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VERSTAPPEN PIPS MERCEDES DUO TO CLAIM ABU DHABI POLE



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LIFE SCIENCES DISCOVERY CENTRE PLANNED IN OMAN



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GRILLED LAMB CHOPS WITH GARLIC SAUTÉED VEGGIES



OMAN

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE SURVEY FROM TODAY

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will begin conducting the 28th cycle of the Consumer Confidence Survey for the fourth quarter of 2020 starting from Sunday. The consumer confidence index, which is considered an important indicator of the performance of economic activity, targets citizens of 18 years old and above. The survey aims to assess the financial progress of Omani families between 2019 and 2020, as well as the positive or negative factors that affect the performance of the Omani economy.

DETAILS ON P3

WORLD

US REASSURES VACCINE IS SAFE

WASHINGTON: With Pfizer Inc's and BioNTech SE's COVID-19 vaccine distribution imminent after US authorisation on Friday, top regulators sought to reassure Americans that the record fast pace was warranted and had not sacrificed safety. "We worked quickly based on the urgency of this pandemic, not because of any other external pressure," US Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Stephen Hahn said during a press conference. The United States on Friday evening granted an emergency use authorisation for the vaccine for people aged 16 and older.

DETAILS ON P8



INSIDE



MIGRATORY BIRDS FIND SANCTUARY



Oman stands at the crossroads of four distinct regions – Asia, Arabia, Africa and Europe – and as such, is on the migratory path of several species of birds that travel southwards seeking a warmer climate during the northern winters, and reverse their patterns when winter comes to the southern hemisphere.

DETAILS ON P20

State audit issues 253 reports

MUSCAT: Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of State Audit Institution (SAI), submitted SAI's annual report for fiscal 2019 to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The SAI annual report includes the results of Fiscal-2019. SAI has deployed all its resources, efforts and capacities to effectively execute its purviews and realise the objectives entrusted to it.

SAI also sent copies of the report to the Council of Min-

isters, the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura.

OBSERVATIONS

The SAI annual report included a number of phenomena and observations attained as a result of oversight works conducted by the SAI's eight branches distributed across the Sultanate at some of the state administrative units, companies, and public authorities and establishments. This is in addition to the final account of

the state and the results of the budget implementation.

A total of 212 oversight missions were carried out by SAI, which included all types of monitoring works undertaken by SAI namely administrative, financial and performance oversight.

As a result, SAI issued 253 monitoring reports which were delivered to relevant entities along with the SAI's observations and recommendations.

TURN TO P5

No foreign investment in some activities

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

As part of the efforts to protect the small Omani businesses and also traditional products related to national identity, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a decision No 209/2020, which specifies the list of activities in which foreign investment is prohibited.

As per the decision based on the Foreign Capital Investment Law issued under Royal Decree No 50/2019, the business will be limited to Omani investors.

Some of the activities operating within the tourism sector have been exempted from the prohibition.

In line with the priority given by the government to empower small and medium enterprises, the Omani investor can invest in all activities in which foreign investment is prohibited

MINISTRY'S DECISION

INCENTIVES

It may be noted that to provide an attractive investment environment for investors, the Gulf investors will be treated as an Omani investor in practising economic activities in the Sultanate, taking into account the economic agreement in force between GCC countries.

"In line with the priority given by the government to empower small and medium enterprises, the Omani investor can invest in all activities in which foreign investment is prohibited, and this list will also be updated according to the circumstances of each stage to keep pace with

economic developments," the decision added.

The Foreign Capital Investment Law has granted a number of incentives, privileges, and guarantees to non-Omani investors.

Article (14) of the Foreign Capital Investment Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 50/2019 states that a list of activities in which foreign investment is prohibited to be issued by a decision from the minister.

Article 1 of the same decision also specified the activities in which foreign investment is prohibited, except for what is established in tourist establishments, such as washing all kinds of textiles, washing and ironing clothes with steam...

TURN TO P2

Ready for ban on single-use plastic bags?

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

Replacement of single-use plastic bags is important in the wake of the ensuing ban in the Sultanate on such bags from January 1, 2021. Readiness for this among customers and the business houses is important.

The decision has been taken to preserve the Omani environment from the side effects of single-use plastic waste.

Corporate houses, in general, are preparing for the change terming it a welcome step from the authorities and called it a much-needed decision to protect the environment from plastic waste, which consumes the



largest space in the garbage bins.

Businesses already have plans in place to meet the challenge of some customers coming without their own shopping bags

David C, Business Head, Spar Oman, called it a great move, which of course would be a behavioural shift among all our shoppers.

"In accordance with the decision, we at Spar Oman will also be banning single-use shopping bags at our checkouts effective January 1, 2020. While this is a great move for the good of the country and the planet at large, it calls for a behavioural shift among all our shoppers."

"To ensure that this change is seamless, and caused no inconvenience to our shoppers, we have made available reusable shopping bags for sale at affordable prices across all our stores."

TURN TO P5

129 pharmacy jobs for Omanis in private sector

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour announced on its website 129 pharmaceutical jobs in private healthcare institutions as part of its efforts to follow up vacancies in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Health and Environment committee of Majlis Ash'shura.

Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, Under-Secretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs and Planning at the Ministry of Health, said that the ministry has provided jobs for pharmacy graduates beside the jobs available in the Ministry of Health in line with the Omanisation strategy adopted by the government.

— ONA

Tourism sector loses half a billion rials due to impact of coronavirus

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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The coronavirus pandemic in the Sultanate has caused direct losses to the tourism sector that are estimated at half billion Omani Rial as of the end of September this year, according to Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Tourism Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

During the 20th press conference held on Thursday she pointed out that the cancellation of visa requirements for tourists hailing from different countries will encourage foreigners to visit Oman and speed up the recovery of the tourism sector.

The ministry endorsed a 'Recovery Plan' that included re-opening of some tourism activities, she added.

"Besides considering the safety of the tourism sector against risks posed by the COVID-19, the ministry's Recovery Plan will enhance the sustainability of the human capital, support local communities, foster tourism communication and promotion, and bring back investment in the tourism sector, said Al Mahrouqiyah, adding that details of the plan will be unveiled later.

She also explained that the



quarantine period for people arriving into the Sultanate has been shortened and that "the timeframe has been substituted by the PCR test and health isolation till proof of being negative result is furnished by the tested person on visit to the Sultanate."

She commended the government's consent to re-open activities and provide incentives to the private sector as a step in the right direction that assisted the sector to stand firm, despite the crisis, and secure the stability of jobs of not less than 15,700 people who work in the tourism sector.

The Under-secretary explained that the ministry waived entry

visas for citizens from 103 countries to encourage tourism activity. This comes in as a move to support tourism and shore up its struggling economy.

"In line of the current situation, the Supreme Committee endorsed the reopening of touristic activities and places, and conditioned a number of measures such as, reducing quarantine period for the visitors to the Sultanate, have PCR test upon arrival, stick to health isolation at the tourist facility until a negative result appears," she added, noting that the ministry has updated the precautionary measures guide for hotel establishments and travel

and tourism offices and agencies. It also issued another guideline for tourist places.

Losses of the sector automatically were reflected in hotel occupancy in the Sultanate as the total revenues of Omani hotels in the three-to-five-star category fell by 60.2 per cent to RO 70.70 million until the end of October 2020 compared to RO 177.72 million for the same period in the previous year.

Hotels occupancy rates declined by 50.1 per cent to reach 26.1 per cent until the end of October 2020 against 52.3 per cent for the same period in 2019, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Meanwhile, the total number of guests in Omani hotels dropped by 53.9 per cent in the first 10 months of 2020 to stand at 646,841 guests, compared to 1.40 million guests for the same period in 2019.

Among the nationalities, Omanis constituted the maximum number of visitors, reaching 337,687 guests. This was followed by 164,873 European guests and 47,643 Asian tourists until the end of October 2020, the NCSI revealed.

■ FROM PAGE 1

No foreign investment in some activities

...(dry washing), cutting and styling hair for men and children, and types of cosmetics for women.

Article 2 stipulates that investment projects existing at the time of its implementation shall be excluded from the application of its provisions, and it is prohibited to assign them to third parties without the written consent of the minister or his authorised representative.

Article 3 also stipulates that everything that contradicts

this decision or contradicts its provisions shall be canceled, and the fourth article of the decision stipulates that it shall be enforced on the day following the date of its publication.

The provisions of the Foreign Capital Investment Law apply to every non-Omani natural or legal person who establishes an investment project in the Sultanate, by enabling his capital and assets to establish economically viable investment projects for the Sultanate.

GCC residents with valid visas allowed to enter Oman

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

GCC citizens, residents with valid residency permits, and passengers with valid visas are allowed to enter the Sultanate without prior approval. COVID - 19 PCR test before departure to the Sultanate is not required.

All passengers arriving in the Sultanate are required to have

international health insurance covering the cost of treatment from COVID - 19 for one month except for citizens, GCC nationals, and passengers with free treatment card.

Before departure to the Sultanate of Oman, passengers must complete pre-registration via <https://covid19.emushrif.om/traveler/travel> for the PCR test in Oman, pay RO 25 test fees and download Tarassud +.

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Be cautious, COVID-19 risk is still high!

A sharp decline in the number of COVID-19 infection cases has been registered recently, as cases dropped from 26 per cent in the past few months to 4 per cent

SAMUEL KUTTY
@SAMKUTTYVP

Even as most business activities have opened in the Sultanate, the authorities warn that risk from the coronavirus is still high and need to exercise high caution.

"Re-opening of more activities does not mean any 'business-as-usual' condition. The risks posed by the virus are still high", warned Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

The minister made the statement during the weekend media briefing held by the Supreme Committee.

While urging all the sections of the society to follow the precautionary measures, Dr Ahmed hoped that "the Supreme Committee would not be compelled to again impose a

lockdown".

To avoid any peaks of the pandemic that might jeopardise health services and programmes, he said that all people should cooperate with the health authorities and listen to their advice.

A sharp decline in the number of COVID-19 infection cases has been registered recently, as cases dropped from 26 per cent in past few months to 4 per cent thanks to a number of factors, including public cooperation in implementing precautionary measures.

However, said Dr Ahmed, "the number of infection cases might pick up again if commitment to health procedures is relaxed".

From December 6, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the COVID-19 situation allowed re-opening of



a new set of activities including beaches, parks, cinemas and museums, in addition to the issuance of tourist and other visas.

Other activities that were allowed to reopen included restaurants in shopping malls, health clubs, tourist destinations, rehabilitation and curative centres, nurseries as well as kindergartens and amusement parks. Children aged 12 and below have been allowed into all activities.

While infection cases continue to fluctuate locally and globally, the situation is being closely monitored in Oman, Dr Ahmed said.

COVID-19 has been recorded as a cause of death in 0.5 per cent of the cases, with an estimated mortality rate of 8.2 per 100,000 population out of a

total population of 4.49 million in the Sultanate.

The most affected chronic diseases in admissions in general wards and intensive care units, as well as deaths, were diabetics with 2.9 per cent and those with high blood pressure accounted for 0.7 per cent.

Dr Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of Disease Control Department at the Ministry of Health, said that COVID-19 vaccination is expected to begin early next year, with priority to be accorded to high-risk or vulnerable like people aged above 65 years and diabetics or patients with kidney failure or chronic lung infection.

Also included in the priority list are employees at intensive care units and COVID-19 care units, as well as to patients admitted to these units.

Inflation falls 1.46% in Nov

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation fell by 1.46 per cent in November 2020 compared to the same month of 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 November 2020 fell by 0.09 per cent compared to October 2020.

The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages fell by 0.78 per cent; housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels by 0.42 per cent; clothing and footwear by 0.13 per cent; furnishings, household equipment & routine household maintenance by 0.25 per cent; transport by 5.88 per cent; communication by 0.04 per cent and restaurants and hotels 0.25 per cent.

However, non-alcoholic

beverages witnessed a price rise of 5.25 per cent; health by 0.02 per cent; recreation and culture by 0.52 per cent and education by 0.08 per cent.

Meanwhile, among foods and non-alcoholic beverages category, a marked rise was witnessed in the price of oils and fats; and meat by 0.10 per cent and 1.11 per cent, respectively.

However, the price of fish and seafood fell by 14.80 per cent, bread and cereals by 0.80 per cent; and milk, cheese and eggs by 0.13 per cent. The price of fruit and vegetables also fell by 0.55 per cent and 0.42 per cent, respectively, in November 2020 against the same period of 2019.

Miscellaneous goods and services witnessed a price rise of 1.26 per cent in November 2020 compared to the same period of the previous year.

— ONA

Consumer confidence survey from today

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will begin conducting the 28th cycle of the Consumer Confidence Survey for the fourth quarter of 2020 starting from Sunday to December 24.

The consumer confidence index, which is considered an important indicator of the performance of economic activity, targets citizens of 18 years old and above.

The survey aims to assess the financial progress of Omani families between the past year and the current year, as well as the positive or negative factors that affect the performance of the economy.

The survey also aims to identify the future prospects of the economy, the current economic situation of families, purchasing power of household appliances, goods and cars, in

addition to the availability of job opportunities at the present time and their future expectations as well.

The survey includes 1,500 samples, including Omani nationals aged 18 or above, distributed across the governorates of the Sultanate, taking into account the representation of males and females in relation to society, groups and different educational levels. Data collection will be done over mobile phones.

The methodology and formula used by NCSI to calculate the consumer confidence index have been developed by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, US, and is widely used by national governments across the world. This enables global comparisons of the index obtained.

The methodology involves

Whenever the index value exceeds 100 points, this indicates a relative improvement in the index values over the reference period and an increase in the level of optimism regarding economic conditions

simple arithmetic average of three sub-indicators, namely current economic conditions index, household income level index, and consumer expectations index.

NCSI carries out quarterly surveys of consumer confidence index, with the first cycle of the same conducted in March 2014.

The consumer confidence index is a reflection of the behaviour of consumers. An

increase in customer spending leads to a rise in demand for various goods and services. This results in increased production and a rise in production facilities to meet that demand, which in turn aids the economic recovery process.

Starting from the first quarter of 2015, the Consumer Confidence Index (as well as the sub-indices) is calculated as a record number attributed to the last quarter of 2014.

