian football federation.

AFF

Italian Super Cup comes back home after two editions in Saudi Arabia

Rome, Italy - The Italian Super Cup between Juventus and Napoli will be played on home soil at Reggio Emilia in January after the last two editions took place in Saudi Arabia, the country's football federation announced. The game, at the home of top-flight club Sassuolo and pitting the Serie A champions against the Italian Cup winners, will be staged on January 20.

It will be the first clash between the two clubs this

season after a scheduled league game in October was called off following Napoli's decision not to travel to Turin following a coronavirus outbreak. Juventus were awarded a 3-0 win while Napoli were deducted a point for their no-show.

The decision to stage the last two Super Cup games in Saudi Arabia proved controversial due to the kingdom's record on human rights issues.

AFF



A file photo of Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman (right) and Lionel Messi

Koeman unsure about Messi's future

Madrid, Spain - Ronald Koeman has admitted he has no idea if Lionel Messi will leave Barcelona next summer and said it is not his job to persuade the Argentinian to stay.

Messi made an attempt to leave Barcelona this summer before backing down.

He can talk to other clubs in January and leave for free when his contract expires in June, with Manchester City expected to make a renewed attempt to lure the 33 year old away from Camp Nou.

"Messi still has a contract and in my opinion he has to stay here," Koeman said in a press conference on Friday.

"But I am not the person that has to try to make him stay here. We will see about his future, still he is a Barcelona player. Nobody knows what will happen with the future of Messi."

After returning from a 15-hour trip back to Barcelona on Wednesday morning following international duty, a frustrated Messi faced questions about his relationship with French forward Antoine Griezmann.

A former agent of Griezmann's had claimed Messi was difficult to play with at Barca, to which Messi said: "I'm tired of always being the problem with everything at the club."

When the comments were

put to Koeman, he said: "I can understand why Leo was fuming. People should show a lot more respect to people like Lionel Messi."

"After such a long trip, to ask Messi about Antoine is a lack of respect, once again to create controversy."

"I have not seen any problem between the two of them, not in the changing room on the training pitch. There are enough pictures who showing them working well together."

"Someone has said something and that someone has not been a client of Griezmann for three years. It's bullshit."

AFF

Jatinder shines in Muscat victory; IT Works, Renaissance prevail

LOCAL CRICKET

Jatinder Singh hit an elegant 45 as Muscat CT outplayed Al Turki NMC by 71 runs to claim their fifth successive victory in an Oman Cricket (OC) Premier Division T20 game at Al Amerat on Friday.

Besides Jatinder, Wasim Ali (32) and Ayaan Khan (32) guided Muscat to 160 for six. Al Turki stumbled in their chase and were tottering at 38 for seven in 13 overs.

Al Turki NMC were restricted to 89 for eight. Hemalkumar

Tandel top-scored with an unbeaten 35. Siddharth Bukkapatnam and Rajesh Ranpura took two wickets each for Muscat.

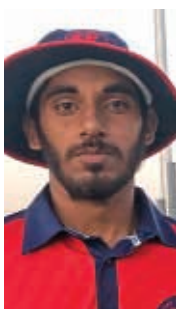
In another Premier Division game, IT Works secured their third win in five matches as they defeated Arm Alpha by 31 runs at the same venue on Saturday.

IT Works scored 121 for eight but then bowled out Arm Alpha for paltry 90 with Waseem Akhtar picking three wickets for just eight runs.

Also on Saturday in another Premier Division match, Renais-



Jatinder Singh



Wasim Ali



Ayaan Khan



Waseem Akhtar



Pruthvikumar Machhi



Abdul Rauf



Danish Mohammed

sance CT's Pruthvikumar Machhi and Abdul Rauf hit half-centuries in their team's 25-run win over AER. The pair

helped their team put up a challenging total of 161 for five. Chasing a tough target, Danish Mohammed struck a solid 63

but his efforts went in vain as AER could manage 136 for eight. Renaissance's Syed Muzamil claimed three wickets.

BRIEF SCORES
Premier Division: Muscat CT 160-6 (Jatinder 45, Wasim 32, Ayaan 32) **beat Al Turki NMC**

89-8 (Tandel 35 n.o.; Bukkapatnam 2-8, Ranpura 2-21).

IT Works 121-8 (Khawar Ali 30; Chetan Mallya 2-11, Bilal Khan 2-16, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-17) **beat Arm Alpha 90 all out in 17.5 overs** (Ansar Raza 21; Waseem Akhtar 3-8, Mohd Nadeem 2-29, Zeeshan Maqsood 2-16).

Renaissance 161-5 (Machhi 64, Rauf 56; Muzahir Raza 2-33) **beat AER 136-8** (Danish Mohammad 63; Syed Muzamil 3-29, Yash Mehta 2-17).

INDIA TOUR OF AUSTRALIA



A file photo of India skipper Virat Kohli (left) and Australia's Marcus Stoinis

Stoinis expects Kohli to be 'extra motivated' for the Australia tour

Sydney, Australia - Virat Kohli is always up at '110%' when it comes to being motivated, so he will be 'ready to go' in Australia before going on paternity leave following the white-ball games and the first Test, according to Australian allrounder Marcus Stoinis.

Asked at a press interaction if Kohli might be a bit more keyed up than usual to make an impact because he would be missing the last three Tests to be back at home with his wife for the birth of their first child, Stoinis said, "Don't worry about Virat, he's up for every single game that he's playing."

"Yeah, maybe there will be extra motivation, but I don't think there's any extra motivation than 110%. So let's see. I am sure he will be ready to go."

"He is getting home for the birth of his kid, which is the right decision in my opinion. So I am sure he will be extra motivated."

"We've definitely got our strategies, we've had things that have worked in the past, and at other times the same plans haven't worked and he's made some runs."

"Obviously he is a great player, and to all these good players, you do what you want to do, you have your plans, and on the day, you get extra competitive and you hope it all falls in your side of the court."

Stoinis is coming into the white-ball games against India - starting with the three-ODI series on November 27, and then the three T20Is - on the back of good form in the IPL, where he was one of the major forces that drove the Delhi Capitals to their maiden final, before they lost to the Mumbai Indians.

He averaged 25.14 in scoring 352 runs from 17 innings at a strike rate of 148.52, and also made an impact with the ball, picking up 13 wickets at an

economy rate of 9.53 and an excellent strike rate of 13.6.

"I will hopefully continue to bring that form into the summer, but there's nothing really too different (that I have been doing)."

"The break was great - as bad as it was with COVID - it was nice to come back quite fresh into all these competitions. I feel like I was going well in England before leading in as well, so hopefully the results keep coming my way," he said.

"But it also helped that we had a good team, we had a great team; I was very fortunate to be in the same team as Ricky Ponting, who was our coach."

'Massive fan of Ponting'

Calling himself a 'massive fan' of Ponting and sharing credit with the former Australia captain for 'whatever personal success I had in the IPL', Stoinis elaborated

on the equation between the two men while at the IPL, which concluded in the UAE on November 10. "He's also not someone who will sit there and tell you what to do."

"He will either show you the way or only sort of speak to you when he thinks he has something that can help," Stoinis said.

"You have to ask him, but I don't think he is in the business of changing careers; like all those good coaches, you never really know you're being coached until the end, when you look back and think that was that, bloody important."

With concussion putting Steven Smith out of Australia's last ODI series in England - shortly before the IPL - Stoinis was moved to No 3 in the batting order, and he said Ponting had been one among 'a big sort of pool of events' that led to the promotion.

"I think there's been a big pool of events that are leading

towards me moving up the order a little bit."

"But I also really enjoy batting in the middle order for Delhi in the IPL," he said.

"Punter [Ponting] wants me to take more responsibility in teams that he has been in charge of. But, at the end of the day, I think I just have to be adaptable about batting in every position, pretty much from one to seven, (as I have) over the last three years. So I just have to keep that mindset, I guess."

"I am just happy to be involved wherever they feel (I will have) the most impact on the game, whether that's in the middle order, whether that's where my biggest impact is for the team, whether they want to get me up earlier... I know I have had these conversations with Ricky, 'just let me know when to put the pads on', 'let me know when I'm in and I'll try to do the best job I can'."

Cricinfo

Still some work to be done on hamstring injury: Rohit

Mumbai, India - Rohit Sharma says he was 'constantly communicating with the BCCI and Mumbai Indians' regarding the hamstring injury he suffered during the league stage of IPL 2020.

Rohit was initially left out for the Australia tour but returned to action after a week to marshal Mumbai Indians to their fifth IPL title, leading to a lot of speculation about his fitness. He was subsequently added to the Test squad.

"I don't know what was going on, to be honest, and what all were people talking about," Rohit, who is currently doing strength and conditioning work at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru, told PTI. "But let me put this on record, I was constantly communicating with the BCCI and Mumbai Indians. "I told them [Mumbai] that I can take the field since it is the shortest format and I will be able to manage the situation quite nicely. Once I made my mind clear, it was all about focusing on what I needed to do."

"Hamstring is feeling absolutely fine. Just started the process of getting it nice and strong. Before I play the longer format, I needed to be clear in mind that there is no stone left unturned. That's probably the reason I'm at the NCA."

