

VOICES

Cultivate, innovate and never give up

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The 50th anniversary of Oman is also a time that has brought about memories.

Going down the memory lane, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, reflects: “Of course circumstances were different. Maybe we had our own set of challenges as youngsters back then, but what remained constant, something that I am proud of is the continuity of our culture, identity and traditions that are cherished until today and this is what makes Oman what it is today with its current generation carrying on with this vast history, culture and wealth of heritage of which we are very proud.”

For every individual childhood memories are special and that too school days. Sayyid Badr had the opportunity to attend schooling both in Salalah and Muscat. He went to the school that was one amongst the first three schools in Oman.

“It was a government school called Al Saidiyah. These schools still exist in Muscat and Salalah. I went to both the schools because our family was living in Salalah during my childhood,” he reflected.

Today the children are going through online classes thanks to the pandemic; however Sayyid Badr looks at it from a positive angle as he believes it will prepare the youngsters for the Gig economy.

“Today’s generation is really set to take off with this new way of learning, new ways of doing business and we must encourage them. We must also try to keep finding ways and innovative techniques so that we also do not have to lose our traditions that bind us a community through social media and through these new platforms that are existing.

“It is interesting to observe how

quickly people adapt to new ways of doing things and make good out of it. I think it should be further supported and encouraged to bring more benefits and growth to our economy and to our engagement to the rest of the world,” he explained.

The foreign minister’s advice to the youth: “I would always say to them be positive, look at ways to be innovative and unleash your potential for your own benefit, for your family and for your community. The sky’s the limit. The world has become smaller because of the digital platforms and so there are endless opportunities for the youth to make use of. So cultivate, innovate and never give up. Look forward with positivity. They will find the support they need from the government and institutions that are specialising in such areas. Think big and think global — I think that is very important.”

The youth has a responsibility and that is to carry forward the values of tolerance.

“We are blessed here in the Sultanate to have carried the concept of tolerance and respect for others and so that really positions Omanis quite well in terms of the ability to do business with everybody, regardless of their background and beliefs,” he explained.

“Tolerance is an important value and for Omanis as people of a seafaring nation as well as throughout history Omanis have been engaging with the world through trade and through acceptance of the other.

This tolerance brings with it justice, equality and respect. These are values that ought to be always treasured and embraced because it truly brings us together as human beings.

If we can all think in this spirit we will have a much better and peaceful world,” concludes Sayyid Badr.



Taking the Sultanate’s achievements forward

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of National Day, the Observer spoke to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

“First of all I would like to wish everyone a Happy National Day, not just to fellow Omani, my brothers and sisters who are citizens, but also to all friends of Oman, living here in Oman and abroad. Our hearts are welcoming and as soon as circumstances allow, we would expect to see you soon. I also wish to take the occasion to wish the whole world a happy festive season that is coming up,” he greeted the nation and the world.

When asked about his thoughts about Oman on the occasion of its 50th National Day, Sayyid Badr reflected, “My first thoughts, having lived through this period of our history, are about how much our country has changed and developed since 1970.

This National Day is therefore a good occasion to look back with both pride and gratitude at what our country has achieved in that time, and the extraordinary work that has been done, under the visionary leadership of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, in the cause of national development.

“I think, in particular, we should be proud and grateful that through this period, in which the modern nation of Oman was formed, and the foundations of our contemporary way of life were laid, such careful attention was paid to maintaining features of social and cultural life that are both precious and distinctive.”

“I am thinking in particular of all those small but important things that make everyday life

The longstanding principles of Omani foreign policy remain in place: our commitment to dialogue, to good relations with all our neighbours and to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. I am optimistic that there are opportunities for more positive developments in the years ahead

beautiful and which are not just about doing business and making progress: taking the time to welcome visitors and friends; spending time with family; making time for music or poetry.

“Above all, I have been reflecting on the importance we continue to give to the principles of tolerance. I am very happy that we have preserved this in the country.

“At a time of much conflict, much of it caused by people who find it difficult or impossible to live with or near people whose lives and beliefs are different from their own, we have succeeded in making Oman a nation in which tolerance for difference and respect for the cultures of others still prevails.”

In regard to difficulties that could lay ahead, he pointed out that there are challenges both at home and abroad.

“Of course, they are related. Above all, the world faces a future in which economies are

somewhat uncertain. In Oman, we can no longer rely on the present structure of the economy — the structure we created for the years of relatively high government revenues from oil and gas. Now the country needs to take bold steps to make sure that the future is secured.”

“Put very bluntly: new sources of income need to be found and substantial reductions in expenditure need to be achieved. As the government implements policies and decisions, it also makes sure the social umbrella that protects the most vulnerable among us remains intact.

“We all have a collective responsibility to make sure that citizens do not suffer disproportionately from the hard times that may lie ahead.”

He further added that he is confident that under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman will be able to build structures through which we can all support each other.

“I know that those who have been fortunate enough to achieve wealth and prosperity will make an appropriate contribution to this collective endeavour, and government policy will be guided by the absolute priority the government gives to ensuring that low income families are supported,” he added.

When asked about Oman’s key foreign policy directions, Sayyid Badr said, “I am happy to say that the longstanding principles of Omani foreign policy remain in place: our commitment to dialogue, to good relations with all our neighbours and to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. I am optimistic that there are opportunities for more positive developments in the years ahead.”