Whenever the index value exceeds 100 points, this indicates a relative improvement in the index values over the reference period and an increase in the level of optimism regarding economic conditions. The reverse occurs when the index falls below 100. If the index value remains stable at 100, it means neutrality or no change from the reference period. — ONA



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Rich in oil and fish

The Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat islands offer a mix of both sea and desert. The islands have a reputation of being one of the biggest fishing destinations across the Sultanate. With a beautiful rocky seacoast and lush landscapes, Wadi Shuwaymiyah offers opportunities enough to fulfil your fishing adventures. Shaleem and Al Halaniyat islands are part of the Dhofar Governorate located in the far east about 50 kilometres away from Hasik coast. They comprise a number of islands, the largest being Al Halaniyat island which spreads over 25 square km. Other popular isles are Al Qablia and Ghrozut in the east and Al Sudah and Al Haskiyah towards the west. Al Sudah is named as 'island for birds' due to the large number of birds nesting in the spot. Since it is uninhabited, the government is using the island for mega tourism projects. Al Halaniyat is the only populated island where the citizens are engaged in fishing activity. The wilayat is noted for its commercial activities since the bygone era. Antiquities represented in ancient tombs dating back to the pre-Islam era were discovered in the area. Shaleem also has the largest crude oil reserves in Oman, in addition to a variety of frankincense trees. The wilayat is distinguished for its various environment and terrain. It is a mix between arid desert and plain coast. The desert environment, which occupies a large part of wilayat, encompasses oil fields that store huge amounts of oil reserves in the Sultanate, estimated to be billions of barrels. It includes fabulous islands, sea cliffs and clean beaches that reflect the sunlight on its sands. The coastal environment is characterised by large areas of sandy beaches which is being utilised for tourism purposes. The coastline also is characterised for the presence of large quantities of marine wealth, such as lobster and rare abalone. The islands are similar to any Bedouin regions of Oman. Many traditional art forms such as Taghrood, Razha, Al Haboot, in addition to Al Naeesh, have found its existence in the island. The wilayat also is reputed for vital infrastructure projects like Hasik — al Shuwaymiyah road which is ranked as one of the mega projects implemented across the country. Other upcoming projects include the construction of a water desalination plant, a harbour for fishermen, a new health centre and many other facilities implemented to fulfil the inhabitants' needs and requirements.





Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection
Authority

FERRARI VEHICLES RECALL CAMPAIGN
FOR 812 Superfast 2017 – 2019



الفردان للسيارات
Alfardan Motors



Campaign Date: 13 / 12 / 2020
Campaign Type: Safety Action
Campaign Section: Mechanical / Replacing the rear window.
Product Description: Ferrari Vehicles



Production year	Vehicle Model	VIN No.	No. of affected vehicles	
2017 – 2019	812 Superfast	ZFF83CMTJ0229564	ZFF83CMT0K0237866	15
		ZFF83CMT0J0230916	ZFF83CMTIK0237861	
		ZFF83CMT2J0230917	ZFF83CMT8K0240790	
		ZFF83CMT9J0230493	ZFF83CMT9K0240801	
		ZFF83CMT7J0233103	ZFF83CMTXK0243643	
		ZFF83CMT6J0232864	ZFF83CMTIK0245278	
		ZFF83CMTXK0237860	ZFF83CMT0L0250098	

Description:
Incorrect bonding of the rear window may lead to decreased adhesion of the rear window to the rear hood. As a result, the rear window glass could fully detach from the vehicle, with risk of injury and / or the possibility of an accident.

Action: Replacing the rear window.

For More Information:
Owners of affected vehicles may contact Alfardan Motors to book an appointment starting 13 / 12 / 2020

Contact Data:
Alfardan Motors service center, Ghala, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24501170 – Mob: 92882926
P.O. Box: 1358, P.C: 133
Sunday to Thursday, From 8:00 AM To 5:00 PM

List of activities prohibited for foreign investors		
Production of Omani sweets	Car and vehicle cleaning and polishing	Retail sale in specialised stores of empty gas cylinders
Production of Omani daggers	Fruit and vegetable wholesaling	Retail sale in specialised stores for wedding cards
Specialised stores for sale Omani daggers	Wholesale of cooking gas and LPG filling stations	Transportation of pilgrims and Umrah performers
Specialised stores for the sale of traditional weapons	Retailing in speciality stores for honey, Vehicle fuel stations	Transporting cooking gas cylinders in trucks
Specialised stores for craft products	Diesel fuel stations	Shipping and unloading of goods and customs clearance offices
Sewing and knitting Arab and non-Arab men's and women's clothes	In-store retail of phones and their accessories	Valuation of cancelled vehicles, Commission and real estate brokerage insurance agent, and labour offices (recruitment)
Tailoring and sewing sports and military clothes	Retail sale in specialised stores for souvenirs, antiques, and paintings	Employment offices, and regulation in public buildings
Transporting and selling drinking water	Retail sale in specialised stores of natural flowers and plants	Photocopying and document printing services
Repairing electrical parts in vehicles, charging batteries	Retail sale in specialised stores of pottery and handicrafts	Transaction tracking offices
Detailing Omani cuffs	Retail sale in specialised stores selling cooking gas	Installation and assembly of neon panels
Tailoring and sewing women gowns	Retail sale in specialised stores of silverware and gifts	Management and operation of fuel filling stations, Driving schools
Repairing and cleaning vehicles' radiators	Retail sale in specialised stores for licensed phone cards in the Sultanate	Specialised rehabilitation centres
Repairing tires and wheel caps	Retail sale in specialised stores for animal feed	Old people's homes, orphanages
repairing vehicle scales	Retail sale in specialised stores for bags, retail sale in specialised stores for wedding supplies	Rehabilitation homes
Vehicle washing and lubricating stations	Retail sale in specialised stores for fireworks	Activities that are related to libraries and archives.
Vehicle oil change		
Auto air conditioner repair		
Auto and vehicle sound exhaust repair		

IoT startup wins new funding

■ FROM PAGE 1



File Photo

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

eMushrif, an Oman-based IoT startup, and a Phaze Venture's portfolio company, announced late last week its \$2.3 million Series-A funding round, led by IDO Investments. The investment round also saw participation from Phaze Ventures, otf Jasoor Ventures, Dtec Ventures, and other angel investors.

Founded in 2016 by Adnan al Shuaili, Awadh al Shukaili, and Issa al Shuaili, eMushrif develops IoT and software for school and commuter buses, as well as COVID-19 tracking devices for quarantine compliance, and attendance tracking systems. The company currently operates in Oman and Kuwait and has completed three acquisition deals to expand the team and

explore other markets.

The newly raised funds will support their expansion to other markets and verticals across the region. The company plans to invest in strengthening product development introducing new cutting-edge technologies and scale mass production and supply chain for the IoT devices developed by the R&D team.

Abdullah al Shaksy, Co-founder & CEO at Phaze Ventures, and Board Member at eMushrif, said, "We are extremely proud of the major milestone for the team at eMushrif, and the incredible work they have done to get here. We are seeing IoT transform the world around us at an increasingly rapid pace, and we believe eMushrif will have a major role to play in this space with huge growth potential in Oman and across

eMushrif develops IoT and software for school and commuter buses, as well as COVID-19 tracking devices for quarantine compliance, and attendance tracking systems

the globe."

Commenting on the occasion, Mazin al Naamani, Portfolio Impact Lead at IDO Investments said, "At IDO Investments, we are committed to supporting growth stage, innovative startups in Oman that have the capability and scalable potential to expand beyond Oman's borders by offering capital and a

platform to expand globally. These startups typically have a product or service that is unique not only to Oman but to the world.

"eMushrif is a great example, and in many ways embodies the spirit of future-facing Omani startups of global potential. The company is exceeding all expectations and we are pleased to join hands in pursuing the company's mission."

Adnan al Shuaili, Co-Founder and CEO at eMushrif concluded, "We're excited to receive such tremendous support from our investors, who are aligned with our vision for expansion. With our current fundraise, we can continue to revolutionising commuting and attendance services, as well as ensure the safety of the community by implementing COVID-19 quarantine compliance."

State audit issues 253 reports

With regard to the units of the state administrative apparatus, oversight and monitoring works conducted by SAI at some of them, resulted in a number of phenomena that the relevant entities need to review and find suitable solutions.

The SAI oversight procedures spanned several areas most importantly the monitoring of public revenues, monitoring of capital and current expenses which underwent SAI monitoring to ensure that the expenses were made in accordance to the laws and regulations. This is in addition to the monitoring of developmental expenses which were attached great importance by SAI,

given the large allocations allotted to them. Besides, SAI conducted administrative oversight on the performance of some units of the state's administrative apparatus to ensure that they are handling their purviews economically and effectively.

The second part of the report is allocated to companies and public authorities and establishments some of them underwent monitoring in accordance with the international accounting and auditing standards within the parameters of the financial systems and the instructions issued by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). — ONA

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To whomsoever It May Concern



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Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Heritage & Tourism

Closure of Some Castles and Forts for Maintenance

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism notifies dear visitors that it is closing some castles and forts for periodic maintenance. They are Al Rustaq Fort, Nakhal Fort, Al Hazm Castle and Ras Al Had Castle. The opening will be announced once the maintenance ends.

Ready for ban on single-use plastic bags?

We are consciously trying to bring in more variety to the portfolio, so that it suits all pocket sizes."

"On occasion of Arab Environment Day, October 14, 2020, we ran an extensive campaign and gave reusable shopping bags for free to our preferred shoppers (on every purchase of RO 10)," he said.

He assured to continue running such awareness campaigns in the future as well and ensure that by January 1, 2021, Spar and its preferred shoppers are all set to deal with the change very smoothly.

Some responsible citizens

sounded full awareness about the step and welcomed it as a deterrent against some irresponsible ones who neither care for the environment nor for the cleanliness after having fun at public places.

"I really endorse this and love the idea, as it not only will save the environment from the onslaught of plastic waste, it will have its impact on food security as well. Since most of the people will carry their own bags to the supermarkets, they will buy up to the limit of the bags they will carry. As of now people land at the supermarkets without any 'to buy list' and shop as much

as they can because they do not have constraints of carry bags," said Ali Maqbali, who works in a government department in Muscat.

The catch is for those who do not have any clue about the government's plan to ban single-use plastic bags.

Farhan, a resident of Salalah, is totally ignorant about the decision. A shopping lover, Farhan started searching for a solution when asked what he would do if single-use plastic bags are banned. "I may need to buy some good quality shopping bags in advance," he quipped.

■ A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY HOLDS VIRTUAL WORKSHOP



A'Sharqiyah University (ASU), represented by the Environment Friends Group, in cooperation with the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) organised a virtual awareness workshop titled 'Oman's Environmental Diversity'. A number of visual displays on the Omani environment were screened during the workshop followed by a presentation by Dr Hamad al Ghailani, an environmental expert at ESO which included three themes the first of which dealt with marine biodiversity in Oman, the major turtle species in Oman and coral reef islands. — ONA

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding invites the specialized manufactures to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below;

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NG/2020/01	Framework agreement for the supply of Electricity Transformer Product for Nama Group	31 Dec 2020	14 Feb 2021	2000/-
NG/2020/02	Framework agreement for the supply of Electricity Switchgear product for Nama Group	31 Dec 2020	14 Feb 2021	2000/-

Terms and conditions:

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and the tender name & number must be written on the envelope.
- Three separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these three envelopes must be marked with a tenderer company name & tender number as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception area before 12:00 pm (time of the Sultanate) on Sunday 14 February 2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, for a total amount of OMR 100,000/- and valid for a period of (120) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company website (www.nama.om/tenders).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned) Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12:00 pm
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Location to submit the offer :Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307) Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number : +968 24559200 /276/277
E-Mail: Yasmmeen.allawati@Holding.nama.om / Fatima.AhAjmi@Holding.nama.om

Syria declarations on chemical arms lacking: UN

UNITED NATIONS, US: UN officials and a global watchdog have criticised incomplete declarations from Syria on chemical weapons while its ally Russia sought to push back against the accusations.

During a videoconference at the UN Security Council, officials from the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said Syria had failed to respond to a series of 19 questions involving toxic arms.

Izumi Nakamitsu, a UN high representative for disarmament affairs, said the OPCW had found that because of unresolved gaps and discrepancies Syria's declarations "cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention."

OPCW Director-General

Fernando Arias said one of the questions involved a chemical weapons production facility declared by Syria as never having been used for chemical weapons production.

Information and material gathered since 2014 indicate the facility was used for "production and/or weaponisation of chemical warfare nerve agents," he said, without specifying the location.

OPCW investigators have accused President Bashar al Assad's government of sarin gas and chlorine attacks in Syria in 2017.

Russia and Syria have dismissed the charges, saying Western powers have politicised the work of the OPCW.

"What we reject is speculations and political smear campaigns,



United Nations chemical weapons experts collected samples in August last year in Damascus. – Reuters file photo

which, unfortunately, more and more often poison the OPCW," said Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vasily Nebenzya.

He alleged the organisation was relying on remote investigations

During a videoconference at the UN Security Council, officials from the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said Syria had failed to respond to a series of 19 questions involving toxic arms

Germany, Belgium, Estonia, France and Britain praised "its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention and tasks assigned by the states

parties." The United States also said it "strongly" supported the global watchdog.

Russia and Syria have been under pressure for months by the UN and the OPCW to provide clarification on chemical attacks carried out in Syria and poisonings of Russian nationals.

Although the meeting was devoted to chemical weapons in Syria, Arias spoke at length on the case of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who says he was poisoned by the Kremlin.

He particularly regretted that Moscow is still blocking a technical visit by the OPCW to Russia.

The OPCW has said samples taken from Navalny have contained a Novichok-type nerve agent. — AFP

Sudan nears removal from US terror list amid Congress debate

WASHINGTON: Sudan is expected shortly to be formally removed from the US blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism but it is still awaiting action by Congress to provide immunity over past attacks.

President Donald Trump announced in October that he was delisting Sudan, a step desperately sought by the nation's new civilian-backed government as the designation severely impeded foreign investment.

As part of a deal, Sudan agreed to \$335 million to compensate survivors and victims' families from the twin 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, carried out when dictator Omar al



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) greeting Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in Khartoum. – AFP file photo

Bashir was welcoming Al Qaeda, and a 2000 attack on the USS Cole off Yemen's coast.

Sudan's transitional government, which took over last year following Bashir's overthrow, also agreed to recognise Israel, a major goal for Trump, although

Khartoum has sought to downplay the connection.

Trump sent his notice to Congress on October 26 and, under US law, a country exits the terror list after 45 days unless Congress objects, which it has not.

A State Department spokesperson did not confirm the date for Sudan's formal removal but said it would formally take effect when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signs a notice to be published in the Federal Register.

US lawmakers broadly support the decision but have not reached an agreement on an accompanying goal of Sudan — legally shielding it from any further terrorism claims in US courts. — AFP

DEMO AGAINST SOARING PRICES



Yemenis chant slogans as they march with banners during a demonstration against the deteriorating economic situation in the country's third city of Taz on Saturday. – AFP

Years after IS, Iraqis forced out of camps into uncertain future

BALAD, Iraq: Last month, Iraqi authorities gave families displaced by the war against IS just 48 hours to pack up and leave the Al Ishaki camp before it was closed. When the deadline expired, pick-up trucks and military vehicles arrived to take about 200 people back to their hometown.