For Rohit, the outside chatter regarding his injury and his subsequent participation in the IPL playoffs didn't matter much. "For me, it was not a concern what X, Y or Z was talking about like whether he would make it to Australia."

Once the injury happened, the next two days all I did was to figure out what I can do in the next ten days - whether I will be able to play or not."

"But every day, hamstring [degree of injury] was changing. The way it was responding was changing, so I was feeling quite confident that I could play and that is the communication that I had with MI at that point."

"I told them that I think I will be okay to play just before playoffs. If there is any discomfort, I won't be playing

I don't know what was going on, to be honest, and what all were people talking about

ROHIT SHARMA

the playoffs."

India will start their Australia tour with the first ODI in Sydney on November 27 but Rohit feels he is yet to be ready to take the load of intensive cricket.

"There is still some work that needs to be done on my hamstring. That's why I didn't go to Australia for the white-ball leg as there are back-to-back games. Around six games in 11 [12] days."

"So I thought if I get to work on my body for 25 days, I can probably go and play the Test matches. So it was an easy decision for me and I don't know why it became so complicated for others."

Cricinfo



Bereaved Siraj to stay back in Australia

Sydney, Australia - India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj, who is in Australia with the Indian squads for the upcoming four-Test series, lost his father Mohammed Ghouse on Friday in India.

Ghouse was 53 and lost the battle to a lung ailment. It has been learnt that Siraj won't return for the last rites in Hyderabad due to COVID-19 quarantine protocols.

Ghouse was instrumental in Siraj's growth as a cricketer as he supported his son's ambitions with his limited resources.

...Our heartfelt prayers and condolences go out to Mohammed Siraj & his family, on the loss of his father. The entire RCB family is with you during this difficult time. Stay strong, Miyan — Royal Challengers Bangalore (@RCBTweets) November 20, 2020

The Indian squad, currently in the middle of a 14-day quarantine period, has been training in isolation on the outskirts of Sydney after arriving on November 13 from



the UAE after the IPL.

Siraj, 26, has played one ODI and three T20Is so far and is part of the Test squad in Australia. He will be the fifth pace-bowling option along with Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav and Navdeep Saini. Ishant Sharma, currently at

the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, is also expected to join the squad ahead of the first Test starting on December 17, once he is declared fit.

In a video posted on social media by the BCCI on Tuesday, Siraj and Shami were seen bowling with the pink and red

balls to captain Virat Kohli and other batsmen.

Siraj recently represented the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL to take 11 wickets in nine games, including a match-winning three for eight against the Kolkata Knight Riders.

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

REAL MADRID HELD



Villarreal's goalkeeper Sergio Asenjo blocks a shot on goal by Real Madrid's Croatian midfielder Luka Modric (right) next to Villarreal's defender Pervis Estupinan during the Spanish League match at La Ceramica stadium in Vilarreal, Spain, on Saturday (AFP)

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid missed the chance to move within a point of La Liga leaders Real Sociedad as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Villarreal.

Mariano's header after just two minutes gave Real Madrid the ideal start. However, the visitors struggled to put the game out of reach and visibly tired as the game wore on.

Instead, Villarreal got stronger and were awarded a penalty late on when Samuel Chukwueze was brought down and Gerard Moreno slotted in the spot-kick.

Moreno had a good chance to secure all three points for Villarreal and send Unai Emery's side top of the table but he hesitated when well-placed to shoot and Raphael Varane got the block in.

In end it was a good point for Real Madrid, who were missing a number of first-team players through injury, and they stay fourth in the table behind Villarreal in second.

Mariano was almost sold last summer but had to stand in for Karim Benzema, who is injured, and Luka Jovic, who tested positive for coronavirus on Friday.

Sergio Ramos and Casemiro were also missing following the international break. Given their absences, a draw may not worry Zidane too much, particularly against a Villarreal side who sat

second at kick-off after four victories on the bounce.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea take top spot

Newcastle, UK - Frank Lampard warned Chelsea to stay humble after they climbed to the top of the English Premier League (EPL) for the first time in more than two years with a 2-0 victory at Newcastle, while Brighton survived late penalty controversy to secure their first ever win at Aston Villa on Saturday.

Lampard's side moved above Leicester on goal difference thanks to Federico Fernandez's first half own goal and Tammy Abraham's strike after the interval. Chelsea are unbeaten in nine games in all competitions and haven't lost in their last six league matches.

With five clean sheets in their last six matches in all competitions, Chelsea's third successive league victory was the perfect way to start a hectic period leading up to Christmas.

Maurizio Sarri was in charge the last time Chelsea were in pole position in the EPL in September 2018.

Chelsea could surrender top spot before the end of the day, with both Aston Villa and Tottenham able to go above them depending on their results.

The Blues' pressure was rewarded in the tenth minute when a short corner caught

Newcastle flat-footed. Mason Mount whipped in a low cross and Fernandez turned it into his own net under pressure from Chilwell at the far post.

The fifth EPL own goal of the hapless Fernandez's career didn't sate Chelsea's appetite.

Chelsea put the result beyond doubt in the 65th minute when Werner accelerated away from the Newcastle defence and slipped a pass to Abraham, who guided his shot past Darlow and in off the post.

Abraham has now scored in three consecutive appearances in all competitions for the first time since September 2019.

At Villa Park, Brighton's 2-1 success ended a run of seven

games without a win in all competitions, but it didn't come easily for the Seagulls.

Graham Potter's side, who had won only once in the league this term, took the lead through Danny Welbeck before Ezri Konsa's equaliser for Villa. Solly March put Brighton back in front, but Brighton defender Tariq Lamptey was sent off for a foul on Jack Grealish in stop-page-time.

Villa were controversially denied a penalty in the final seconds when Michael Oliver gave a spot-kick for March's challenge on Trezeguet, only for the referee to change his mind after consulting the pitchside monitor.



Chelsea's striker Tammy Abraham celebrates after scoring against Newcastle during the English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

GERMAN LEAGUE
Neuer denies Bremen

Berlin, Germany - European champions Bayern Munich remained top of the Bundesliga despite being held on Saturday to a 1-1 draw at home by Werder Bremen, who were only denied a shock win by a string of excellent saves from Manuel Neuer.

Germany goalkeeper Neuer produced great stops to twice deny US forward Josh Sargent as Bremen earned their first point at Bayern for a decade.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Lazio triumph

Milan, Italy - Ciro Immobile scored on his return from coronavirus isolation as Lazio beat rock-bottom Crotone 2-0 under driving rain in southern Italy on Saturday. Immobile's diving header put Lazio ahead in the 21st minute on a water-logged pitch after storms in the sole of Italy.

It was the fourth Serie A goal in six games this term for the top scorer in Europe last season, who had missed Lazio's last two league games.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Monaco stun PSG

Paris, France - Cesc Fabregas scored a late winner from the penalty spot as Monaco came from two goals down to stun reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) 3-2 in French League on Friday.

Kylian Mbappe had netted a first-half brace, including a penalty, against his former side, taking him to 99 goals for PSG and leaving his current team seemingly on course for a ninth consecutive league win.

But German international Kevin Volland struck twice for Monaco after the break and Fabregas converted from 12 yards in the 84th minute after Abdou Diallo had been sent off for conceding the all-important penalty.

PSG remain clear at the top of Ligue 1 while Niko Kovac's Monaco climb up to second in the table, four points behind PSG.

OTHER RESULTS:

Scottish Premiership: Saturday:
Dundee United 2 Hamilton Academical 1, Hibernian 2 Celtic 2, Livingston 0 St Mirren 1, St Johnstone 1 Motherwell 1, Kilmarnock 3 Ross County 1.

AFP

Oliveira on Portuguese MotoGPpole

Portimao, Portugal - Miguel Oliveira will start his home Portuguese Grand Prix from the front of the grid after emerging quickest in qualifying on Saturday to claim his maiden MotoGP pole.

The Portuguese KTM-Tech3 rider, 25, will be joined on the front row of the season-closer in Portimao by Franco Morbidelli and Australian Jack Miller.

Joan Mir's hopes of finishing with a flourish after claiming the world title last week appear slim after he failed to make it into Q2 which determines the make-up of the front four rows.

The Spaniard will start from a lowly 20th on the grid.

Oliveira, winner of the Styrian Grand Prix, said: "Every time I'm on the circuit I feel better and better and it's great to get my first pole here in Portugal."

Morbidelli, who won last weekend in Valencia as well as at the Teruel MotoGP earlier this season, said he had to work hard to get on the front row.

"It was tough but to end so well is a positive," said the Italian who was just 0.044sec behind

Oliveira. "It was unbelievable to get into Q2 and then almost be on pole position."

Miller said being on the front row will be crucial on Sunday on a circuit where "it's hard to pass".

"There's a lot of wind in the last corner so that can be scary, but the bike has been amazing all weekend.

"There isn't anyone who isn't having fun out there."

Sunday's race, held in front of empty stands due to the pandemic, provides Morbidelli with a chance to clinch second place in the world championship behind Mir.

Valentino Rossi, the seven-time MotoGP champion who is racing for the final time with the Yamaha factory team, will start in 17th place on Sunday.

The 41 year old Italian is switching places with Yamaha-SRT satellite rider Fabio Quartararo in 2021.

He is down in 15th place in the championship after missing two races of the season after testing positive for coronavirus.