Taama al Owaisi and others who had lived for years in the camps did not want to leave but they say they were forced to. An uncertain future awaits them - wrecked towns with no services, surrounded by paramilitaries who regard the returnees with



Taama al Owaisi with his wife Worood and their 3-month-old son stand in front of their tent in an informal camp in the town of Balad. – Reuters

suspicion for having survived life under IS. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes during the conflict in northern Iraq, which started in 2014 when IS captured vast areas and imposed its own rule and ended in 2017 with the hardline group's defeat by Iraqi forces backed by US airpower.

Cities, towns and villages - including Mosul, the capital of IS's self-proclaimed caliphate - were left in ruins. Owaisi now squats outside an abandoned railway station in Balad, about 90 km north of Baghdad. His home is two miles away, but he dares not negotiate

militia checkpoints to reach it. Local people blame paramilitaries that control the area for abducting and killing eight men in October.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi said then his government was chasing the perpetrators and said Iraq should avoid "sectarian rivalry". But his government is determined to close camps in most Iraqi provinces by the year's end-end, a move rights groups say could leave 100,000 people homeless with no aid.

The migration ministry says the closures are part of a programme of "safe and voluntary return"

but critics say they are badly coordinated and premature while much former IS territory lies in ruins or under the control of groups hostile to those returning. Owaisi is one of about 23,000 people who have been moved from formal camps with basic services to informal camps since mid-October, according to the UN migration agency.

Lahib Higel, senior analyst at International Crisis Group, said the government was "counting on someone else to take care of it, and by that I mean the international community". — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NETHERLANDS

Man sentenced to life for Hariri murder

An international court sentenced a fugitive Hezbollah member on Friday to five life jail terms for the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri (pictured left) and 21 other people. Salim Ayyash, 57, (right) was found guilty in absentia of murder and terrorism on August 18 by the Netherlands-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon over the huge suicide bombing that killed the billionaire politician and injured 226 others.



Ayyash remains on the run. Hassan Nasrallah, the head of the Hezbollah movement, refusing to hand him over or to recognise the UN-backed court. "Mr Ayyash participated in an act of terrorism that caused mass murder," Chief Judge David Re said. — AFP

TEHRAN

French-based dissident journalist executed

Iranian dissident journalist Ruhollah Zam, who was convicted of fomenting violence during anti-government protests in 2017, was executed on Saturday, Iran's state television reported.

Iran said on Tuesday its Supreme Court had upheld the death sentence of Zam, who was captured in 2019 after years of living in exile in France.

His Amadnews feed had more than one million followers. State TV said Zam, "director of



the counter-revolutionary Amadnews network, was hanged this morning". The son of a pro-reform cleric, Zam fled Iran and was given asylum in France. In October 2019, Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps said it had trapped Zam in a "complex operation using intelligence deception." — Reuters

ISTANBUL

Turkey's daily COVID-19 deaths at record high

Turkey's daily coronavirus deaths rose to a record 226 in the last 24 hours, bringing the country's total death toll to 15,977, health ministry data showed on Friday. Turkey also recorded 32,106 new coronavirus cases, including asymptomatic ones, in the last 24 hours.

For four months, Ankara only reported daily symptomatic cases but has reported all cases since November 25.

The government imposed weekday curfews and weekend



lockdowns to saddle the surge in cases.

Turkey ranks fourth globally in the highest number of daily cases, behind the United States, India and Brazil, all countries with much larger populations. — Reuters

In brief

HONG KONG



HK MEDIA MOGUL FACES NATIONAL SECURITY CHARGE

Hong Kong media tycoon and Beijing critic Jimmy Lai appeared in court on Saturday morning to face a charge under the national security law that could put him in jail for life. He is accused of colluding with foreign countries, by calling on overseas governments to sanction Hong Kong and China in response to the crackdown on pro-democracy activism in the city. Lai, 73, is the most high-profile figure charged under the sweeping law. The police's new national security department charged him on Friday with "collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security" under the security law. — **AFP**

TOKYO



JAPAN SURPASSES 3,000 DAILY VIRUS CASES FOR FIRST TIME

Japan saw more than 3,000 new infections of the novel coronavirus for the first time in one day on Saturday, public broadcaster NHK reported, as the number of cases continues to rise in the winter. A total of 3,041 people were newly infected, NHK said. Tokyo, Japan's capital and largest city, on Saturday confirmed 621 new cases. While Japan has not seen anywhere near the kind of massive outbreaks that have hit the United States and parts of Europe, infections have worsened as winter has set in, particularly in regions such as the northern island of Hokkaido. — **Reuters**

WELLINGTON



NZ MOVES TO REOPEN BORDER BUT ONLY WITH COOK ISLANDS

New Zealand took tentative steps on Saturday towards reopening its borders for the first time in the COVID era, but only with the tiny Cook Islands in the South Pacific. The government announcement made no mention of any plans for a broader expansion to take in Australia, which introduced a one-way travel bubble in October allowing quarantine-free travel from New Zealand to Australia but not vice-versa. New Zealand has been widely praised for its strict handling of the coronavirus which has caused just 25 deaths in a population of five million. — **AFP**

South Korea reports record 950 cases in COVID-19 'emergency'

SEOUL: South Korea reported a record 950 daily coronavirus cases on Saturday, exceeding the late February peak of 909, with the president calling the country's third wave of COVID-19 an "emergency". The South Korean authorities warned they may tighten social-distancing restrictions to their strictest level but held off for now. Of the Friday cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA), 928 were locally transmitted and 22 were imported, bringing the total to 41,736 infections with 578 deaths. More than 70 per cent the domestically transmitted cases were from Seoul and its neighbouring areas, where about half of the nation's 52 million people live. "This is indeed an emergency situation," said President Moon Jae-in, ordering the mobilisation of police, military personnel and public medical doctors in an effort to curb the further spread of the coronavirus, chiefly driven by small, widespread clusters.



A vendor waits for customers outside a stall selling Christmas decorations at Namdaemun market in Seoul. — **AFP**

"We plan to extensively expand drive-through and walk-through coronavirus testing methods... as preemptive measures to track down infected people and block the spread," Moon said in a Facebook post. South Korea is likely to see a further rise in the caseload with significant increases in testing, he added. The surge has been a

blow to South Korea's vaunted pandemic-fighting system, which used invasive tracing, testing and quarantine to blunt previous waves without lockdowns, keeping daily infections below 50 for much of the summer. "I was worried when I heard the daily coronavirus count was beyond 900 infections," Chae Hyeong-chan, 29, said on a visit to

Seoul for a doctor's appointment from the port city Incheon. "I had to take the subway today, which made me worried, because I'm afraid I might be exposed to the risk of infection. I will try to return home as soon as possible." The third wave comes despite tougher social-distancing rules that took effect on Tuesday, including unprecedented curfews on restaurants and most other businesses. The country has reported about 600 cases a day this week. Greater Seoul is under level 2.5 restrictions. Raising that to 3, the highest of the five levels, would require schools to switch to remote learning, allow only essential workers in offices and ban gatherings of more than 10 people. Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said the government will make all-out efforts to halt the third wave. "If we don't curb the spread now, escalating social distancing restriction to Level 3 would be inevitable," Chung told an emergency meeting. — **Reuters**

Eight countries denounce rights record in N Korea

UNITED NATIONS, US: Eight countries, including the United States, on Friday denounced North Korea's human rights record after a closed-doors videoconference at the UN Security Council organised by Germany. "The situation of human rights in the DPRK is appalling and gets worse by the day," the eight said in a joint declaration read by German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, referring to North Korea by the initials of its formal name. At his side were envoys from the United States, France, Britain, Japan, Estonia, Belgium and the Dominican Republic. "Individuals in the DPRK are stripped of nearly all their human rights, their freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, movement, and religion or belief, among many others," the statement said. "Media freedom is non-existent, neither is there any possibility of a political opposition to the regime's tight grip on its people," it added. — **AFP**

KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE



Kyrgyz riders take part in a Kok-boru, or goat dragging, a regional competition, outside Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on Saturday. The traditional horse game is a synthesis of traditional practices, performances and the game itself. It is played by two teams on horseback. — **Reuters**

Modi says govt committed to farmers' welfare

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured farmers on Saturday that reforms in the agrarian sector were aimed at helping them as thousands of farmers continued protests against three new laws to overhaul procurement and sale of produce. "Reforms will help draw investment in agriculture and benefit farmers," he said at the annual meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi. "The aim of the all government reforms is to make farmers' prosperous," he said, adding that private sector must help improve the country's agriculture sector. But protesting farmers in northern states fear the new legislation will eventually dismantle India's regulated markets and stop the government from buying wheat and rice at guaranteed prices, leaving them at the mercy of private buyers.

At least 30 farmer unions

are actively protesting against the new laws. Talks between leaders of the farmers' unions and government officials have failed to break the deadlock with the farmers demanding the complete rollback of the reforms. Despite Modi's latest assurances, thousands of farmers are trying to enter New Delhi from neighbouring states to press for the repeal of the new legislation. At the same event, Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said the government was committed to doubling farmers' income and the ongoing "farmer agitation was infiltrated by Leftists and Maoists". Last weekend, thousands of members of the Indian diaspora held rallies in London against the new laws while over 15 Indian opposition parties supported the protest. Farmer unions have said the new laws were introduced without consultation and they fear losing earnings and protection over guaranteed prices. — **Reuters**



Students hold placards as they shout slogans in support of farmers during a protest against the recent agricultural reforms in Amritsar on Saturday. — **AFP**

One killed in Kabul rocket attack

KABUL: A series of rockets struck Kabul on Saturday, killing one person and wounding two, officials said, the second such attack to rock the Afghan capital in less than a month. Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months, with several deadly attacks carried out in Kabul, despite the Taliban and the government engaging in peace talks since September 12 in Qatar. "This morning, 10 rockets were fired from the Labe Jar neighbourhood of Kabul," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters. He said three rockets landed near Kabul airport and seven in residential areas, leaving one civilian dead and two wounded. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far and the Taliban denied any involvement. The barrage of rockets on Saturday was the second such attack in less than a month in Kabul.



An Afghan man holds the remains of a rocket at the site of the attack in Kabul on Saturday. — **Reuters**

On November 21, eight people were killed and 31 were wounded when 23 rockets hit the capital in an attack claimed by the IS group. IS has also claimed two brutal attacks on educational centres in the capital that killed mostly students, including one on Kabul University during which gunmen sprayed classrooms with bullets. Authorities blamed the attacks on educational centres on the

Haqqani network, an affiliate of the Taliban. Afghan Vice-President Amrullah Saleh said on his Facebook page on Saturday that he had received a warning from IS that it would "transform Kabul into a slaughterhouse" for rival the sect if any of the group's militants arrested by government forces were executed. In recent months, Saleh and his aides have pushed for public trials of "terrorists" arrested in connection with deadly attacks and for those found guilty to be hanged publicly. IS has regularly claimed attacks targeting the minority Hazara community in Afghanistan. On Saturday, in a separate statement, the interior ministry said attacks such as Saturday's were aimed at "soft targets". "The enemies of the people of Afghanistan have intensified the violence," it said. — **AFP**

UN chief urges global summit to declare ‘climate emergency’

LONDON: UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday urged world leaders to declare a “state of climate emergency” and shape greener growth after the coronavirus pandemic, as he opened a summit marking five years since the landmark Paris Agreement.

The Climate Ambition Summit, being held online, comes as the United Nations warns current commitments to tackle rises in global temperatures are inadequate.

The commitments made in Paris in 2015 were “far from enough” to limit temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the UN Secretary-General said in his opening address to the summit, which is co-hosted by Britain and France.

“If we don’t change course, we may be headed for a catastrophic temperature rise of more than 3.0 degrees this century,” he said.

“That is why today, I call on all leaders worldwide to declare a State of Climate Emergency in their countries until carbon neutrality is reached,” he added, arguing the recovery from COVID-19 presented a rare opportunity to recalibrate growth.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the climate summit that a traumatic year of pandemic was ending with the hope of vaccines coming on-stream.

“My message to you all is that together, we can use scientific



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. – Reuters

advances to protect our planet, our biosphere against a challenge far worse, far more destructive, than even the coronavirus pandemic,” he said.

For its part, Britain was acting on climate not because it was a nation of “mung bean-eating eco freaks” but because scientific progress would allow the creation of “millions” of green jobs, Johnson added.

Speaking slots were handed to countries that submitted the most ambitious plans to accelerate their Paris promises.

These include Honduras and Guatemala, which were hit last month by a pair of monster hurricanes, as well as India, which is battling increasingly erratic weather patterns and air pollution.

Business figures set to speak

If we don’t change course, we may be headed for a catastrophic temperature rise of more than 3.0 degrees this century

ANTONIO GUTERRES

UN Secretary-General

include Tim Cook, the chief executive of Apple, which has committed to making its whole supply chain carbon neutral by 2030.

But major economies including

Australia, Brazil and South Africa are absent.

Brazil’s far-right President Jair Bolsonaro has dismissed the scale of destruction to the Amazon rainforest opened up by his climate-sceptic policies.

The United States, the world’s second-largest polluter after China, left the Paris Agreement under President Donald Trump. President-elect Joe Biden plans immediately to re-enter the accord, and has set a goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.

“We haven’t come close to the bold action that’s needed, and today, we have no time to waste,” Biden said in a statement on Saturday, reiterating a pledge to convene leaders of major economies for his own climate summit within 100 days of taking office next month.

‘MOMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY’

Speakers at Saturday’s summit were delivering short video messages, with organisers saying they would announce “new and ambitious climate change commitments” and that there would be “no space for general statements”.

Under the Paris climate accord, signatories committed to action to limit temperature rises to “well below” 2.0 Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to try to restrain them to 1.5C. — AFP



US approves Pfizer vaccine as millions of doses begin shipping

WASHINGTON: The US green-lit the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine late on Friday, paving the way for millions of vulnerable people to receive their shots in the world’s hardest-hit country.

President Donald Trump immediately released a video on Twitter, where he hailed the news as a “medical miracle” and said the first immunisations would take place “in less than 24 hours.”

It comes as infections across America soar as never before, with the grim milestone of 300,000 confirmed deaths fast approaching.

The US is now the sixth country to approve the two-dose regimen, after Britain, Bahrain, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Mexico.

The move came earlier than expected and capped a day

of drama after it was widely reported that the White House had threatened to fire Food and Drug Administration chief Stephen Hahn if he did not grant emergency approval on Friday.

Trump’s intervention reinserts politics into the scientific process, which some experts have said could undermine vaccine confidence.

The US is seeking to inoculate 20 million people this month alone, with long-term care facility residents and healthcare workers at the front of the line.