AFP



KTM-Tech 3's Portuguese rider Miguel Oliveira rides during the qualifying session of the Portuguese MotoGP in Portimao on Saturday (AFP)

Thiem ends Djokovic's record attempt in London thriller



Austria's Dominic Thiem in action against Serbia's Novak Djokovic at the O2 Arena in London on Saturday (AFP)

ATP FINALS

London, UK - Dominic Thiem recovered from squandering four match points in a dramatic second-set tie-break to beat Novak Djokovic in three pulsating sets in the last four at the ATP Finals on Saturday.

The Austrian third seed's 7-5, 6-7 (10-12), 7-6 (7-5) win ended Djokovic's hopes of equalling Roger Federer's record of six titles at the elite eight-man event.

The US Open champion will face either Rafael Nadal or Daniil Medvedev in Sunday's final at

London's O2 Arena as he chases the second-biggest title of his career. The 2019 runner-up, who forced the only break of the match in the first set, faced an uphill battle psychologically after his missed chances in the second-set tie-break. But he was

quickly back in the groove and rallied from 0-4 down in the final-set tie-break, winning six successive points to earn two match points, taking the second of those.

"It was for sure a mental battle," said Thiem. "I got so tight in the second-set tie-break, first of all because to play these legends is always going to be something special.

"And then playing for a final here at the ATP Finals is also something very special. I thought after my first big title in New York, maybe I'm going to be a little bit more calm but that was a mistake I guess.

"I was just as tight and nervous as before and it was so much on the edge... I'm incredibly happy to be through."

Earlier on Friday, Djokovic out-battled Alexander Zverev 6-3, 7-6 (7-4) while Russian fourth seed Medvedev beat debutant Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 6-3 in a dead rubber.

AFP

May at the double as England beat Ireland in Nations Cup

AUTUMN NATIONS CUP

Twickenham, UK - Jonny May scored two tries as England once again proved too strong for Ireland in an 18-7 Autumn Nations Cup win at Twickenham on Saturday.

England's fourth victory in a row over Ireland meant the Six Nations champions had won both their opening two Pool A matches. England dominated the opening 40 minutes but still only led 12-0 at half-time thanks to dashing wing May's double, with one try converted by captain Owen Farrell - the son of Ireland coach Andy Farrell.

But two Owen Farrell penalties early in the second half at a once again eerily quiet Twickenham, with this match being played behind closed doors because of the coronavirus, gave England breathing space. By the time Ireland replacement Jacob Stockdale scored a 73rd-minute converted try, England had the game won after their defence had repeat-



England's Jonny May (left) kicks past Ireland's James Gibson-Park to score the second try during the Autumn Nations Cup on Saturday (AFP)

edly denied the Irish a score.

May is now among England's best all-time wings with Saturday's double giving him an impressive record of 31 tries in 59 Tests. Both teams kicked off on the back of decisive home pool wins, England thrashing Georgia 40-0 last week when Ireland overwhelmed Wales 32-9.

Ireland, however, were without injured veteran fly-half

and captain Johnny Sexton, with Ross Byrne at No 10, while Jamison Gibson-Park kept vastly experienced scrum-half Conor Murray on the bench.

It was the first time that neither Murray nor Sexton had started for Ireland since 2011.

England will look to complete an unbeaten group campaign away to Wales next week, when Ireland are at home to Georgia.

AFP



GM BOOSTS EV INVESTMENT

General Motors said it will boost investment in electric vehicles (EV) and autonomous technology by US\$7bn through mid-decade as it accelerates a technology race with Tesla

BUSINESS

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Bank Nizwa signs RO20mn financing deal with ONEIC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Nizwa has signed a financing agreement with Oman National Engineering & Investment Co (ONEIC) to establish Sahalnoot sanitation network in Salalah for Salalah Sanitary Drainage Services Co (SSDC).

The project, valued at RO45mn, is one of the most identified key projects that will support overall development in the Dhofar region and follows the national direction of encouraging more private sector investments in the country's infrastructure.

In a press statement, Bank Nizwa said it will support this essential Salalah infrastructure project by providing Sharia'a-compliant financing to the tune of RO20mn.

The financing agreement was signed at Bank Nizwa headquarters by Sheikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalili, chairman of Bank Nizwa and Sheikh Aiman bin Ahmed al Hosni, chairman of ONEIC in the presence of Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Dr Rashid al Ghilani, CEO of ONEIC.



The new sanitation network project in Salalah is the first-of-its-kind in Oman being awarded on build, operate and transfer (BOT) basis and represents another milestone in the public and private partnership (PPP) of large infrastructure projects. The project involves construction, operation and delivery of the sewerage network project in Sahalnoot area in Salalah. It covers the construction, operation and delivery of the sewer network that includes upgrading and extending more than 70km of sewerage pipes covering key population areas as well as much needed main pumping station to accommodate the flows of Sa-

halnoot and future neighbouring areas.

The project's implementation period is 30 months followed by 15 years of operations and maintenance period. The first package of the project is expected to serve 5,500 properties and is expected to provide new employment opportunities to citizens.

Khalili said, "We are committed to being a vital contributor to the nation's growing economy and our presence in the Dhofar region has been noteworthy. Bank Nizwa has successfully executed several projects in the region, across sectors such as cement, construction, poultry,

red meat plant, municipal waste collection (green financing), among others. Through strategic partnerships like these projects, Bank Nizwa is well-positioned to spearhead the growth of Islamic finance and solidify its leadership in the sector."

Hosni said, "Financing partnerships like these not only support the government in reducing running costs and expenses but also helps boost ONEIC's delivering capacity. With the project covered successfully through strategic funding in line with the project goals, we are positive that it will also create a healthy environment for the Sahalnoot district area."

Business leaders laud government's efforts to attract investment

Muscat - A number of Omani businessmen have lauded the great achievements made across the sultanate over the past 50 years. The business leaders also lauded the Omani government's efforts and procedures to attract foreign investment in the country and achieve fiscal balance, according to a report published by Oman News Agency.

Sam'an bin Jameel Karam, CEO of Al Sarooj Group, said that over the past five decades the Omani economy passed through four main stages of growth. The foundation stage brought about basic services like health and education, to mention a few, said Karam. He said that Oman's 2020 Vision led economic growth till 2014 when a steep decline in oil prices posed great challenges accentuated further by the coronavirus pandemic this year.

Karam pointed out that Oman's Vision 2040 aims to achieve financial sustainability and fiscal balance to help reduce the deficit, bring down the general debt and put the economy on course for a new stage of growth.

Ghanim bin Dahir al Bathari, board chairman of Al Baraka Oil-field Services Company, said that the governorates centralised administration law allows integration among the governorates by optimising competitiveness in building the robust and diversified national economy.

He said the government's approach to bringing state-owned firms under the purview of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is a step in the right direction and will yield positive results



Pankaj Khimji



Ghanim bin Dahir al Bathari

I am convinced that the future of Oman is in the hands of Omanis and we have to build it on solid grounds established over the past 50 years. The sultanate has a bright future in store

PANKAJ KHIJMI

rapidly. "It will also provide a more comprehensive and more uniform view about maximising benefits from these firms, irrespective of whether the companies act individually or engage as a collective entity into major investment projects."

Pankaj Khimji, co-owner and director of Khimji Ramdas Group (KR), said he was among lucky businessmen who witnessed the growth of the Omani Renaissance founded by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and that he is enthusiastic to

carry on with the renewed Renaissance stage under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

"I am convinced that the future of Oman is in the hands of Omanis and we have to build it on solid grounds established over the past 50 years. This will definitely place a great responsibility on the shoulder of young Omanis who are considered the main wealth of this nation so that the renewed Renaissance could press ahead. The sultanate has a bright future in store," Khimji said.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman, CEO of United Securities LLC, said that decisions to delegate powers to governorates provide good grounds for developing the governorates and attracting various types of investment to them.

He added that the restructuring of state-owned firms under the supervision of OIA will generate many great benefits to the Omani economy. The volume of investments will increase and the authority can contest major international projects of economic feasibility. ONA

Saudi Arabia to invest \$20bn in AI projects by 2030

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia announced that it will invest US\$20bn in artificial intelligence (AI) projects by 2030, as the oil-rich country seeks to diversify its economy amid slumping crude prices.

The kingdom, the Arab world's biggest economy, launched an AI strategy last

month to attract investors as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious 'Vision 2030' plan to wean the kingdom off oil.

"Saudi Arabia will invest US\$20bn from now until 2030," said Abdullah al Ghamdi, head of the Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, which was es-

tablished in 2019.

"We aspire to have artificial intelligence as a component of an alternative economy through startups and innovation companies... and view artificial intelligence as a source of savings and additional income," he said during a G20 media briefing.

Ghamdi added that shares will

be open to both foreign and local investors, as the country seeks to establish more than 300 startups in AI by 2030.

Saudi Arabia has been trying to diversify its economy which has been hit by the double whammy of low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

AFP

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Airlines need another \$70-80bn to survive amid pandemic: IATA

Paris, France - Airlines need up to another US\$80bn to survive, the head of the industry's trade association told a French daily as many countries tighten restrictions to confront another wave of coronavirus infections.

"For the coming months the industry is estimated to need US\$70bn-US\$80bn in additional aid," the head of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Alexandre de Juniac told *La Tribune*.