The government also said on Friday that it is buying 100 million more doses of the Moderna vaccine candidate, amid reports the administration passed on the opportunity to secure more supply of the Pfizer jab. — AFP

Foreign aid convoy reaches capital of Ethiopia’s scarred Tigray

ADDIS ABABA: The first international aid convoy arrived on Saturday in the capital of Ethiopia’s Tigray region since fighting broke out more than a month ago, triggering a refugee crisis and humanitarian disaster.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said seven trucks brought medicines and medical equipment for 400 wounded as well as relief supplies to Mekele, a city of half a million that had been all-but cut off to foreign aid since the conflict began on November 4.

“It is the first international aid to arrive in Mekele since fighting erupted in Tigray more than one month ago,” the Geneva-based ICRC said, describing healthcare facilities in the city as “paralysed”.

Patrick Youssef, ICRC regional director for Africa, said the supplies would “reduce those impossible life-or-death triage decisions” for

doctors and nurses in Mekele who had endured for weeks without running water and electricity, let alone essential medicines.

The convoy arrived as the United Nations expressed growing alarm over the plight of nearly 100,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray and appealed for urgent access to assist them and 600,000 others dependent on food rations.

Ethiopia had restricted access to Tigray, and a communications blackout has made it difficult to evaluate the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Aid groups have been warning for weeks of a looming hunger crisis as food rations dwindled, and life-saving relief was repeatedly delayed.

DISTURBING REPORTS

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, winner of last year’s Nobel Peace

Prize, on Friday said his government would be in charge of handling the humanitarian response and access to Tigray, and that Ethiopia had this week dispatched tonnes of food and other relief supplies by trucks to Mekele and other cities in the region.

Addis Ababa has rejected suggestions that outsiders might play a leading role in the relief effort and an agreement last week to allow the UN and aid agencies access to Tigray foundered, deepening international alarm, before another deal was announced on Wednesday.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR said on Friday it still has not been able to reach four camps for Eritrean refugees since the announcement of a major military offensive against forces loyal to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). — AFP



Women carry sacks of wheat during a distribution of food organised by the Ethiopian government in the city of Alamata, on Friday. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

US Supreme Court dismisses Texas suit

The US Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a bid by Texas to overturn the results of the presidential election, which Republican Donald Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden, in a fresh setback for the president. The longshot suit lodged late on Tuesday against four states key in the November 3 vote — Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — challenged Biden’s victory in each jurisdiction.

But the Supreme Court, made up of nine justices including three



appointed by Trump, said Texas — which voted for the president — “has not demonstrated a judicially cognisable interest in the manner in which another State conducts its elections.” — AFP

OTTAWA

Canada sees pandemic heading into Christmas

Canada’s second wave of the novel coronavirus is worsening as the holidays approach and some areas are imposing stricter restrictions, authorities said on Friday, with the first vaccinations due next week. Although many of the 10 provinces have already clamped down on businesses and limited gatherings as numbers continue to spike, chief public health officer Theresa Tam said more action was needed to reduce pressure on the healthcare system as hospitalisations soar.



Local authorities should implement “restrictions, closures and control measures” while urging people to cut their interaction with others, she added. — Reuters

LAGOS

Gunmen attack school in northern Nigeria

Gunmen have raided a government secondary school in northern Nigeria’s Katsina state, police said on Saturday, in an apparent kidnapping attempt for ransom. Local people said several students were captured. The attackers on motorcycles stormed Government Science Secondary School at Kankara late on Friday. “The bandits came on motorcycles firing sporadically and tried to enter the school,” said state police spokesman Isa Gambo. “Our men with the



assistance of the army engaged them in a shootout lasting one and half hours.” The gunmen were forced to retreat and were being tracked. — AFP

I’ve never completely understood the ‘company cars’ thing. Have you?

Around half of all the new cars sold in any given year, are sold to companies for use as company vehicles, and I dunno about you, but that’s something I’ve always found more than slightly unusual.

I have no doubt, that if my employer was to say, “Here you go Ray. Here are the keys to a new vehicle,” I would grab it quick-smart! After all, gift horse and all that!

“The fuel card is in the glovebox, and you can only use it on company business (nudge, nudge, wink, wink), there’s a good lad.” Then I would wake up! I’m not that lucky! Like most of us, I have to pay from my wheels out of my own pocket, and it’s certainly one of life’s wee mysteries, isn’t it? That those of us who earn lesser salaries have to buy our own vehicles, while those on mega-salaries always seem to get the company car, emphasising the ironic view that ‘the less you need, the more you get given.’

As I said, I’m not moralising here, as I would take a company car if it was offered, quicker than a mother-in-law’s good humour. It does appear though that much of the rationale for company car assignment is to make it an easy and reliable method of ensuring employees get to work on time. Aw diddums... no buses? No taxis? So how on earth do the tens of thousands of ‘great unwashed,’ get to



Ray Petersen
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I WOULD TAKE
A COMPANY
CAR IF IT WAS
OFFERED,
QUICKER THAN
A MOTHER-IN-
LAW’S GOOD
HUMOUR

work? They walk, take buses, taxis, carpool, or buy a car! One of their own, probably from OLX or one of the Internet sites, so they can buy something that looks just a little better than it is, so they don’t feel too out-of-place in the company carpark...

The reality is that having a company car is great, especially those with children, as access to a second car means that employees with families have more flexibility with their personal transportation. Yes... now you don’t need a family vehicle, your wife can buy that sporty little number she’s been looking at, or the people-carrier to get the kids to school, OMG... or what about a Hummer to do all the desert trips and mountaineering? Woo hoo! The good news just never stops does it? Aaaaaaand... Think about this... You can sleep in longer if you are one of those modern-day, young upwardly mobile working couples, because... you... no longer... have to... share a car. Now you can sleep in longer, way hey... and leave later, because you each have a car. Dumpty doo... Dumpty day... Start with a smile... every day...

The other really good thing... of course it doesn’t apply in Oman because there is no income tax (yet), but you can even have the option, which again is never made available to the ‘plebs,’ of a ‘salary sacrifice scheme, which reduces your income tax obligations,

and means you pay less tax, thus making you a fiscal beneficiary within your society, as you are earning more, yet paying less, than Joe Bloggs down the road... Winner, winner, chicken dinner. The company car... It’s the gift that just keeps on giving... innit?

And look, while much of this is ‘tongue-in-cheek,’ and maybe a touch of the green-eyed-monster has reared his ugly head too, it is a fact that many of the high-income earners are getting any of good amount of salary. If that can’t motivate them... they don’t need a new car as well... and don’t get me started on expenses and expense accounts... those working on the factory floors, and at the company ‘coal-face,’ deserve some ‘freebies’ a darn sight more.

No, the reality is that company cars have been perpetuated by motor vehicle dealers, and in more recent years by car-leasing companies, as a means of moving heaps of cars in big numbers, as the new vehicle retail market has contracted in recent decades. ‘Money men’ do tend to ‘look after’ each other, don’t they? I read somewhere “Do not walk on the earth in haughty style...” and I’m sure you know the rest of it, but don’t drive around in your company car, lording it over us mere minors... remember, no matter how high is our opinion of ourselves... we all sit down on our derrieres.

HUNGER AND TRAUMA

The lives of Mozambicans who fled insurgency

EMIDIO JOZINE AND ALFREDO ZUNIGA

Sinamangue Tamu is still just a teenager, but now has the responsibility of parenting her three little brothers after they fled a brutal insurgency in which their northern Mozambican town was seized.

They were separated from their father while escaping the port town of Mocimboa da Praia — his whereabouts are still unknown. “I don’t know if he’s alive or dead,” Tamu said, avoiding eye contact. Their mother had died of an illness.

Tamu is sitting on a mat in a camp for internally displaced people on the outskirts of Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado province, where the insurgency was launched three years ago.

Her youngest brother is under two years old and always clings to her, whether sitting in her lap or strapped to her back with a capulana — a colourful Mozambique sarong.

Pausing between sentences, Sinamanga said she was worried about her toddler brother.

“He is refusing to eat the food we have here. At the hospital, they say he has anaemia. He doesn’t eat,” she said.

The diet of chickpeas and cornflour is monotonous for the around 600 families at this dilapidated former agriculture training college in Metuge, 45 km from Pemba.

They are just a few of the half-million people forced from their homes by the vicious militant campaign in northern Mozambique, which is estimated to have killed more than 2,400 people.

For women and adolescent girls at the camp, life is a daily grind of chores — washing, cooking, caring for children.

Men meanwhile gather idly under trees worrying about their future, having left everything behind.

The insurgency has intensified in recent months, with torched villages and atrocities including beheadings increasing. The painful memories of such atrocities can be seen etched on the faces of many at the camp.

Isa Ali, 53, fled when the militants set fire to his village near Mocimboa da Praia. He hid in the bush until they left, returning to discover that he had lost everything. He walked until he ended up at the camp. He has no news of his wife and 10 children. Now he says sleeping on the concrete floor is making him sick.

“We are not animals, animals sleep in the sand,” he said.

“Here we don’t eat properly; they give us a bag of 50 kilos of peas for 30 days... without oil. It’s just water and salt and peas.” He is not the only one struggling.

“Mr journalist, in this centre we are hungry,” said a man who only gave a first name, Ramadan.

He warned that it would not be a surprise if people start dying from hunger “because the food is not enough — and the government knows that.”

Bartolomeu Muibo, the former administrator of Quissanga district, is among those displaced and living in the camp after fleeing his home in April. He acknowledged the government is struggling to meet everyone’s needs. — AFP

HUNGER AND TRAUMA

Leaders told to make more space for nature

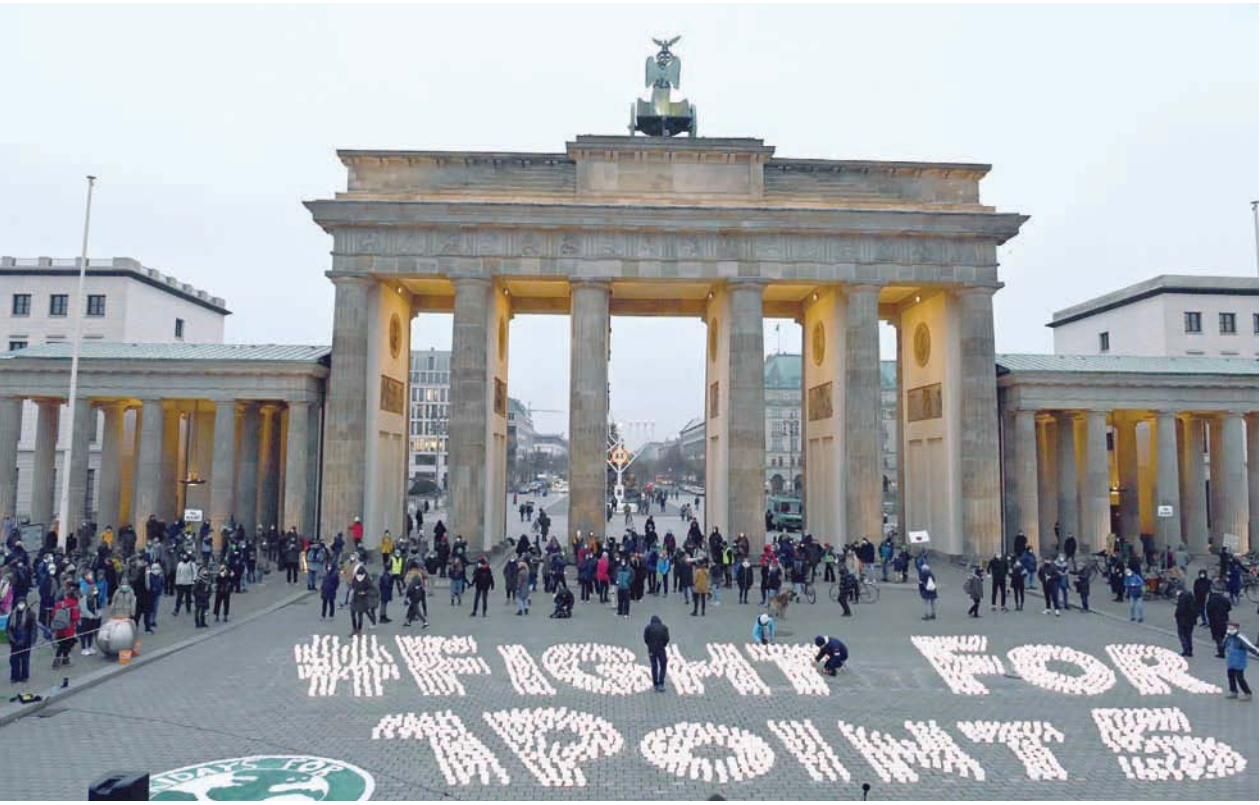
MEGAN ROWLING

Five years ago, when the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change was adopted, storing planet-warming carbon in ecosystems such as tropical forests, wetlands and coastal mangroves was not seen as a major part of the solution. Now officials and environmentalists say goals to limit global temperature rise cannot be met without nature’s help. Ahead of a UN “Climate Ambition Summit” to mark the fifth anniversary of the Paris accord on Saturday, held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they said threats to plants, wildlife, human health and the climate should be confronted together.

“It is time for nature to have a more prominent role in climate discussions and solutions,” said Brian O’Donnell, director of the Campaign for Nature, which works with scientists, indigenous people and conservation groups. “Global leaders can no longer deal with the climate and biodiversity crises in isolation if we are to be successful in addressing either of them,” he added in a statement.

It noted scientific estimates that protecting the planet’s ecosystems could provide at least a third of the reductions in emissions needed by 2030 to meet the aims of the Paris pact.

Under that deal, nearly 200 countries agreed to limit the average rise in global temperatures to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius and ideally to 1.5 C above preindustrial times. But the Earth has already heated up by about 1.2 C and is on track to warm by more than 3 C



An installation of the Fridays for Future activists reads “#FightFor1Point5” in front of Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on Friday, to mark the 5th anniversary of the Paris climate agreement. — AFP

SCIENTIFIC
ESTIMATES THAT
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EMISSIONS NEEDED
BY 2030

by the end of the century, the United Nations said last week. Understanding has accelerated in recent years about the crucial role ecosystems on land and sea play in absorbing carbon emitted by human activities - mainly from burning fossil fuels - and curbing potentially catastrophic planetary heating.

In 2019, a UN climate science report said the way the world manages the land, and how food is produced and consumed, had to change to curb global warming - or food security, health and biodiversity would be at risk.

Zac Goldsmith, Britain’s minister for the international environment and climate, said nature had been “left behind” and life on the planet was being exhausted at a “terrifying speed”, as forests were cut down and seas polluted.