"Otherwise they won't survive."

Airlines are one of the sectors worst hit by measures adopted by governments to slow the spread of the coronavirus, but they have also received an estimated US\$160bn in aid.

"The longer the crisis lasts, the greater the risk for bankruptcies," de Juniac was quoted as saying by the daily.

'Nearly 40' airlines 'are in a very difficult situation or are under bankruptcy protection or administration', he added.

Travel restrictions imposed during the first wave of the crisis forced many airlines to ground



Alexandre de Juniac

almost their entire fleets. Many governments stepped in with various forms of aid such as loans, cash injections, and support for furloughed workers.

While traffic picked up as restrictions were eased, it has begun to slow again in recent weeks as the circulation of the

coronavirus has surged in numerous countries.

IATA expects traffic to be down by 66 per cent for 2020 as a whole.

It believes the traffic won't return to its 2019 level before 2024 - an estimation based on the expectation of a vaccine becoming

available in mid-2021.

It forecasts the revenue of airlines to come in at US\$419bn, half of the 2019 level.

De Juniac now expects airlines to suffer losses in the order of US\$100bn, up from previous estimates of US\$87bn.

Asked about whether the crisis would encourage consolidation in the sector, de Juniac said that in order for that 'the companies need the means to buy one another' but that at the moment 'they are in survival mode'.

But he said there were likely to be fewer airlines as carriers go bust and that the ones which survive are likely to be smaller as they close routes and sell off aircraft.

"We'll have smaller companies, but they will probably be pretty strong, dynamic and ready to go. And once they do, I think the recovery will be quick and strong," said de Juniac.

The comments by de Juniac come days ahead of IATA's annual meeting that will bring together representatives of 290 airlines throughout the world.

AFP

Congratulations and Warm Wishes to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSM index declines as services stocks fall

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) last week posted marginal decline amid a drop in services sector stocks.

The MSM30 index ended the week marginally lower by 0.01 per cent. Services index fell 0.98 per cent during the week, while Industrial index was down by 0.26 per cent and Financial index decreased 0.12 per cent. MSM Shariah index was also down 0.36 per cent.

Local news

►Ubhar Capital (U Capital) announced the completion of the merger between U Capital and Gulf Baader Capital Markets (GBCM). The merged entity has started to operate as Ubhar Capital. The merger brings together two leading investment services firms in Oman with combined assets under management and custody of US\$1.2bn and U Capital will continue to be the leading broker in the Muscat Securities Market.

►Oman is discussing a loan of at least US\$1bn with a group of banks, media sources reported. Oman issued US\$2bn in bonds last month in a deal. It is now in talks with banks for a loan that would refinance US\$1bn of existing bank debt due in January, said one of the three sources familiar with the matter. A second source said the new facility could exceed US\$1bn, as per the media reports.

►The Ministry of Finance

(MoF) issued a financial circular on regulating financing instruments and means, whereby MoF instructed all the government units and companies to provide Debt Management Office (DMO) with their proposed annual financing plans by no later than January 31 of every year. The MoF emphasised the importance of coordination with DMO before initiating any procedure to select local or foreign lenders for any form of borrowing, and also prior to liaising with the issue managers or financial advisors in relation to the bonds or sukuk proposed to be issued. The MoF stated that it is essential to obtain an approval from the DMO for any proposed loan contracts before and after negotiating with the lenders. The DMO approval must also be obtained for the details and terms and conditions of bonds or sukuk prior to the issuance.

►Omran Group, the sultanate's executive arm for tourism investment and development, has so far attracted RO186mn in foreign investments in Oman's tourism and hospitality sector. This has been achieved through a number of avenues, most noticeably through strategic development partnership agreements with renowned regional and global developers. The group has entered strategic partnerships with leading real estate developers in the region to develop state-of-the-art Integrated Tourism Complexes



(Muscat Daily)

(ITCs) across the sultanate, namely, Madinat Al Irfan (West), Al Mouj Muscat with Majid Al Futtaim, Muscat Bay with Eagle Hills, Ras Al Hadd with Qatari Diar, Jebel Sifah and Hawana Salalah with Orascom Development Holding. ►Oman Drydock Company (ODC) has signed a partnership agreement with TOR Group of Companies to fulfill the market requests for private and governmental marine sectors. A statement issued online by ODC said, 'Oman Drydock Company has signed a partnership agreement with the Turkey based TOR Group of Companies, a

shipbuilding company operating since 1880, to fulfill the market new-build requests for private and governmental marine sectors.'

►Dubai Customs said its bilateral trade with Oman, which is the UAE's second-largest trading partner in the Gulf region, has jumped 8.4 per cent to hit AED37.85bn last year, compared to AED34.9bn in 2018. The Dubai-Oman bilateral trade stood at AED14.85bn from January to June, according to latest figures released by Dubai Customs.

►Inflation in Oman fell by 1.51 per cent in October 2020 com-

pared to the same month in 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on consumer price index. According to the report, the inflation rate in October declined by 0.11 per cent compared to September. The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages witnessed a rise of 0.32 per cent in October compared to the same month a year ago.

GCC markets

The Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE) announced the extension of its economic stimulus

package - the Targeted Economic Support Scheme (TESS) - by six months until the end of June next year. The scheme was launched by the CBUAE in March to support the UAE economy during the COVID-19 pandemic, through a range of integrated relief measures to the banking sector related to funding, liquidity, lending and capital. Under this extension, the CBUAE will extend the duration of the zero cost facility (ZCF) of AED50bn (US\$13.5bn), which benefits retail and corporate banking customers and facilitates liquidity management for banks through collateralised funding at zero cost, for an additional period of six months, state news agency WAM reported.

Starting from January 1, banks and finance companies participating in the TESS initiative will be able to provide new loans and facilities to customers negatively affected by the pandemic.

According to the secondary sources, OPEC's total crude oil production averaged 24.39mn barrels per day (bpd) in October 2020, up by 0.32mn bpd on month-on-month basis. Crude oil output increased mainly in Libya, Iraq and Nigeria, while production decreased primarily in the UAE, Angola, Venezuela and Congo. The share of OPEC's crude oil in total global production was up by 0.1 per cent in October to 26.7 per cent compared with the previous

month. The preliminary data indicates that global liquids production in October increased by 0.58mn bpd to average 91.17mn bpd, compared with the previous month, and was lower by 9.25mn bpd on year-on-year basis.

Recommendation

Globally, the markets are expected to remain in check as the rally has shifted to recovery over final successful result announcements by some of the top vaccine manufacturers. We witnessed rally in oil, aviation and banks whereas the technology stocks remained in check.

Regionally, the markets moved behind the recovery on oil front. Oil was supported by the news of new sanctions on Iran by the US administration along with potential cure offered vaccine and the positive announcements coming out from the upcoming OPEC meeting at the end of November.

Locally in Oman, in his latest speech His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik spoke about the economic recovery plans of the government, which should give investors confidence on the seriousness of the government in tackling the future challenges. We believe the plans in place are viable and would aid the market in the coming period.

We advise investors to pick stocks with less debt and better return-on-equity and dividend yield.

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China mulls joining trade pact dumped by Trump: Xi

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - China will consider joining a free trade pact once championed by the US but abandoned by Donald Trump, President Xi Jinping said on Friday, as Beijing increasingly seeks to influence the global rules of commerce.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is an updated version of a giant deal originally backed by former US president Barack Obama as an effort to counter China's rising might in Asia.

Trump pulled out of it after winning the presidency in 2016 as he turned away from what he viewed as unfavourable multilateral deals, but 11 countries eventually agreed to sign the new version.

Addressing the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, Xi said the grouping 'must continue to promote regional economic integration and establish an Asia-Pacific free trade zone at an early date'.

China 'will actively consider joining' the CPTPP, he said, according to Chinese state media.

Trump attended this year's



People walk below a giant screen showing news coverage of China's President Xi Jinping's speech via a virtual meeting to the APEC forum in Malaysia, outside a shopping mall in Beijing, China on Thursday (AFP)

virtual summit, the first time he has participated since 2017, as he continues to challenge his election defeat to Joe Biden.

Xi's comments came just days after Beijing and 14 other

countries signed what will be the world's biggest trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

That deal, which comprises 30 per cent of the world's total

economic output and excludes the United States, was viewed as a major coup for China at a time Washington is retreating.

Singapore-based international trade expert Deborah

Trump pulled out of CPTPP after winning the presidency in 2016 as he turned away from what he viewed as unfavourable multilateral deals, but 11 countries eventually agreed to sign the new version

Elms said if China did join the CPTPP, it could encourage others to follow.

"If Xi's statement of interest is pushed forward in the coming weeks and months, it will, of course, lead to a lot of questions from current members, prospective members and others that are not thinking of CPTPP membership at all," said Elms, executive director of the Asian Trade Centre.

AFP



China maintains ban on Boeing 737 Max flights

Beijing, China - China's aviation regulator will not yet allow Boeing's troubled 737 Max jet to fly in the company's biggest market owing to lingering safety concerns, despite the US lifting a ban on commercial flights.

Boeing's best-selling aircraft was grounded worldwide early last year following two crashes that killed 346 passengers.

It has since faced lengthy tests and approval processes with aviation regulators worldwide.

But the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) said that there was 'no set timetable' for the resumption of flights, according to state broadcaster CCTV, dealing a blow to the plane-making giant.

China was the first to suspend flights of the aircraft.

The regulator added that the results of investigations into the deadly crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia 'must be made clear' and that the aircraft design improvements must be 'effective' and 'receive approval'.

The US Federal Aviation Administration last week approved commercial flight operations of the plane.

Director of the Civil Aviation Administration of China said in October that China's prompt grounding of the aircraft was based on 'zero tolerance' towards potential safety hazards

The crashes are believed to be linked to a faulty anti-stall system called MCAS, according to results from probes into the accidents.

Feng Zhenglin, director of the CAAC, said in October that China's prompt grounding of the aircraft was based on 'zero tolerance' towards potential safety hazards.

Boeing Company said recently it expects China to buy more than 8,600 new aeroplanes worth US\$1.4tn in the next two decades, increasing its forecast.

AFP

Coronavirus pandemic adds \$15tn to world's total debt this year

Istanbul, Turkey - In the first three quarters of 2020, global debt increased by US\$15tn to reach US\$272tn as the pandemic forced businesses to shut and pushed people out of jobs.

After a large surge in the global debt-to-GDP ratio (from

320 per cent to 362 per cent year-on-year in the first half), the increase in the third quarter was more modest, due to strong global recovery, the International Institute of Finance said.

The global debt is expected to reach US\$277tn, 365 per cent of

world GDP, as of the end of this year.

As of the end of the third quarter, the debt-to-GDP ratio was 432 per cent in mature markets while 250 per cent in emerging markets.

On a global scale, non-finan-

cial corporates' debt was US\$79.6tn, governments' was US\$77.6tn, financial sector's was US\$65.6tn and households' was US\$49.2tn, as of the end of the third quarter. All sections posted increases on a yearly basis.

The coronavirus has claimed

1.34mn lives worldwide and infected 56.2mn since it emerged last December. Measures, such as curfews and travel bans, to stem the spread of the virus effected economic activity dramatically all around the world.

Anadolu Agency

Azerbaijan troops enter ceded district

Turkey said some of its forces would observe the ceasefire arrangements from a centre in Azerbaijan



This file photo shows a house set ablaze before its owner left for Armenia, in the village of Charektar outside the town of Kalbajar on November 14 (AFP)

Baku, Azerbaijan - Azerbaijan said on Friday its troops had entered a district bordering Nagorno-Karabakh that was previously home to Armenian separatists, as part of a Russian-brokered deal to end weeks of fighting in the region.

Troops moved into the district of Aghdam, one of three to be ceded, the Azerbaijan Defence Ministry said, a day after Armenian soldiers and tanks withdrew from the territory. Azerbaijan is also to recover the Kalbajar district wedged between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia on November 25 and the Lachin district by December 1.

Armenian residents of Agh-

dam hurriedly picked pomegranates from trees around their homes and packed vans with furniture before fleeing ahead of the deadline to cede the mountainous province.

Ahead of the handover, residents set their homes on fire, leaving nothing behind for their bitter rivals.

Fierce clashes between Azerbaijan's forces and Armenian separatists broke out in late September in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The fighting lasted six weeks, leaving thousands dead and displacing many more.

The ex-Soviet adversaries agreed to end hostilities last week within the framework of a

Troops moved into the district of Aghdam, one of three to be ceded, a day after Armenian soldiers and tanks withdrew from the territory

THE AZERBAIJAN DEFENCE MINISTRY

accord brokered by Moscow that includes deployment of Russian peacekeepers and the cession by Armenia of swathes of territory.

Turkey has said that some of its forces would also observe the ceasefire arrangements from a coordination centre in Azerbaijan, but Putin has emphasised that Turkish troops would not be present in Nagorno-Karabakh.

'Wild enemy'

In a televised address, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev called Armenians who destroyed property as they fled a 'wild enemy'.

"They are embarrassing themselves in front of the whole world," he said.

On Thursday, people celebrated in Baku, with cars parading through the city with flags of

Azerbaijan ally Russia and Turkey.

Separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh and several surrounding districts had captured the territory and claimed independence following a post-Soviet 1990s war that left around 30,000 dead.

Their claim was not recognised internationally, however, even by Armenia.

As part of the peace accord, Armenia agreed to return 15 to 20 per cent of Nagorno-Karabakh territory captured by Azerbaijan in recent fighting, including the historic town of Shusha.

A Russian peacekeeping

Armenia PM urges stronger military links with Russia

Yerevan, Armenia - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called on Saturday for greater military cooperation with Russia, a day after Azerbaijani troops began moving into territory in Nagorno-Karabakh previously held by Armenian separatist forces.

"We hope we can reinforce cooperation with Russia not only in the security sector but also military and technical cooperation," he said. "Of course, there were hard times before the war, but the situation today is even more difficult."

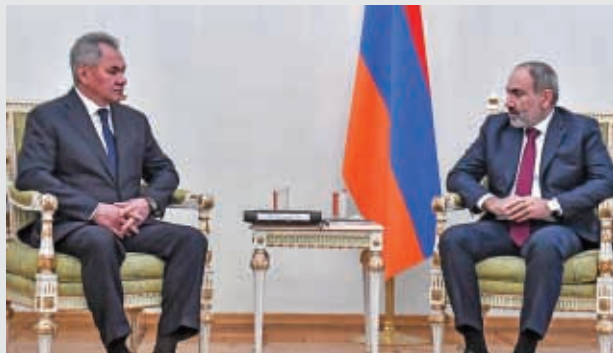
Pashinyan was speaking during a meeting in Yerevan with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Around 2,000 Russian peacekeepers will be deployed in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under the terms of the deal.

"For us, the main thing is to prevent bloodshed," Shoigu said on Saturday.

He was part of a major Russian delegation in Yerevan that also included Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

AFP



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (right) with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, in Yerevan on Saturday (AFP)

force totalling 1,960 troops has now deployed to the region, the Defence Ministry said on Friday, and set up checkpoints and observation posts along the strategic Lachin corridor that connects Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

Return of refugees

While Armenians in the provinces to be handed over to Azerbaijan have left in an exodus, the Russian mission on Thursday said it had bussed 3,000 residents back to the regional capital Stepanakert and other areas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that provid-

ing humanitarian aid to residents of 'severely hit' Nagorno-Karabakh was now a priority, and called on the UN and the World Health Organization to send delegations to the region.

He maintained that the peacekeepers had 'helped end the bloodshed and prevent further casualties'.

Most of Azerbaijan's southwestern district of Aghdam has been under the control of Armenian separatists since 1993. Before the post-Soviet war it was inhabited by 130,000 people - mostly ethnic Azerbaijanis who were expelled from their homes.

AFP

UN, Germany, others urge Egypt to free rights group detainees

Cairo, Egypt - The UN and Germany on Friday urged Egypt to release three members of a rights group arrested within days of each other, adding to international pressure over the case.

In a fresh wave of an ongoing crackdown, security forces targeted the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) after several ambassadors and diplomats visited its Cairo office on November 3. They arrested EIPR office manager Mohamed Basheer on Sunday, before detaining researcher Karim Ennarah on Wednesday and executive director Gasser Abdel-Razek on Thursday.

They were held on charges including 'joining a terror group' and 'spreading false news', the



One of the detained activists Karim Ennarah was arrested while on vacation in the resort of Dahab

EIPR said, and placed in pre-trial detention for 15 days - which under Egyptian law can be extended and last up to two years.

'The arrest of three human rights defenders in Egypt this week is a very worrying development that underscores the ex-

treme vulnerability of civil society activists,' the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a statement.

"We are very concerned that the targeting of human rights defenders and other activists... are having a profound chilling effect on an already weakened Egyptian civil society," added spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani.

The OHCHR said the arrests 'appear to have been carried out as retaliation' because they came after the EIPR hosted a meeting with 13 ambassadors and diplomats earlier this month.

Germany's Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Friday 'clearly condemning the escalation against Egyptian civil society' and demanding the

'immediate release of these human rights defenders'.

The German Ambassador had attended the 3 November meeting at EIPR's Cairo office along with Svend Olling, the Danish Ambassador to Egypt.

Several ambassadors, including Italy's envoy to Cairo, sent a letter to Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry calling for the release of the EIPR staff, Italian news agency Adnkronos reported on Friday.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab also raised the issue with Shoukry, the Foreign Office said.

The US State Department on Thursday said Washington was 'deeply concerned'.

AFP



This file photo shows Iran's Defence Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami (fifth-right) at a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Jumaa Inad (fifth-left), in Tehran on November 14 (AFP)

US extends sanctions waiver to Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq - Washington has granted Iraq a shortened 45-day sanctions waiver to import Iranian gas that will expire days before US President Donald Trump's term ends, an Iraqi official said on Saturday.

Iraq buys gas and electricity from its neighbour Iran to supply about a third of its power sector, worn down by years of conflict.

The US blacklisted Iran's energy industry in late 2018 but granted Baghdad a series of temporary waivers, hoping Iraq would wean itself off Iranian energy by partnering with US firms.

The lengths of the exemptions have become a key tool in US policy towards Iraq, demonstrating the level of satisfaction or frustration with Baghdad.