“We are denuding the world at a rate that would have seemed impossible to humans a century ago,” he said. “It is not possible for us to tackle climate change properly unless we also restore nature - the two are inseparable,” he added in a phone interview.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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Oman set to contest ICC Board election

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, DEC 12

MUSCAT: Oman's headline-making cricket strides could take a giant leap when it becomes part of the International Cricket Council's (ICC) all-important decision-making team if Pankaj Khimji, Oman Cricket's Board Member, is elected to ICC Board of Directors following a keenly-contested election that starts on Monday,

December 14 and closes on Friday, December 18. ICC Board comprises 15 Directors, 12 nominated members from Test playing countries and three elected members from the 92 Associate nations.

Pankaj's nomination to contest the ICC Board election is a result of his untiring efforts to promote the cause of Associate nations in the power corridors of international cricket where he has been successful in



Pankaj Khimji, OC Board member

making his presence felt over the last five years. Pankaj, a life Member of London-based Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), the guardian of the laws of the game, has also been representing Oman at ICC and ACC in various capacities.

The election will see voting Associate members picking three directors from a total of seven candidates through a weighted secret ballot conducted electronically.

Apart from Khimji, six others in the fray are Imran Khwaja (current director), Tony Brian (Scotland/current director), Neil Speight (Bermuda Cricket Board), Sushil Kumar Nadkarni (USA Cricket Board), Mahinda Vallipuram (Malaysia Cricket Association/current director), Mark Stafford (Vanuatu Cricket Association) and Prof Adam Ukwenya (Nigeria Cricket Association).

Each Associate voting mem-

ber has three votes which it must cast for three different candidates in order of preference so that the weighted voting system could be used in the event of a tied vote.

This is the first time that a representative from Oman is contesting ICC Board election and, if elected, will go down in the country's history as yet another international accolade brought home by the game of cricket.



Oman U-16 team concludes Bahrain camp on bright note

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The Oman national U-16 football team concluded the first overseas camp in Bahrain on Saturday on a bright note.

During the camp, the national junior team had two friendly matches, the first match ended for the Sultanate team with a 2-1 victory while the Sultanate team suffered a 2-0 loss in the second game.

The goals from the hosts Bahrain were netted by Mahmood al Banai and Sayyied Mahmood al Mosawai. The seven-day camp was suitable for the coaching staff headed by the national coach Hilal al Oufi and his assistant Sultan al Touqi to assess the players' performance prior to the top Asian assignment at the AFC U-16 Championship.

Coach Al Oufi had tested many players during both the matches and gave equal chances to all to prove their technical skills and capabilities. The initial kick off list is almost clear for the head coach and he will finalise

the list before the Asian event in Bahrain next year.

The preparatory plan of the team will continue after the external camp in Bahrain. It is expected all the team players accompanied by the technical staff will be in home quarantine for 10 days as per the procedures of the Supreme Committee. Then, the team will be back to another warm up gathering after completion of the quarantine period.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will announce the new itinerary and schedules of the AFC U-16 Championship very soon as the previous itinerary, which was supposed to be in 2020, is postponed to the next year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Oman will play against Tajikistan, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates teams in Group B at the AFC U-16 Championship. The top two teams in the group will advance to the quarterfinals. The top four teams in the AFC U-16 finals will represent Asia at the Fifa U-17 World Cup in 2021 in Peru.





Jamieson's fifer leaves West Indies reeling

Kyle Jamieson bagged a fifer in a masterclass of swing bowling as New Zealand struck hard and fast to have the West Indies on the ropes on day two of the second Test in Wellington on Saturday. The tourists ended the day on the brink of another follow on as they struggled to 124/8, still 336 behind New Zealand's 460.



Fit-again India batsman Rohit cleared to fly to Australia

India batsman Rohit Sharma has recovered from a hamstring injury and will fly to Australia to join the Test squad Down Under, the BCCI said on Saturday. Rohit was initially ruled out of the entire Australia tour with a high-grade left hamstring injury, which kept him out of four IPL matches in the UAE.

Oman all set to host 39th OCA General Assembly

MUSCAT: Oman will host the 39th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and its accompanying meetings at the JW Marriott Hotel Muscat on December 16 for the first time in the Sultanate.

The event will be attended by representatives of National Olympic Committees from all Asian countries and multiple influential sports figures from across the continent.

The Sultanate will be represented at the meeting by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, OOC chairman, and Shaikh Badr bin Ali al Rawas, Board member.

OOC is fully prepared for the meeting and the programme of accompanying meetings and press conferences, and has made the necessary arrangements and preparation of the agenda.

INFLUENTIAL SPORTS FIGURES

Representatives of (45) National Olympic Committees from Asia will participate in the meeting, of which (32) will attend the meeting in Muscat, and (13) Olympic Committee will participate online.

The meeting will witness the attendance of influential international and Asian sports figures from the heads of the National Olympic Committees or representatives thereof, as well as members of the Executive Office of OCA.



A number of heads of international and continental sports federations headed by Shaikh Ahmed Al Fahad Al Jaber al Sabah, OCA President, and Shaikh Joaan bin Hamad al Thani, Chairman of Qatar Olympic Committee(QOC), Shaikh Fahd Nasser Al Jaber al Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait Olympic Committee(KOC), Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Faisal al Saud, Minister of Sports and Youth in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad al Khalifa, Chairman of Bahrain Olympic

Committee(BOC).

The meeting will also be attended by Adnan Darjal al Rubaie, the Iraqi Minister of Sports and Youth, Jibril al Razjab, the Palestinian Minister of Sports, Hassan Mustafa Musa, President of the International Handball Federation, in addition to International Judo Federation President Maurice Baiser.

David Lapatian, President of the International Cycling Federation, and General Antonio Espinus, President of the International Karate Federation, in addition to many important



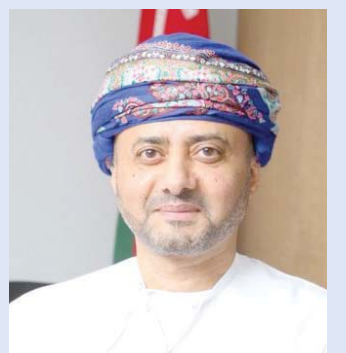
sports figures.

MEETING AGENDA

The prepared programme includes several meetings, including the meeting of OCA

Executive Office which will be held on December 15, and the thirty-ninth meeting of the General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia on December 16, in addition to two press conferences.

The first of which is the press conference that will be held for the country that will host the Asian Games 2030, and the second of the Olympic Council of Asia, which will be held after the end of the General Assembly meeting to announce the decisions that came out of the meeting.



“
The Sultanate will be represented at the meeting by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, OOC chairman, and Shaikh Badr bin Ali al Rawas, Board member.



Al Turki, E&Y post victories in Premier Division games

MUSCAT: Al Turki NMC bowlers won another game for their team, destroying Arm Alpha in an emphatic 8-wicket win in a Premier Division 50-over League match at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Alpha was shot out for 111, only Ahmed Fayyaz Butt (46 off 62) making a notable score. Jay Odedara claimed 3 for 16 while Jitenkumar, Ajay Lalcheta and Mehran Khan took two wickets each.

Al Turki raced to the target in just 23 overs, scoring 114 for 2 thanks to a solid 67 not out by one drop Kail Khalid.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): Arm Alpha 111 all out in 40.1 overs (Ahmad Fayyaz Butt 46 – 6x4, Jay Odedara 3-16, Jitenkumar Ramanandi 2-5, Ajay Lalcheta 2-18, Mehran Khan 2-23) lost to Al Turki NMC 114 for 2 in 23 overs (Kail Khalid 67 – 7x4, 2x6) by 8 wickets.

Zeeshan bowls E&Y to victory Rana Zeeshan's superb 4 for 27 was the highlight of Ernst and Young's (E&Y) comfortable 7-wicket victory against OCT Muscat in an A Division 50-over League match at OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

OCT Muscat failed to post a competitive total on the board, folding up for a paltry 119 in 33 overs, Zeeshan doing the bulk of the damage in his 10-over spell.

Al Turki chased down Alpha's target of 112 in just 23 overs, scoring 114 for 2 thanks to a solid 67 not out by one drop Kail Khalid

Brief Scores (A Division): OCT Muscat 119 all out in 33 overs (Muzaffar Shiralkal 35 – 2x4, 1x6, Khalid al Balushi 29 – 4x4, Rana Zeeshan 4-27, Farhan Afzal 2-24, Alkesh Joshi 2-31) lost to Ernst & Young 123 for 3 in 25.5 overs (Sultan Ahmed 50 not out – 6x4, Mohammad Attique 25 – 5x4) by 7 wickets.

Farhan Afzal and Alkesh Joishi bowled well, too, taking two wickets each.

E&Y scored 39 for 2 in 10 overs before veteran Sultan Ahmed (50 not out) found a dependable partner in Omar Sarfraz (22) for a 54-run third wicket partnership. Victory was achieved in the 26th over as E&Y scored 123 for 3 Opener Muhammed Attique contributed 25.

SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 12

The horse, Al Ruba al Khali claimed the title of the Omani Derby Cup on Friday at Al Rahba Horse Racing Track in Barka.

The triumph came after a tough competition in the last round of the race which was dedicated for a distance of 2,200 metres for the pure Arabian horses.

The Omani Derby Cup is one of the top classic horses races in the Sultanate held annually. The winner horse was owned by Shaikh Hamed bin Salim al Balushi, the rider was Al Moutaism al Balushi and coached by the national coach Younis al Kalbani. Shaikh Hamed al Balushi, owner of the horse, was handed over the Cup by the chief guest during the podium ceremony.

The race, which was organised by the Royal Horse Racing Club (RHRC), was held under strict medical and safety protocols. The horse Arkan al Reef, owned by Shaikh Nasser al Saadi and ridden by Mounais al Siyabi was positioned as runner up.

The horse, SSR Heiba, finished in the third place. The horse owned by Salim al Rushaidi, ridden by Hamed al Malki and coached by Abdulaziz al Rushaidi.

The race featured from eight rounds including six rounds for



the pure Arabian horses while two rounds for purebred hybrid horses. The first round was titled under “Dhofar University” for a distance of 1,200 metres and dedicated for the pure Arabian horses. As many as 16 horses took part in this round.

The rider Anas al Siyabi on “Silent Asaseen” horse managed to win the first place award at Sohar University” race which was dedicated for purebred hybrid horses for a distance of 1,200 metres. The rider Mounais al Siyabi was an opponent to Anas but the former ended as runner up on “Snafield”.

The owner of “Hathlool Thani” horse, Hamood al Nahdi, clinched

the award of the top place for the Nizwa University race which was for a distance of 1,200 metres for the pure Arabian horses.

The horse “Hamayel” won the first place award for the “Al Sharqiya University” race which was for a distance of 1,200 metres for the pure Arabian horses.

The winning horse was owned by Hamza al Taie, ridden by Amer al Rasbi and coached by Essa al Balushi.

Al Buraimi University race was for 1,600 metres and dedicated for the pure Arabian horses and the race title went to “SSR al Safaa” horse which was owned by Salim al Mamari, ridden by Asim al Farsi and

coached by Fahad al Hajri.

The following round was for the purebred hybrid horses for a distance of 2,200 metres. The horse “Kalkrand” won the title after tough competition with the horse “Nolohai” which ended as runner up.

The winning horse owned by Taher al Khalili, ridden by Amer al Rasbi and coached by Fahad al Hajri. Muscat University round was for 2,200 metres and dedicated for the pure Arabian horses. The horse “Betit Mounser” clinched the title. The horse was owned by Mohammed al Khalili, ridden by Ahmed al Siyabi and coached by Fahad al Hajri.



Verstappen pips Mercedes duo to claim Abu Dhabi pole

BERLIN: Red Bull's Max Verstappen stunned world champions Mercedes by grabbing pole position for the season-ending Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix on Saturday.

Verstappen topped a thrilling final shoot-out in the day-to-night session with less than nine-hundredths of a second separating him from third-placed world champion Lewis Hamilton, with Valtteri Bottas second in the other Mercedes.

Verstappen clocked 1 minute 35.246 seconds on the 5.554-kilometre Yas Marina Circuit for his first pole of the season and third overall.

It is the first time since 2013 that Mercedes have not claimed pole in Abu Dhabi, and only the second time this season in 17 races that they will not start from first place on the grid.

The Dutchman Verstappen was more than happy to have finally beaten Mercedes when it mat-

tered. "The whole season, behind, behind and getting closer it's a bit frustrating. But very, very pleased with today," he said.

"It's a long season for everyone, with a lot of races in a row. I think this was a good final qualifying for everyone in the team and for sure we are very happy with that.

"It seems like we have a decent top speed this weekend. Hopefully, this will work out for tomorrow." Red Bull advisor Helmut Marko told Sky TV that pole was "is an important sign that all our work was worth it."

Hamilton had set the fastest time in his return from a positive coronavirus test which saw him miss last week's race in Bahrain, but first Bottas and then Verstappen were even faster.

"It's definitely been a difficult weekend, just getting back into a rhythm. Even though it's only a couple of weeks off it just felt like you'd lost that momentum and I've really struggled with the balance

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix
Yas Marina Circuit

55

x 5.554 km
305.355 kms

55

x 5.554 km
305.355 kms

Lap record: 1min. 39.283
Lewis Hamilton (2019)

Source: Formula1.com

AFP

Race 17
Dec 13

Standings

Drivers

Lewis Hamilton
Mercedes

332

Valtteri Bottas
Mercedes

205

Max Verstappen
Red Bull

189

Sergio Perez
Racing Point

125

Teams

Mercedes

540

Red Bull

282

Racing Point

194

“The whole season, behind, behind and getting closer it’s a bit frustrating. But very, very pleased with today. It’s a long season for everyone, with a lot of races in a row. I think this was a good final qualifying for everyone

MAX VERSTAPPEN
Red Bull driver

occurred later, was brought back down to earth back at his Williams team as he placed 18th on Saturday.

Alexander Albon will start fifth, behind the impressive Lando Norris McLaren, as he looks to save his Red Bull career while Sebastian Vettel will begin his farewell to Ferrari from 13th. — dpa



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Life Sciences Discovery Centre planned in Oman

NEW LANDMARK: Conceived as an exclusive showcase centring on life sciences, the Centre will incorporate as many as 10 different facilities each with their distinctive value proposition

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Muscat’s splendid urban landscape with its delightful assortment of historical monuments, sumptuous cultural, educational and religious edifices, and other imposing structure, will soon have another striking living landmark: the Oman Life Sciences Centre.

Covering an area of around 380,000 sq metres, this one-of-a-kind complex will serve as a national showcase of Oman’s rich and diverse plant and animal genetic resources.

Complementing this unique facility will be a range of educational, R&D, edutainment, recreation and leisure, hospitality, healthcare and rehabilitation, and other related components that will make it a striking new destination.