In May, Washington granted Iraq a four-month extension as a gesture of goodwill towards Mustafa al Kadhemi, who had just formed a Cabinet seen as US-friendly. But when it renewed the waiver in late September, the Trump administration gave Iraq just 60 days. This time, it went even shorter: 45 days.

AFP

Spain to set up camps for 7,000 migrants after huge influx in the Canaries

Madrid, Spain - Spain will set up emergency camps for up to 7,000 migrants as part of a plan to tackle the huge influx of arrivals in the Canary Islands, the government said on Friday.

The plan also involves reinforcing Salvamento Maritimo's coastguard rescue teams in the area, alongside a diplomatic offensive as part of a concerted push to address the crisis in the holiday islands where more than 12,000 people have landed since

September.

Migration Minister Jose Luis Escriva unveiled the details at a news conference in Gran Canaria after talks with regional officials who want urgent government action given the saturation of the islands' migrant services.

Escriva said 'tents and emergency encampments with 7,000 places' would be set up within weeks as a temporary solution while the government readied other facilities, mostly military, in



Yacine Diof (left) lost her husband of four months as he tried to make the illegal crossing to the Canary Islands, in Mbour on November 17 (AFP)

a 'more stable' setup for processing arrivals.

The plan will cost €84mn which would come from European funds, he said.

The emergency set up would enable the authorities to rehouse the 5,500 migrants currently staying in tourist accommodation, along with more than 1,000 others at Gran Canaria's overwhelmed Arguineguin port.

The port camp was initially put up to process arrivals and run

virus tests but it has become saturated with more than 2,000 migrants sleeping there although the authorities have since Wednesday been moving hundreds of people into a temporary camp near Las Palmas.

So far this year, more than 18,000 migrants have reached the Canaries, ten times the number that arrived in 2019. The figures soared after EU agreements with Turkey, Libya and Morocco stemmed the flow along previ-

ously popular migrant routes into to Europe.

The crisis has triggered sharp criticism of the patchy response by Spain's leftwing coalition government, with Escriva admitting its response 'could have been more proactive'. The islands' regional chief Angel Victor Torres has asked the government to 'urgently' transfer migrants to mainland Spain to ease pressure on the archipelago.

AFP



A woman casts her ballot at a polling station during the Georgia's parliamentary runoff elections, in Tbilisi on Saturday (AFP)

Opposition boycott Georgia election runoffs

Tbilisi, Georgia - Georgia held runoff elections in several constituencies on Saturday, in a vote boycotted by the opposition, which has refused to enter the new parliament in the Caucasus nation.

All the opposition parties have denounced as rigged the October 31 parliamentary elections and have staged mass protests, calling for snap polls - a demand the ruling Georgian Dream party has rejected.

The ruling party, led by billionaire ex-prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, flatly denies accusations of electoral fraud.

An opposition boycott could weigh heavily on Georgian Dream's political legitimacy.

On Friday, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia called on opposition parties to assume their seats in the new parliament and take part in Saturday's runoffs to 'return the processes back to a formal legal framework and formal political platform'.

Georgian Dream had won 48

per cent of the votes, against 46 per cent for opposition parties, in a proportional ballot that decided 120 of the legislature's 150 seats.

The party also secured a first-round victory in 13 single-mandate majoritarian constituencies and the remaining 17 parliamentary seats are up for grabs in the second-round runoff. Opposition candidates have said they will renounce their mandates.

In an unprecedented show of unity before October's elections, the main opposition party, exiled former president Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM), agreed with smaller opposition groups to form a coalition government if they win a parliamentary majority.

"The joint decision of all (opposition) political parties is that they will not enter the new parliament and will not take part in the second round," Nika Melia, a UNM leader, said. "Ivanishvili and his party have abolished elections in Georgia," Melia said.

AFP

At least eight dead as barrage of rockets hits Afghan capital

Kabul, Afghanistan - At least eight people were killed on Saturday when a barrage of rockets struck densely populated parts of Kabul, marking the latest big attack in a wave of violence sweeping the Afghan capital.

The salvo slammed into various parts of central and north Kabul - including in and around the heavily fortified Green Zone that houses embassies and international firms - just before 9:00am.

The Iranian embassy said on Twitter that its main building had been hit by rocket fragments after a missile landed on the premises. No one on the compound, located just outside the Green Zone, was wounded.

Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian blamed the Taliban, saying 'terrorists' had fired a total of 23 rockets.

"Based on initial information, eight people were martyred, and 31 others were wounded," Arian said, noting the final toll would change.

Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz confirmed the same tolls and details.

The Taliban denied responsibility, saying they 'do not blindly fire on public places'.

At least one rocket landed in an office inside the Green Zone, but did not explode.

Photos and videos circulating online showed several buildings with damaged walls and windows, including at a large medical complex.

Recent big attacks in Kabul, including two horrific assaults on educational institutions that



People inspect a damaged house after several rockets land at Khair Khana, north west of Kabul on Saturday (AFP)

Terrorists have fired a total of 23 rockets. Based on initial information, eight people were martyred, and 31 others were wounded.

TARIQ ARIAN

killed nearly 50 people in recent weeks, follow a familiar pattern in the aftermath, with the Taliban denying any involvement

while the Afghan government pins the blame on them or their proxies.

"The rocket attack in Kabul

city has nothing to do with the mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, using the insurgents' name for Afghanistan.

The Taliban are under pressure not to attack urban areas, having pledged not to do so under the terms of a US withdrawal deal signed in February.

Any acknowledgement of overt involvement in such inci-

dents could in theory slow the American pull-out, though outgoing US President Donald Trump has made clear he wants US forces out regardless of the situation on the ground.

The Islamic State group claimed the two attacks on educational centres, but Kabul said the Taliban's ultra-violent Haqqani network was responsible.

AFP

Pompeo meets Taliban, Afghan negotiators in Qatar

Abu Dhabi, UAE - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met negotiators from the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha on Saturday, amid signs of progress in their talks as Washington speeds up its withdrawal.

Pompeo met separately with the Afghan government and Taliban negotiation teams in a luxury hotel in the Qatari capital.

"I would be most interested in getting your thoughts on how we can increase the probability of a successful outcome," Pompeo said as he met the Afghan government side, noting the shared interest in such a scenario.

He also met Qatar's ruler, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, the Foreign Minister, on his stop in Doha, which is the Taliban's base for diplomacy.

The outgoing top US diplomat is on a seven-nation tour of Eu-



Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary-General Ahmed bin Hassan al Hammadi (second from left) greet US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his wife Susan, at Old Doha International Airport on Saturday (AFP)

rope and the Middle East, as President Donald Trump shores up late-term priorities.

Earlier this week, the Pentagon said it would soon pull some 2,000 troops out of Afghanistan, speeding up the timeline established in a February agreement between Washington and the

Taliban that envisions a full US withdrawal in mid-2021.

Trump has repeatedly vowed to end 'forever wars', including in Afghanistan, America's longest-ever conflict that began with an invasion to dislodge the Taliban following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Breakthrough?

The Taliban are speaking to Afghanistan's government for the first time.

The talks started on September 12 in Doha but almost immediately faltered over disagreements about the agenda, the basic framework of

I would be most interested in getting your [Afghan government's] thoughts on how we can increase the probability of a successful outcome [of the peace initiative]

MIKE POMPEO

discussions and religious interpretations.

Several sources told AFP on Friday that the two sides appear to have resolved some of the issues, however.

Among the sticking points so far, the Taliban and the Afghan government have struggled to

agree on common language on two main issues.

The Taliban are insisting on adherence to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, but government negotiators say this could be used to discriminate against Hazaras, who are predominantly Shiite, and other minorities.

Another contentious topic is how the US-Taliban deal will shape a future Afghan peace deal and how it will be referred to.

The Doha peace talks opened after the Taliban and Washington signed a deal in February, with the US agreeing to withdraw all foreign forces in exchange for security guarantees and a Taliban promise to start talks. Despite the talks, violence has surged across Afghanistan, with the Taliban stepping up daily attacks against Afghan security forces.

AFP

8 hurt at US shooting, gunman still at large

Washington, US - Eight people were injured in a shooting at a US mall in Wisconsin on Friday according to police, who said they were still hunting for the shooter.

The FBI and the Milwaukee County Sheriff's office tweeted that their officers were on the scene at the Mayfair Mall in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, supporting the 'active' response by local police.

'When emergency personnel arrived, the shooter was no longer at the scene,' the Wauwatosa Police Department said in a statement.

It said the wounded included seven adults and one teenager who had been rushed to hospital. The seriousness of their injuries was not immediately known, but Wauwatosa mayor Dennis McBride told ABC news their injuries were not life threatening.

The shooter was identified by police as a 'white male in his 20s or 30s'.

Numerous workers at the mall took shelter inside the building as the shooter rampaged, according to videos circulating on social media.

Shopper Jill Wooley told a local news station she was inside with her 79 year old mother when the gunfire erupted.

"I knew right away it was a gunshot and they just kept coming one right after the other," Wooley told CBS affiliate WDJT.

"We just dropped to the floor," she said.

"I think we're all born with it," she said. "We've all been exposed to public shootings like this. I think all of us have thought of what we would do in a situation like this."

AFP

Balloon messages for Hong Kongers held in China

Hong Kong, China - Relatives of 12 Hong Kong democracy activists detained in mainland China released balloons carrying messages to their loved ones across the border on Saturday, as they called for their return.

It has been 90 days since the 12 were arrested by the Chinese coast guard in late August when fleeing their city for Taiwan by boat.

Most of those aboard the vessel were being prosecuted in Hong Kong for crimes linked to last year's huge and often violent pro-democracy protests.

They have since disappeared into the mainland's notoriously opaque, party-controlled legal

system on immigration charges.

Family members climbed a small hill on the outlying island of Kat O, in northeastern Hong Kong just across the harbour from Yantian in Shenzhen, where the 12 Hong Kongers are being held.

"After I come up here, I feel I'm closer to him," Wong Wai-yin's mother told AFP, overlooking Yantian from the hilltop.

"It's almost within reach, but it's still out of reach."

The relatives and some supporters held up a banner reading 'SAVE 12', and released balloons with the names of and messages to their loved ones.

"Miss you so much. Come



Four families and members of the Save12HKers campaign group prepare to fly balloons towards Yantian, in mainland China (back) at Crooked Island, in Hong Kong on Saturday (AFP)

home soon," one balloon read.

Some of the relatives recently received handwritten letters from their loved ones for the first time since their arrest.

The letters were passed by

lawyers appointed by the Chinese government after family-appointed counsel were denied access to the detainees, a common move by authorities in sensitive or political cases.

"There was no news about them at all before. So when I received his letter, my wife and I cried bitterly," said the father of Cheng Tsz-ho, who was also at the hilltop, adding that they finally knew their son was still alive. "No matter what they have been accused of, deep down in their hearts, they really love Hong Kong. I hope mainland China can return them to Hong Kong as soon as possible."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez delivers a speech to announce that Spain will vaccinate 'a very substantial part' of its population of 47mn people against COVID-19 by the middle of 2021, during a visit to the Wurth Museum in Agoncillo on Friday (AFP)

Spain to complete mass vaccination by mid-2021

Madrid, Spain - After months of turmoil and over 42,000 deaths, Spain appeared to see light at the end of the tunnel Friday, announcing ambitious plans to vaccinate much of the population by mid-2021.

"Our forecasts, under almost any reasonable scenario, show that a very substantial part of the Spanish population will be able to be vaccinated, with all guarantees, within the first half of the year," said Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

With the numbers gradually improving, suggesting Spain has passed the peak of the second wave, Sanchez said the government had finalised 'a comprehensive vaccination plan' that would be presented at Tuesday's Cabinet meeting.

The government, he said, had been working on the plan since September, making Spain the first within the European Union, alongside Germany, to fully map out such an immunisation scheme.

"We are ready," he said, stressing that Spain had a 'significant logistical network' to ensure supplies would be distributed to its population of 47

million people.

His words came as major pharmaceutical companies closed in on vaccines against the virus which has infected more than 55mn people and caused more than 1.3mn deaths worldwide, according to an AFP tally.

US giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech have taken the lead alongside US firm

Pfizer/BioNTech's bid for US regulatory approval for its vaccine after large-scale trial data showed it was 95 per cent effective against COVID-19.

Earlier this week, Spain's AEMPS medicines agency approved the country's first phase three trial for another COVID-19 vaccine, one of nine nations to take part in the process.

remain in place, including a night curfew and limitations on inter-regional travel, Spain has managed to avoid a second lockdown as has been imposed in several other European nations. And the measures appear to be working, with a decline in the 14-day incidence rate and the northeastern Catalonia region preparing for Monday's re-opening of bars and restaurants that have been closed since October 16.

Although the pressure on accident and emergency services remains 'significant', health professionals say it is far from the extremes of the first wave.

"Back then, it was awful, like wartime, but now it's not even close," Enrique Sánchez of Madrid's SUMMA ambulance services said recently. These days they tend to see milder cases of COVID-19 and unlike in the spring, 'we are not short of protective material', he said.

"The situation is stable," agreed SUMMA spokesman Victor Escudero, saying the service was 'not seeing as many critically ill patients in homes as there were in the first wave'.

AFP

Our forecasts, under almost any reasonable scenario, show that a very substantial part of the Spanish population will be able vaccinated, within the first half of the year

PEDRO SANCHEZ

Moderna, with the EU saying it was hoping to have both vaccines approved for use by the year's end.

Last month, Health Minister Salvador Illa said the government had authorised the purchase of 31.5mn doses of a COVID-19 vaccine currently being developed by the University of Oxford and British pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca.

The government is also awaiting the outcome of

'Situation is stable'

Spain has been badly hit by the pandemic, suffering more than 1.5mn confirmed infections - the EU's second-highest number after France. The virus has also claimed 42,619 lives in Spain, the fourth highest toll after the UK, Italy and France.

The health crisis has also triggered a devastating economic slowdown, hammering Spain's all-important tourism sector.

Although many restrictions

Cases, deaths hit new highs in Russia

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Saturday registered record numbers for daily infections and deaths from the coronavirus, two days after having passed two million cases.

Health officials reported 24,822 new infections and 476 deaths, bringing the national total to 2,064,748 cases and 35,778 fatalities since the beginning of the year.

While those figures suggest a lower death rate than elsewhere in the world, they need to be treated with caution. The official Russian death toll only includes those in which COVID has been established as the primary cause of death after an autopsy.

Data published by Russia's federal statistics service earlier this month indicated excess deaths of over 117,000 year-on-year between March and September, suggesting that virus fatalities could be much higher.

Most of the new cases announced on Saturday were recorded in Moscow (7,168) and in the country's second city, Saint Petersburg (2,476), with other regions recording figures in the tens or hundreds.

"We are getting a lot of calls



A woman walks looking at her phone in Moscow on Friday (AFP)

at the moment," Dmitri, a Saint Petersburg ambulance driver, said. "The number of sick people is growing."

The medical team he worked with collecting samples to identify cases visited around 20 ad-

resses every day, he said.

"People are scared, and they are calling for a doctor as soon as they get a little cough," said Lyudmila, one of the two nurses on the team.

AFP

Trump's son Don Jr positive for COVID-19: Spokesman



This file photo shows (from left) US President Donald Trump, Donald Trump Jr and Kimberly Guilfoyle, in Kenosha on November 2 (AFP)

Washington, US - US President Donald Trump's eldest son Donald Trump Jr has tested positive for COVID-19 and is quarantining without symptoms, the latest in a long list of infections among those with links to the White House.

"Don tested positive at the

start of the week and has been quarantining out at his cabin since the result," his spokesman said.

"He's been completely asymptomatic so far and is following all medically recommended COVID-19 guidelines."

Trump Jr's positive test fol-

lows infections for a string of others connected to the White House, including his father, who was hospitalised, the President's wife Melania and Trump's youngest son Barron.

Donald Jr's girlfriend, former Fox News host Kimberly Guilfoyle, also tested positive in July.

Earlier on Friday, Andrew Giuliani, a White House aide and son of the president's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, announced he had tested positive.

Trump Jr is one of the most outspoken and aggressive defenders of his father, who is still refusing to recognize his defeat to Democrat Joe Biden in the November 3 presidential election.

In the days after the vote, Trump Jr called for his father to go to 'total war' against what he calls electoral fraud despite no evidence to support the claim.

AFP

HK, Singapore postpone travel bubble

Hong Kong, China - A planned travel bubble between Hong Kong and Singapore was scrapped a day before its launch on Saturday after the southern Chinese city announced a sudden spike in coronavirus cases.

The decision is both a blow to the two cities' battered tourist industries but also for other countries who had been hoping the scheme might be a model to replicate during the pandemic.

The two financial hubs have both suffered comparatively mild outbreaks with strict social distancing and border measures imposed soon after the pandemic first emerged.

But with small populations and a heavy dependence on links to the outside world they have been hard hit as the global economy collapsed.

Desperate to help their key tourism and aviation sectors, they came up with the plan allowing limited, quarantine-free



People gather outside a bar, as the government plans to tighten social distancing rules to a maximum of four people per table at restaurants and two at bars, in Hong Kong on November 15 (AFP)

travel between the cities as long as visitors test negative for COVID-19.

The travel corridor was set to kick off on Sunday morning.

But on Saturday, Hong Kong

announced the scheme would have to be delayed for two weeks following a sudden rise in coronavirus infections.

"In the light of recent surge of local cases we have decided, to-

gether with the Singapore government, to defer the air travel bubble's launch by two weeks," commerce secretary Edward Yau told reporters.

After weeks of single-digit in-

fections, Hong Kong health authorities have begun reporting a sudden uptick in cases in recent days.

On Saturday they recorded 36 local coronavirus cases. Crucially, 13 were from unknown transmission sources, prompting fears the city has a new wave of out-of-control infections.

Both Hong Kong and Singapore agreed that seven straight days of five or more unknown transmission cases would be enough to halt the travel bubble.

But Saturday's double-digit spike was enough for authorities in both cities to postpone the travel bubble.

This is a sober reminder that the COVID-19 virus is still with us, and even as we fight to regain our normal lives, the journey will be full of ups and downs," Singapore Transport Minister Ong Ye Kung wrote on his Facebook page.

AFP

Toronto lockdown to begin on Monday

Toronto, Canada - Canada's largest city Toronto and much of its suburbs will be placed under lockdown beginning on Monday due to the spread of COVID-19, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced.