Development of the state-of-the-art facility is being spearheaded by Oman Animal and Plant Genetics Resources Centre (OAPGRC), a specialised agency of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation.

The entire development has been conceived by Oman-based Integrated Development Solutions (IDS) within the framework of Oman’s Public Private Partnership (PPP) Law administered by the Ministry of Finance.

OAPGRC was established by Royal orders in 2012 specifically to advance the sustainable use of animal and plant genetic resources through education, research

and innovation.

Its primary mission is to promote the recognition, sustainable utilisation and value of the genetic diversity inherent in Oman’s animals, plants, marine life and microorganisms as a natural heritage resource.

“There are compelling economic, social and environmental drivers for a more robust and concerted Omani response to animal, marine, microorganism and plant challenges, which are of critical importance to protecting and enhancing the Sultanate’s prosperity and well-being.

“Several years in the planning, the Oman Life Sciences Centre seeks to bring to life the core tenet of OAPGRC’s mandate: ‘Transforming Genetic Resources into Value,’ said Dr Nadiya al Saadi, Executive Director.

“It will serve as a hub for a full spectrum of activities and services covered by our mandate, from developing the capabilities of our human resources and providing our researchers the opportunity to work in a science and technology-focused environment, to promoting the concept of human well-being.”

Conceived as an exclusive showcase centring on life sciences, the Centre will incorporate as many as 10 different facilities each with their distinctive value proposition.

In addition to the centrepiece Oman Animal and Plant Genetics Resources Centre, the complex will also include the following:

Life Sciences Exhibition and Conference Centre, International School of Science and Technology, Science and Technology Teaching Academy, Discovery Centre for Children with Special Needs, Teaching Academy for special needs educators, caregivers, and parents, and Centre for Neuro-Recovery and Rehabilitation.

Adding a sizable edutainment and leisure dimension to the centre are: an all-access Science and Fun Water Park, full dome Zeiss planetarium, full dome IMAX theatre, and Eco-heritage Resort Village.

The erstwhile Research Council, now part of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, has enthusiastically promoted the idea of an integrated Life Sciences Centre in the Sultanate.

OAPGRC’s lead partner in the conception, design and delivery of the signature project is Integrated Development Solutions (IDS), Muscat-based development

Dr Nadiya al Saadi

strategists and land economists in partnership with Earc Sabla Architects and Engineers.

The company’s CEO, Eng Michael A Katz, who is a long-standing investor and resident of the Sultanate, said: “With our extensive and diverse expertise in mixed-use developments, IDS has come up with a winning combination of income-generating education, healthcare, recreational and leisure elements to implement and operate a truly landmark project

on a financially sustainable basis for the long-term.”

He further added: “All of the individual components of the project will complement each other to create synergies that will position the Oman Life Sciences Centre as a national landmark.”

Every aspect of the project’s design and construction is at the highest levels of sustainability principles, according to Jamal al Zeedi, Principal, Earc Sabla, Architects and Engineers.

“We have taken a comprehensive green building approach to the entire Oman Life Sciences Centre Development. A ‘green’ building is a building that, in its design, construction or operation, reduces or eliminates negative impacts, and can create positive impacts, on our climate and natural environment. Green buildings preserve precious natural resources and improve our quality of life,” Al Zeedi said.

Distributed across the sprawling complex will be

dedicated spaces for all types of human activity that will benefit from the project’s biophilic design, which Eng Michael Katz described as a human’s innate attraction to nature. This concept has been recognised for several decades by the scientific and design communities, and intuitively for hundreds of years by the population at large, he noted.

“We believe that incorporating nature into the built environment is not just a luxury, but a sound economic investment in health and productivity, based on well-researched neurological and physiological evidence. In our development planning, we illustrate how small investments involve very low or no up-front cost, such as providing employees access to plants, natural views, daylight, and other biophilic design elements,” he stated.

“The Oman Life Sciences project is a unique combination of both meeting country-needs for the Sultanate of Oman as well as the potential for strong financial rewards for investors. It is rare to find ESG compliant investment opportunities which offer such a combination of economic benefit as well as good corporate citizenship,” said Paul Callaghan, Partner, Moore Oman.

Significantly, a number of state pension funds and other government investment bodies have confirmed their interest in participating as shareholders in the PPP-based project, Eng Michael Katz said, adding that there has also been significant interest from international ESG investment and finance groups.

The Oman Life Sciences Centre is expected to be fully operational by early 2024.

Oman crude production averaged 720,789 barrels/day in November

MUSCAT: The Sultanate’s daily production of crude oil during November 2020 averaged 720,789 barrels, representing a 0.04 per cent decrease (m-o-m) with the daily average of October 2020, according to the monthly report of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. Exports of Oman Blend crude oil increased 4.77 per cent to 777,207 bpd for the month.

Of total exports of Oman Export Blend, China’s share fell 9.60 per cent m-o-m, compared to October 2020, while India’s share climbed 9.50 per cent m-o-m. Malaysia and Singapore also imported some quantities of Omani crude.

Oil prices for all reference crude oil grades around the world have experienced a bullish trend during the trading days of November 2020 for January 2021 delivery, compared with trading of October 2020.

The average price of West Texas Intermediate Crude Oil at the New York Mercantile Exchange

(NYMEX) settled at \$42.66 per barrel, an increase by \$2.84. The average price of North Sea Oil (Brent) at the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in London averaged \$43.98 per barrel, up by \$2.46 compared with trading during October 2020.

The average price of Oman’s Crude Oil Futures Contract on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange similarly increased by 6.6 per cent compared with previous month. The monthly official selling price for Oman crude oil for January 2021 delivery — traded dur-

ing November 2020 — was announced to be \$43.83 per barrel, rising by \$2.72 compared with the October 2020 official selling price.

The daily trading marker price ranged between \$48.30 per barrel and \$36.67 per barrel.

The yearly average for the Oman crude oil in 2020 reached \$46.02 per barrel.

Crude oil prices experienced overall optimistic sentiments during November 2020 trading due to several factors, which had direct and positive impacts on prices. — ONA

CBO set to receive applications for Fintech live testing

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The formal launch of a Fintech Regulatory Sandbox (FRS) initiative by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) last week opens the way for Fintech solutions providers to live test their innovative apps that are enabled by new technologies, in a safe environment under the supervision of the CBO.

To this end, the regulator has published the framework for the Fintech Regulatory Sandbox initiative on its website (www.cbo.gov.om). It includes the eligibility criteria for application, processes and expectations, as well as the evaluation process of the Sandbox live testing period. The first phase of the FRS will be open for receiving Fintech applications related to payments solutions.

A Fintech Regulatory Sandbox is a common and worldwide-used approach to achieve

the objective of harnessing opportunities for innovation in the financial sector while mitigating the accompanying risks.

The FRS is a testing environment in which the CBO will grant certain regulatory exemptions for participants that have Fintech solution applications entering the FRS, thus allowing them to live test their banking, payments and other financial services solutions on volunteer customers in order to prove their viability. Such testing is live in the sense that it will include actual volunteer customers yet with limitations on their numbers, the volumes and values of operations as

well as on the way some operations are conducted.

Tahir al Amri, the Executive President of the CBO, stated that this initiative will allow the local financial sector to develop through a safe testing environment that allows entrepreneurs and financial institutions to keep up with the rapid changes in financial technology worldwide.

The FRS will enhance competition in the financial sector by allowing participants to better understand the benefits and risks of their Fintech solutions, as well as by reducing the time needed to fully offer the solution to the local market.

This experience will allow the CBO to introduce agile regulatory frameworks and other strategic initiatives to foster innovation in the Omani financial sector while maintaining financial stability and ensuring high standards for consumer protection.

Budgeting marketing during COVID-19 recovery

As I started working on the marketing and communication budget for 2021, I realised how much the pandemic and post pandemic effects are still casting a shadow of uncertainty on the economy.

Before we get into details, allow me to clarify that I belong to the old school of marketers that believes in a marketing mix made of traditional communication methods carefully paired with a resource efficient online strategy.

The clarification is needed because the more we progress in this new century — having put the first 20 years behind us — the more I notice that the new generation of marketer have been taught that social media is all you need to know in order to plan and launch a successful campaign.

As much as I understand the importance of such media, I also recognise that it is strategically wise to balance marketing and communication with initiatives outside of the usual Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Especially at the moment, when I am working mostly in B2B, it is hard to envision a successful effort in generating leads by merely promoting social



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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IT IS SAFER TO
BUDGET THE
FIRST HALF OF
2021 WITH A MORE
DIVERSE APPROACH
COMPARED TO 2020

media posts: in my mind, social media is mostly entertainment for consumers.

So, in a non-COVID time I would have probably relied on offline events, such as conferences and seminars in order to attract interest and generate new connections, but having spent 2020 attending so many online events, I now question their effectiveness.

Some of the readers might empathise with my feeling of boredom, attending endless online sessions on Zoom while keeping a Chrome window open on the second monitor to browse away on something more entertaining.

Despite the event organisers promising the stars and the moon from yet another fully online event, announcing a stellar new software able to simulate a real life event, with avatars of the visitors and ultra-engaging chat rooms, there is nothing in the virtual environment that can replace the exchange of a physical business card and a handshake to firm a deal in person.

Despite this, many of the specialised industry events that I have considered sponsoring in 2020 were charging fees very much comparable to the physical

events in 2019.

This is the dilemma for every marketer at the moment: how to allocate the budget for 2021, given that virtual events are - more often than not - a fiasco?

In my mind the marketing mix for 2021 should be focused on creating a catalysing ecosystem able to attract leads and prospects based on their interests.

In simple words, in 2020 we accepted to take the risk of investing in digital events as if they were as effective as physical events, but in 2021 we should think twice before inking a sponsorship deal for an online conference, but priced like a physical event.

I am not saying that all digital events are bad. I am just inviting marketers to be more selective in 2021 than we all were in 2020.

Hopefully events organisers will manage to find an engagement formula to make the events more exciting and effective, but for now it is safer to budget the first half of 2021 with a more diverse approach compared to 2020.

[The writer is a member
of the International Press
Association]



Dhofar Fisheries and Food Company products exported to 20 countries worldwide

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The 'Made in Oman' products of Dhofar Fisheries and Food Company, operating in Raysut Industrial City, are now being distributed in 20 countries around the world.

Hamid bin Ali al Nahdi, General Manager, said the company has increased the capacity of its refrigerated warehouses from 1,600 tonnes to 11,000 tonnes to store sufficient quantity of fish and sardines.

The company's annual production volume has amounted to 23 million of tuna cans, 2.7 million of sardine cans, and 735 tonnes of fish oil, said Al Nahdi, adding that the company has established new food production lines, namely oats, crème caramel and jelly.

"As planned, the actual operation of these lines will commence in the second quarter of 2021 and the marketing process will take place through local and foreign distribution companies in the Arab and African countries," he said.

Dhofar Fisheries presently exports its products to Yemen, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya, Bahrain, Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Taiwan, Chile, Vietnam, Spain, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Established in 1997, Dhofar Fisheries and Food Company commenced actual production in 2000 in canned tuna and sardines, and fish oil with the aim of enhancing food security in the Sultanate through its products and providing direct and indirect job opportunities for the citizens.



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Weighed down by Financial Index decline

The MSM30 Index ended the week down by 0.91 per cent.

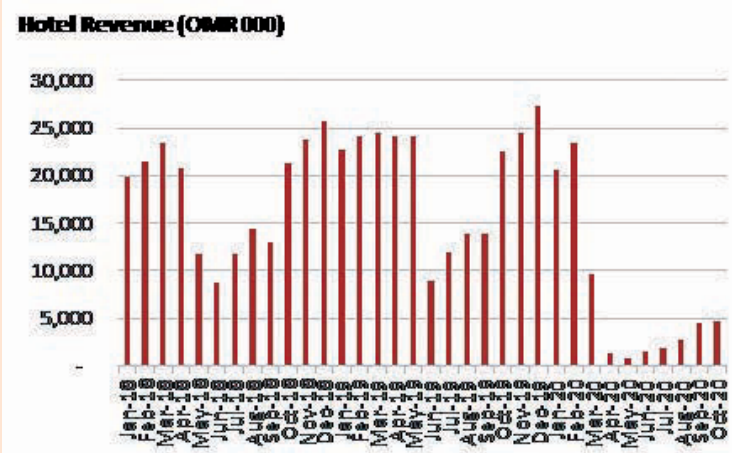
The Financial Index dropped 2.33 per cent, while the Services and Industrial Indices ended the week higher by 0.94 per cent and 3.90 per cent respectively.

The MSM Sharia Index also fell by 0.31 per cent.

Oman plans to amend labour laws, introduce new taxation and end some "long-standing" subsidies while ensuring that low-income families are protected, Oman's foreign minister said.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, told a summit in Bahrain that significant changes to labour policy would include abolishing a requirement that expatriate workers need permission to transfer to a new employer, which is known as the no-objection certificate system.

Oman's government announced the formal establishment of a new corporate entity with a mandate to invest in conventional as well as renewable and alternative energy resources within the Sultanate's borders and beyond. Energy Development Oman SAOC (EDO), set up by Royal Decree 128/2020 published in the Official Gazette, is envisioned as an Omani joint stock company that will, among other things, acquire



Source: IVCSI

a shareholding in majority government-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), presently the largest producer of crude oil and natural gas in the Sultanate.

As per CBO, despite efforts to push expenditure rationalisation during 2019, the fiscal position continued to reflect the evolving conditions in the economy.

Notwithstanding a substantial decline, the fiscal deficit remained elevated due to lower oil prices and expenditure rationalisation constrained by socio-economic priorities and higher proportion share of committed expenditure (such as wages, pensions, interest payments, and so on). In response to the challenges posed by the economic downturn and the pandemic, the government implemented urgent fiscal measures such as a cut in the budgeted expenditure by a minimum of 10 per cent across ministries/departments as well

as a reduction in spending of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), according to the Central Bank.

"The government is committed to achieving primary fiscal balance in the medium term while also strengthening its institutional and governance structures and enhancing its operational capacity to ensure effective planning and timely implementation of its fiscal policy over the medium term," the apex bank stated in its 2019 Annual Report.

The National Programme for Fiscal Balance (Tawazun), constituted in September 2019, is working out a medium-term fiscal consolidation plan, the report said.

The total revenue of Omani hotels in the three-to-five-star category fell by 60.2 per cent to RO 70.70 million (\$183.1mn) until the end of October 2020 compared to RO 177.72 million (\$460.5 million) for the same period of the previous year.

PRESS RELEASES

RAYSUT CEMENT COMPANY OPENS HYDROTHERAPY BUILDING IN SALALAH

In conjunction with the 50th National Day celebrations, the inauguration ceremony of the hydrotherapy centre was held at the Al Wafa Social Centre in Salalah on December 9, under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen Al Ghassani, Head of Dhofar Municipality, and in the presence of Mohammed bin Ahmed Aided, Acting General Manager of Raysut Cement Company in Salalah, officials at the Ministry of Social Development and officials of Raysut Cement Company.

This project comes under the aim of rehabilitation of the Salalah Al Wafa Centre facilities, including the establishment of a hydrotherapy hall, the preparation of the gymnasium with sports equipment and tools, supporting rehabilitation hall with movement equipment's, aerobic and interactive games.

"The opening of this project comes within the company's strategy for social responsibility which covers the support for Al Wafa Social Centre in Salalah, and as a second phase of



supporting Al Wafa Centre in Salalah.

"The first phase was a building that includes multi-purpose halls in the centre and the second phase includes the hydrotherapy hall, preparation of the gymnasium and the equipping of the movement therapy room, and today we inaugurate this project, which is one of the fruits of this strategy approved by Raysut Cement Company Board of Directors," said Mohammed Ahmed Aided, Acting General Manager of Raysut Cement Company in Salalah.

MEETHAQ INAUGURATES AL AMERAT BRANCH



Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat has opened its 23rd branch at Al Amerat. Meethaq branches are spread across the country and includes 12 branches in Muscat and 11 in other governorates. As the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman, Meethaq is continuously launching new services and expanding its presence in the country.

The newly-opened branch is the 3rd branch launched in 2020, and adds to the bank's already excellent network of branches and a dedicated network of 44 ATMs/CDMs as well as free access to over 740 Bank Muscat ATMs and CDMs across different governorates of the country. The new branch is staffed by well qualified and experienced Omani employees and will operate from 8 am to 2 pm in Al

Amerat which is one of the fastest growing areas in the Capital region.

It offers a full suite of retail banking operations and services such as home finance, auto finance and other retail facilities are compatible with the principles and provisions of Islamic Sharia. The Al Amerat branch also has a Hafawa Centre for the benefit of Premium Banking customers. Meethaq Islamic Banking continues to maintain its industry-leading position in terms of asset size, deposit base and profitability as well as branch network and distribution channels.

Meethaq already has several branches spread across the country including at the Bank Muscat Head Office, Al Ghubra, Muttrah, Seeb, Qurum, Al Khoudh, Al Khuwair, Salalah, Ibra, Suhar, Saham, Barka and 18 November Street. Branches are also operating in Nizwa, Bahla, Al Buraimi, Sinaw and Ibri, apart from a branch on the campus of the SQU in response to the tremendous public demand for banking products and services based on Sharia principles.



In brief

■ WASHINGTON

CALIFORNIA TO BRING
ANTITRUST LAWSUIT
AGAINST GOOGLE

California will join the US government and 11 other states in bringing lawsuits against Google for abusing its market dominance, the state's top prosecutor said.

"Google's market dominance leaves consumers and small businesses with little choice when it comes to Internet search engines," Attorney General Xavier Becerra said.

"By using exclusionary agreements to dominate the market, Google has stifled competition and rigged the advertising market." The US Justice Department and 11 states in October brought a civil case against Google for pursuing an illegal monopoly.

■ LONDON

BRITAIN TO FAST TRACK
SOME PERISHABLE
GOODS AT PORTS

Britain will fast track the movement of some perishable goods when its Brexit transition period with the European Union ends on December 31 as part of efforts to deal with expected disruption at British ports, the BBC reported on Saturday.

The British government has warned that even with a trade deal with the EU, 7,000 trucks heading for Channel ports in south-east England could be held in 100-km queues if companies do not prepare the extra paperwork required.

The issue was discussed on Friday at a meeting of the Kent Resilience Forum of emergency services, officials and businesses. — Reuters

■ CALIFORNIA

ORACLE MOVES
HEADQUARTERS
TO TEXAS

Business software maker Oracle Corp said it was moving its corporate headquarters to Austin, Texas, from Redwood City, California. Oracle is the latest tech firm to exit Silicon Valley after the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a broader shift to remote work, making companies reconsider California's higher operational costs and hefty taxes.

Employees can pick their office location and choose whether to work from home part-time or full-time, Oracle said in a regulatory filing. "We believe these moves best position Oracle for growth and provide our personnel with more flexibility about where and how they work," the 43-year-old company said.

US stocks end mostly down
on stimulus stalemate

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks finished mostly lower on Friday on disappointment over the lack of progress on a US stimulus bill, while Disney shares skyrocketed on higher streaming demand.

Major indices concluded a choppy week of trading modestly lower following the session, but remained near all-time highs.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.2 per cent at 30,046.37.

The broad-based S&P 500 declined 0.1 per cent to 3,663.46, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index shed 0.3 per cent to 12,377.87.

In Washington, the US Senate approved a one-week budget stopgap that avoids a government shutdown, but the outlook for a long-awaited coronavirus relief package, without which analysts fear a renewed downturn in economic activity, remained uncertain.

A bipartisan group of



Wall Street sign at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — AFP

lawmakers has been working to win support for a \$908-billion plan that includes new unemployment aid, help for state and local governments and limited liability protections for businesses.

But party leaders remain at

loggerheads over the package, as Americans face the worst economic downturn in decades amid the greatest public health crisis in a century.

"The two big factors that pushed the market lower today

are the lack of any progress on fiscal stimulus from the US and the disappointing news out of the UK regarding Brexit," said LBBW's Karl Haeling, pointing to sagging hopes for a deal between London and Brussels on a new trade pact.

Among individual stocks, Disney jumped 13.6 per cent after reporting that the company's year-old streaming TV service Disney+ had passed 86.8 million subscribers, beating its "wildest expectations," the company's CEO said.

The growth in Disney+ has helped offset weakness in other company businesses during the pandemic, especially theme parks.

Lululemon Athletica dropped 6.7 per cent despite reporting higher profits on a 19-per cent rise in comparable sales for the third quarter. The apparel company avoided earnings forecasts amid uncertainty over the pandemic.

— AFP

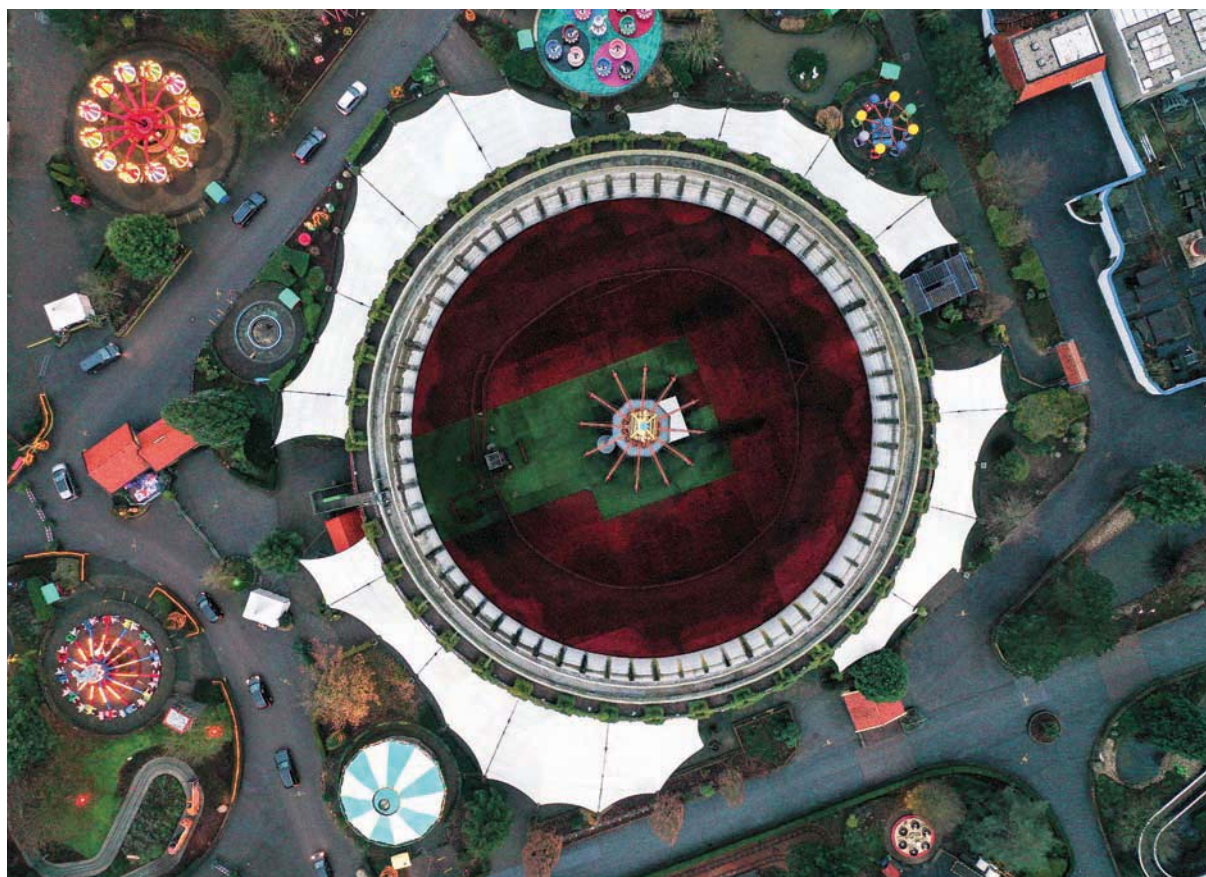
ADB launches
\$9 bn COVID
vaccine financing

MANILA: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said it had launched a \$9-billion financing programme to offer rapid assistance to Asia-Pacific countries in purchasing and delivering COVID-19 vaccines.

The Asia-Pacific Vaccine Access Facility, or APVAX, will provide support for vaccine diagnostics, procurement and transport of the supplies to a member country, the Manila-based ADB said.

It will also help finance investments in facilities for storing, transporting, distribution and processing of the vaccines, as well as developing or expanding manufacturing capacity in member countries, it added. — dpa

■ POWER PLANTS TO CHRISTMAS MARKET



An aerial view shows the drive-in Christmas market at the former nuclear power plant in Kalkar, western Germany. Guests can drive by car for 2.5 kilometres at walking pace past a decorated and illuminated winter wonderland with 300 fir trees and artificial snow in the extensive former power plant grounds. — AFP

Biden's trade chief brings long experience on China

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden's pick to head US trade policy brings extensive experience in dealing with a key point of tension: China.

Attorney Katherine Tai, whom the president-elect announced this week would be his nominee as US Trade Representative (USTR), is also the rare political appointee who has the full-throated backing of business groups, politicians and labour leaders alike.

The decision puts an experienced trade lawyer on the front-line of repairing relations with US trading partners upended by President Donald Trump's aggressive "America first" policy, which included a damaging trade war with China.

"I've gotten more calls complimenting me on your appointment than you can imagine," he said at an event on Friday unveiling his latest batch of cabinet members.

On taking over from Trump's USTR Robert Lighthizer, Tai



Katherine Tai speaks after Biden announced her nomination during a fresh round of nominations and appointments at a news conference at his transition headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. — Reuters

would become the first Asian-American, the fourth woman and the first woman of colour to serve in the cabinet-level role, continuing Biden's track record of promoting women and minorities to key positions.

Tai, a graduate of Yale and Harvard Law, was previously working as the chief trade lawyer

for the House Ways and Means Committee — indicating she is well versed in the challenges of getting legislation through a divided Congress.

She also spent seven years in the office of the USTR general counsel under former president Barack Obama, where she handled enforcement of cases filed

against China with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Tai speaks fluent Mandarin and was the first child born in the United States to parents who were born in mainland China.

Legislators of both parties, impressed by Tai's work in Congress on the USMCA free trade pact with Canada and Mexico negotiated under Trump, had recommended her for the post, according to US media reports.

"It's a testament to Katherine that everyone from business groups to progressive think tanks to the AFL-CIO are applauding her nomination," said Jake Colvin, Vice-President at the National Foreign Trade Council.

"Katherine is an inspired choice to lead USTR," he said, echoing similar comments from other supporters.

Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO labour federation, call Tai "a worker-champion."

Her selection "is a resounding

victory for our families and communities."

Tai herself embraced that role, saying Friday she will be "an advocate for American workers."

Trade is "not an end in itself, it is a means to create more hope and opportunity for people," she said.

"I look forward to harnessing the power of our trade relationships to help communities lift themselves out of the current crisis."

But the Biden team faces a tough trade agenda, including deciding what to do about the raft of tariffs Trump imposed on Chinese goods, and what the next step will be in the relationship between the world's top economic powers.

Bill Reinsch of Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) warns that support for Tai, especially among progressive Democrats, might wane amid the realities of negotiating trade agreements. — AFP

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features

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Inspired by Omani women, jewellery and handicrafts

Her inspiration and passion for art are deeply rooted in her heritage. Studying under the famed Iraqi artist and calligrapher Professor Dr Iyad al Husseini, she started creating things with her own voice and twist... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SCENE



MIGRATORY BIRDS FIND SANCTUARY IN OMAN

Oman stands at the crossroads of four distinct regions — Asia, Arabia, Africa and Europe — and as such, is on the migratory path of several species of birds that travel southwards seeking a warmer climate during the northern winters... **Story on Page 20**

COOK LIKE A CHEF



GRILLED LAMB CHOPS WITH GARLIC SAUTEED VEGGIES

Chef Ajay is known for his ability to re-imagine many of our favourite dishes. For today's recipe, Chef Ajay is showcasing the best way to grill your favourite lamb chops — a simple but truly memorable dish... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE CHICKEN SISTERS

BY KJ DELL'ANTONIA

The family feud between the Moores and the Pogociellos, owners of competing Kansas chicken shacks, gets served up on a reality TV restaurant competition show.

HUMAN INTEREST



COVID MASKS ADORN HEALING TREES IN UPDATED PAGAN RITE

Sick people in northern France occasionally leave garments in healing trees or "arbres à loques" in the hope of a cure, following a tradition that persists since pre-Roman times... **Story on Page 18**

TRAVEL TALES



"ICE CATHEDRAL" IN SWISS ALPS OFFERS VISITORS UNIQUE SHOW

An ice cave which forms naturally on a high-altitude glacier in the Swiss Alps became accessible on Thursday, to the delight of visitors who came to marvel at the huge blue vault of the "ice cathedral"... **Story on Page 18**



Inspired by Omani women, jewellery and handicrafts

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

“As a young child, art was my passion and it is what I found my calling to me. Although being an artist in our community was always seen as a hobby and not a profession, I knew from the very start that art was what I wanted to do with my life.”

Sanaa bint Naseeb Aman Al Haib, a mother of four, is currently a full-time artist with her own studio.