"I've been clear on this: the situation is extremely serious and further action is required," Ford told journalists on Friday.

"Effective Monday, November 23 at 12:01am, Toronto and Peel will be moved into lockdown."

The lockdown, whose restrictions include a ban on indoor private gatherings, will last at least 28 days and violators can be fined CAN\$750.

Outside gatherings will be limited to ten people, as will religious services, funerals and weddings.

Hair salons and other personal care locations as well as gyms and casinos will be closed.

Schools will remain open, but restaurants and non-essential stores will only be open for pickup and delivery.

"We can't risk overwhelming our hospitals," said Ford, with Canada's most populous province having just passed 100,000 coronavirus infections.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had earlier warned Canadians of 'a long winter ahead' and the risk of overwhelming hospitals as infections spike.

"If you are planning to see friends this weekend, maybe don't," Trudeau said.

"There was a birthday party or a gathering for dinner you were thinking about doing - don't do it."

Trudeau said Canadians would have to take precautions 'as the weather drives us indoors'.

AFP



GREENERY AT HOME

How plants improve mental and physical wellness

Flowers and plants are staples in many homes, adding to the style and aesthetic of virtually any space. While the visual benefits of plants are widely embraced, many people are unaware of the ways plants can support mental and physical well-being, too.

"Plants offer countless benefits beyond beauty," explains Alfred Palomares, vice president of merchandising at 1-800-Flowers.com. "From improving air quality to having calming and healing benefits, plants are such an important component to keep in your home." Palomares lends insight into the top benefits of plants and which species you should consider placing in your favourite spaces:

STRESS REDUCTION

Have you ever noticed that when you visit a garden or park, you instantly feel at ease? Greenery has the innate ability to calm and reduce stress. The sights and smells promote calm and a feeling of escape, which is particularly important during times of stress.

Work is a top source of stress for many people, so it makes sense that plants are a smart addition to workspaces. The study "The positive effects of office plants" by Nursery Papers Technical researched plants in the workplace and found employees had many beneficial experiences, including:

- Depression/dejection reduced by 58%
- Anger/hostility reduced by 44%
- Tension/anxiety reduced by 37%
- Confusion reduced by 30%

Because many people are now working from home and children are attending school remotely,



add plants to office and study spaces to reduce stress and make the space more welcoming.

Plant to consider: Lavender has delicate purple buds that offer a splash of colour to the space and a scent that fills a room with its calm-invoking characteristics.

A HOME OFFICE THAT NURTURES

For your home office in particular, choose furnishings and decor that improve your comfort, functionality and focus. Make sure your chair is ergonomic and adjusted at the right height for your desk, and that the space has adequate lighting and ventilation.

Plants suitable for a home office should be easy to maintain, and will not take over the space. For example, a hanging plant that won't use up valuable desk space can add a welcome touch of green.

Plant to consider: English Ivy can beautifully

spruce up your work area.

IMPROVE AIR QUALITY

Plants can improve air quality by decreasing the levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the air by up to 89%, according to a report by the NASA Stennis Space Center. VOCs are commonly found in household items and paints, and include formaldehyde, benzene and trichlorethylene, among others.

Many green houseplants have the ability to:

- Reduce carbon dioxide levels in a home
- Control humidity levels
- Reduce indoor pollution levels
- Reduce airborne dust levels
- Add oxygen to the air

Plant to consider: Peace Lily can remove pollutants and absorb harmful substances like ammo-

nia and xylene that may be present in your home, plus has a pleasant scent when in bloom.

HEALING AND HEALTH-PROMOTING

Plants are believed to calm and promote healing in people of all ages. In fact, just looking at pictures of plants can have a positive impact. The reason? Scientists believe that the calming effects of nature images can reduce cortisol levels and improve mood, effectively speeding up the healing process.

A Journal of Alternative Complementary Medicine article found that patients recovering from surgery with plants and flowers in their room have experienced:

- Lower blood pressure and heart rate
- Lower ratings of pain, anxiety and fatigue
- Fewer intakes of pain medication

Whether you're recovering from an illness or simply want to promote the overall wellness of the people who live in your home, consider placing plants throughout the most-used spaces to reap the benefits.

Plant to consider: Aloe Vera is an ancient natural remedy that not only adds visual appeal, but the clear gel from the plant's leaves soothes the skin.

"The power of plants is incredible," says Palomares. "Whether you bring plants into your own home to promote calm and wellness, or you gift to a loved one as a special surprise, greenery is a wonderful way to elevate a space in numerous ways."

(BPT)

(Learn how plants can boost wellness in any space at: 1800flowers.com/blog/plants.)

PLANTS NOURISH THE MIND



RAJEEV SIMON

Plant lover

Plants have a definite bearing on our psyche, they improve our state of mind and mental balance. The oxygen released by plants enhances heart health while the very sight of plants is very pleasing to all around. If one would remove plants from around my house, I would feel their absence just as one feels when someone has died. Plants signify life and without them life itself seems dull and lifeless.



RAJAN JAYARAMAN

Plant lover

To me, plants are like family, the mere sight of the luscious green and colourful blossoms wavering in the breeze melts away all the stress of the day. Each day spent nurturing them brings in a sense of tranquility, besides improving my physical and emotional wellbeing and enhancing the aesthetics of my home. I feel every room looks better with a little greenery. They also calm the soul and bring in peacefulness in any room."



ZULFIKAR ALI

Botanist

A plant is one of the evolutionary miracles that fuels life in our biosphere. Whether our garden consists of herbs on our kitchen window sill or a densely planted parking strip, or in containers within our home, plants contribute to wellbeing of life on earth. Many people derive mental peace and satisfaction by taking care of plants in their homes. And so, nurturing plants is a good activity for attaining mental peace during the current pandemic.



Photo by Syed Fasiuddin

Living with Art

ART EVERYWHERE

A banker, marine biologist and artist, all rolled in one, there are many shades to Elizabeth Davis

Hubert Vaz

There was an unmistakable streak of contentment in her voice as Elizabeth Davis, a seasoned Indian artist living at Al Mouj Muscat, walked us through her villa to display varied aspects of her tryst with art.

A self taught artist that she is, Elizabeth said she has never been tied down to one style, and that she keeps discovering her varied abilities with the paintbrush as she experiments with her passion every single day. The contentment stemmed from the fact that she revels in letting her creativity not spare any corner of her home. And, if you glance around, you see art everywhere!

"I really don't remember when I

started out, because ever since I can remember, I have been drawing and doodling, and doing so till today. I got a good foundation in art from the school I went to in Cochin (India) wherein we had a wonderful art teacher and a fantastic art department which taught us everything from sketching and oil painting to tie-and-die, marble painting, mosaic painting, leather-craft, lithography, etc," says Elizabeth who did not pursue higher studies in art as she was very good in academics and went on to do her masters, brushing away her natural penchant for art.

A marine biologist and banker, Elizabeth said, after completing a fulfilling career, she chose to nourish her talent for painting just about 5-6

I am an artist without any particular style. I am very much into reusing, recycling, upcycling, and I would love to convert all that goes into garbage bins into beautiful crafts

ELIZABETH DAVIS

years ago in Oman and has ever since done numerous artworks across varied styles from realism to abstract art. She also underwent a few short courses to rev up her talent, including a very fulfilling art workshop conducted by the Na-

tional Museum of Oman during the early part of 2020 which refined many elements of her individual prowess in painting.

Today, every room and passage of her home is filled with art, not just in canvasses but also in the arrange-

ment of furniture and accessories, the choice of shades of upholstery, indoor plants, artefacts placed strategically, and all of these have a definite bearing on her wellbeing and composure, she admits.

"People say every artist has his/her own style, but I am an artist without any particular style. I am still experimenting and I don't want to copy any particular style. As much as I do art, I also do craft. I am very much into reusing, recycling, upcycling, and I would love to convert all that goes into garbage bins into beautiful crafts," Elizabeth said. And if you look around her home, a lot of disposables, like empty plastic water bottles and glass bottles, have been converted into beautifully painted

table décor, lampshades, etc.

"Art is part of every artist's life and I think every person is an artist in some way. It does affect my way of life, my thinking and the way I observe things in a different way," says Elizabeth, adding, "art has not only touched every aspect of my life but also the lives of those I live with. My three sons have not taken after me, with regard to art, but I still feel they might have it within themselves, only waiting to be discovered at the right time.

Elizabeth takes delight in whatever she does and it gives her immense pride as well as fulfillment. If there is something she looks forward to, it is holding her own solo exhibition in the near future.



Coffee time

This set of six paintings were made eleven years ago using instant coffee and water as the medium on paper. "The best thing about using coffee and water is you don't have to spend on paints," says Elizabeth.



Cave at Wadi Bani Khalid

This painting depicts a cave at Wadi Bani Khalid and was created with a fusion of acrylic paints with drizzles of water during an art workshop with an Irish artist in Oman



Fascination for bells

This collection of mini bells adorns a ledge on the landing leading to the first floor bedrooms. They were bought as mementos during her trips to different countries over the years.



Al Huzn

This painting, depicting two sorrowful women, was prepared during a creative imagination course conducted by the National Museum of Oman in early 2020. It was created using a template of two decorative silver spoons.