After school, she followed through with her plan and studied Fine Art in college under the famed Iraqi artist and calligrapher Professor Dr Iyad Al Hussein and went on to complete her bachelors at the Scientific College of Design and has been a member of Omani Society of Fine Arts (OSFA), youth studio and scientific club since 1999.

“My inspiration and passion for art are deeply rooted in my heritage. As I delved deeper into understanding art, I found love for things around me, especially the women around me and our homeland and the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphy,” she said.



“Through my art, I hope to take its viewers through a colourful journey showcasing the beautify of the Sultanate, its women, its jewellery and the intricacies of the Islamic letters,” she added.

Sanaa hosted her first exhibition in conjunction with

the Sultanate's celebrations of the 47th National Day at the reception ceremony of the Sultanate's Embassy in the Belgian capital Brussels 2017 and the Omani Cultural Heritage Day exhibition at the European Parliament in the same year.

In 2018, she presented at

the Color Workshop Arne Art Gallery along with a group of European artists to represent women on the International Women's Day on March 8, 2018, in Brussels where she displayed her work representing Omani handicrafts and traditional Omani women.

In 2020, amidst the pandemic, Sanaa participated and showcased at the Women's Day Exhibition, Mother's Day 2020 and a virtual exhibition that displayed the works of Omani artists. Sanaa is currently preparing her artwork for an exhibition in Belgium where she will present her works inspired by Omani women, jewellery and handicrafts.

“Stepping into the art industry was not easy, whether it's online or in person. From the experience I gained here, Europe and other parts of the world, although many enjoy art and want to support artists, many don't buy their work because art even today is an expensive commodity in the market.”

“In Oman, although artists have over the years gained support from many, there is still a lack when it comes to an expert audience, but this is slowly changing as more artists are entering into the market and the trends are changing,” she concluded.

TRAVEL TALES

“Ice Cathedral” in Swiss Alps offers visitors unique show



An ice cave, naturally formed on a high-altitude glacier in the Swiss Alps, became accessible to visitors on Thursday.

Varying in size and shape from year to year, the cave has a rounded ceiling made of thick ice, about 5 metres (yards) high, and is about 20 metres long.

The site can be reached on foot in 15 minutes from the chairlift at Glacier 3000 above the resort of Les Diablerets, but at your own risk, organisers said.

“It's the first time we indicate it and open it officially.

“The last years... we had kind of an ice cave but it was different, it was more steep. And this year it looks like an ice cathedral, so it's really



beautiful,” Bernhard Tschannen, CEO of Glacier 3000, said.

This year the cave's interior is quite flat, making access easier, he said.

The natural cave, also known as “the Mill”, forms through a siphon effect. Each spring and summer, the cavity fills with water from the snow melt, forming a lake. In autumn, the plug disappears and the water drains, leaving the cave.

“It's magnificent, but even that isn't the right word. I've never seen anything like it. Almost as it's not of this world in fact. It's magnificent, I can only recommend it if you have the chance to go,” Helen Tromp, a Dutch woman living nearby, said after visiting. Brice Rozes, touring the site on his day off, said: “It's very impressive. The vault is incredible. Standing beneath it, you can just imagine the weight above. It's beautiful.” — **Reuters**

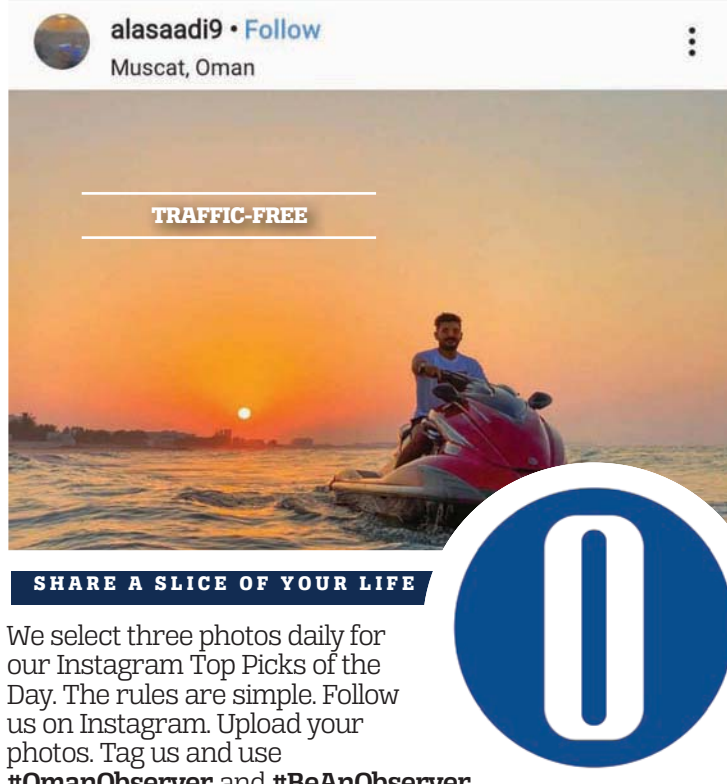
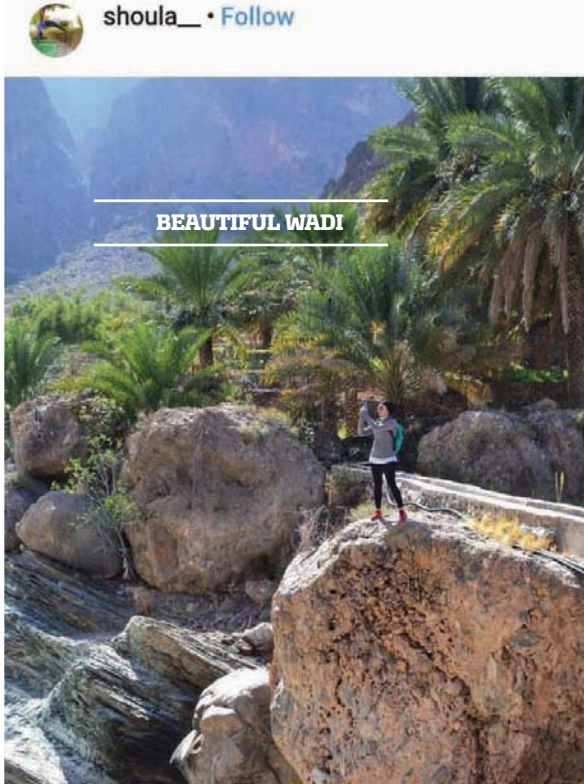


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GRILLED LAMB CHOPS WITH GARLIC SAUTÉED VEGGIES



MEAT GALORE

Chef Ajay is known for his ability to re-imagine many of our favourite dishes. For today's recipe, Chef Ajay is showcasing the best way to grill your favourite lambchops — a simple but truly memorable dish.

A good delicious lambchop depends a lot in properly seasoning the meat. Make sure to also study the proper timing or temperature. A medium rare should be 50 degrees celsius when using a digital cooking thermometer. Medium rare should be 55C, a medium (pink) should be 60C, medium well at 65C and well done at 72C.



INGREDIENTS:

2 lamb chops (Double bone)
1 tbsp Olive Oil
½ teaspoon Kosher Salt
Freshly Ground Black pepper

SIDE DISH: GARLIC SAUTÉED VEGGIES

½ Cup Spinach
¼ Cup Asparagus Cuts in diagonal shape
¼ Cup mushroom slices
3-4 pcs Cherry Tomato cut in ¼
1 clove crushed garlic
1 tbsp Olive oil
Salt and ground black pepper

PREPARATION METHOD

Season the lamb chops with salt and ground black pepper, olive oil. Grill lamb chops as per your choice of cooking doneness. On other side Heat the pan, add olive oil, crushed garlic, add cut veggies & toss, season with salt and pepper.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF AJAY DHOUDIYAL
Executive Chef

In-Charge of F&B & Kitchen
Park Inn by Radisson Muscat

Executive Chef Ajay Dhoundiyal leads the culinary team of Park Inn by Radisson Muscat Hotel since September of 2012 and currently in-charge of F&B department. With over 2-decade experience in the culinary industry, Chef Ajay operates seamlessly to winch the dining experience of the hotel guests.

He has over 20 years of experience in the culinary industry. His career has taken him across various hotel brands like Hyatt, Kempinski,

Starwood, and Radisson hotel groups. As the Executive Chef of the hotel, he leads the culinary team, preparing and managing the operations of the hotel's dining outlets and banquets. He specialises in international cuisine and strives to create interesting banquet.



COVID masks adorn healing trees in updated pagan rite



IT IS A RITUAL steeped in pagan mystery, updated for the coronavirus age.

Sick people in northern France occasionally leave garments in healing trees or "arbres à loques" in the hope of a cure, following a tradition that persists since pre-Roman times.

But locals who pay attention have noticed a recent change.

ility problems.

In another departure from ritual, the votive masks are hung "preventatively", Bosio believes — or perhaps hopes — rather than by COVID-19 sufferers who ought to be self-isolating.

Known as rag trees in Ireland, one of several other countries where the practice survives, the



"The new development in 2020 is COVID masks," said Bertrand Bosio, who runs Nord Fantastique, a Facebook page devoted to the region's ancient sites and lore.

Tied to the branches of the healing tree in Hasnon, southeast of Lille, surgical masks can be clearly seen among items of clothing that range from socks to underwear — often left, Bosio said, by people suffering from fer-

arbres à loques show pagan and Christian influences. Despite appearances, which can be disconcerting, they still bring people hope, he said.

"What's interesting about this place is that the ritual is still very much alive in our times," Bosio added.

"People turn to the healing tree when medicine has reached its limits, and when science has let them down." — **Reuters**



COLLARED PRATINCOLE



CORMORANT



GARGANEY



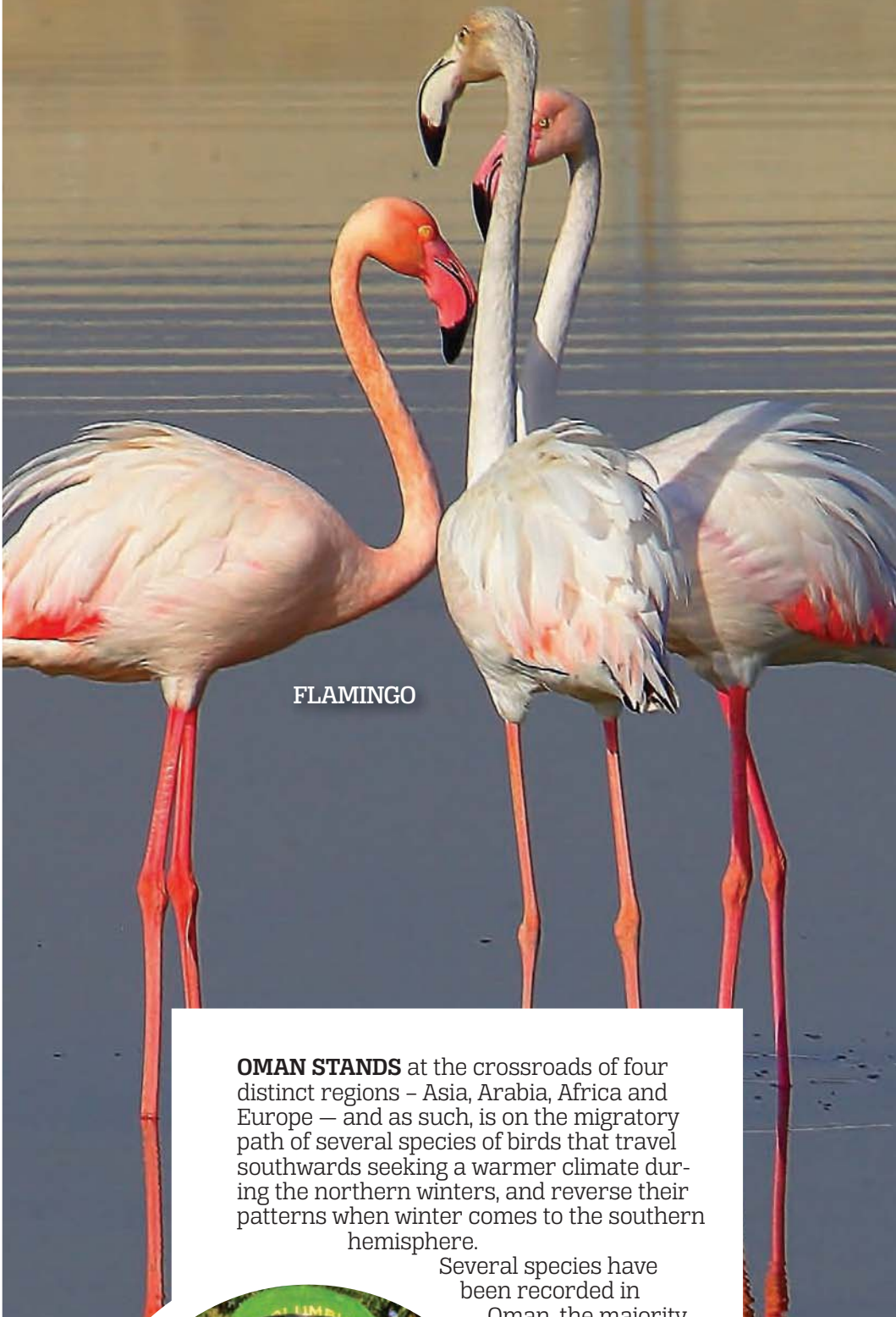
LICHTENSTEINS
SANDGROUSE



NORTHERN PINTAIL

Migratory birds find sanctuary in Oman

PHOTOS BY SHEHAN MCGRATH



FLAMINGO

OMAN STANDS at the crossroads of four distinct regions – Asia, Arabia, Africa and Europe – and as such, is on the migratory path of several species of birds that travel southwards seeking a warmer climate during the northern winters, and reverse their patterns when winter comes to the southern hemisphere.



Several species have been recorded in Oman, the majority being migrants travelling seasonally between northern Asia, with some as far north as Northern Europe where wadis and lagoons and wetlands form along the coast, acting as a focal point for wildlife, especially birds.

There are a lot of good birding sites in every region of the country. The coastal lagoons and wetlands offer perfect spots for wintering and migrating water birds, one can find raptors and other smaller birds.

Some of the more spectacular birds to frequent Oman include the stately lesser flamingo, colourful ducks, storks, stilts, plovers, sandpipers, egrets, herons, the glossy ibis and many more.

While Dhofar, Al Wusta and Al Sharqiyah may receive millions of these avian visitors yearly, Muscat is also a good spot for bird-watchers. These photos were taken in different places in Muscat showcasing the diversity of the avian life in the capital.

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COMMON SNIPE



EURASIAN TEAL



WHITE TAILED LAPWING



PLOVER



LITTLE GREBE