Oman’s achievements outcome of a comprehensive strategy

FROM PAGE 1

HH Sayyid Asaad touched on the role of the Omani civilisation in the human heritage, pointing to the Omani sites and arts that have become part of the world heritage and the contributions

made by the civilisations of Majan and Mazoon to the entire humanity.

HH Sayyid Asaad spoke about the Omanis’ interest in the breeding of purebred camels, pointing out that several formal

establishments and annual festivals were designated to camel husbandry and conservation, and dedicated race tracks such as Al Filaj and Al Bashair were set up and allocated to Arabian camel races. — ONA

Investment Opportunity at Samail Industrial City



Samail Industrial City is considered one of the industrial cities affiliated to The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn. The industrial city contains a number of industrial, logistical and service projects. And within the directions to raise the fundamentals of investment and create an attractive business environment in line with the vision of the Oman 2040 by giving the private sector the role in providing a number of logistical support services, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) is pleased to announce the investment opportunity in Samail Industrial City for developers and investors, as shown in the table below:

Bidding No.	Name of Project	Last date of purchasing the Biddings Documents	Last Date of Bid submission	Purchase Amount (R.O)
2/2020	Build and Manage a Residential City	10/12/2020	24/12/2020	100

According to The Following Procedures:

1. Deposit the bidding document’s amount fees in our account no. (01041415330001) Bank Dhofar under Name Public establishment for industrial Estates – Madayn.
2. Email payments deposit slip and contact Details along with bidding no. and project Name to (ali@Madayn.om) in order to receive biddings documents and attachments electronically .
3. The last date for receiving inquiries and site visits: 17/12/2020.
4. Bids are Submitted in line with the biddings document requirements and shell be deposit in the Bids Box at the Samail Industrial City administration office before 12 pm from the specified date.



RO 379 million worth of cargo handled at Port of Duqm

MAJID AL HATTALI
MUSCAT, NOV 21

The Port of Duqm has seen an increase in revenues this year compared to 2019.

The value of cargo handled by the port in the first nine months of 2020 till September-end amounted to RO 379m. The port received 607 ships during this period with an increase of 112 per cent in ship number and 30 per cent in terms of ship gross tonnage in the first half of

2020, Duqm Port management said.

The Dry Dock Company is pressing ahead towards reinforcing its global position as an international ship repair yard and is seeing an increasing level of customer satisfaction.

The dry dock received 106 ships by the end of October this year and provided maintenance services to more than six ships that broke down in the sea. Other achievements include the replacement of iron parts weigh-

ing between 250 to 400 tonnes, replacement of bows for three ships.

The Dry Dock Company targets to draw more customers from the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular with the majority of its customers being from Europe.

The fishing harbour implementation rate has reached 86 per cent with the marine works expected to be completed in December as per the scheduled timeframe.

Over 7,000 expatriates register for exit scheme

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, NOV 21

The Ministry of Labour has received 7,689 requests from expatriates, who wish to leave the country for good without paying any fines or fees, since start of online registration on November 15. Of these, 3,263 expatriates have left their jobs, 408 have no work permits and 253 of them had their work permit canceled. A total of 3,765 work permits were still active, the ministry said.

Also, from 7,687 requests, 93 were from those with family visas, 87 family joining visas, 147 visit visas, 12 tourist visas, and 7,289 work visas, and 61 with no documents.

The scheme is open till December 31. The registration can be done at the Ministry of Labour's website mol.gov.om.

The service aims to facilitate the non-Omani workforce to permanently leave the country and exempt employers from all fees and fines resulting from



The service aims to facilitate the non-Omani workforce to permanently leave the country and exempt employers from all fees and fines resulting from the expiration of work permits

the expiration of work permits. Residents who have expired work permits or are registered as absent without leave can apply to departure during this period," the ministry said.

"Registration can be done at the embassies, the ministry's website, and Sanad centre. Seven days after registration, the expatriate worker can visit

the Ministry of Labour office at Muscat International Airport or seven hours before the flight departure.

They should carry a valid ticket, travel documents, and the PCR test valid for 72 hours.

If the expatriates do not have proper documentation (like a lost or expired passport) they have to get in touch with the embassies.

Oman Nursing Association joins International Council of Nurses

GENEVA: The International Council of Nurses (ICN) announced the acceptance of the Oman Nursing Association into membership.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said, "I am delighted to welcome the Oman Nursing Association to the ICN family. For over 120 years, ICN has given nurses a global voice. This work is critically important now we are facing a global pandemic. We are proud to add ONA to the richness and diversity of our membership, especially during these challenging times when we are advocating for the protection, prioritisation and fair compensation of nurses working at the frontlines of healthcare."

Abdallah bin Ahmed al Ru-

baiey, President of the Oman Nursing Association (ONA) said, "We at ONA and nurses in Oman are tremendously excited to be admitted to the membership of ICN, the organisation which has proved itself as the global platform to gather and empower the global nurse community."

"Being a member of this leading organisation, ONA will put all of its efforts in working towards advancing nursing, nurses and healthcare for all. The nurses in Oman and across the world are at the forefront of this extremely difficult time of dealing with COVID-19 outbreak. We have seen evidence of nurses' and other healthcare staff's diligence and unwavering dedication in



response to the coronavirus, the crisis of which has surpassed all sense of realism expected of 2020," he said.

The International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife dedicated by WHO to nurses and midwives

has thus in the process provided a once in a generation opportunity to showcase their dedicated work.

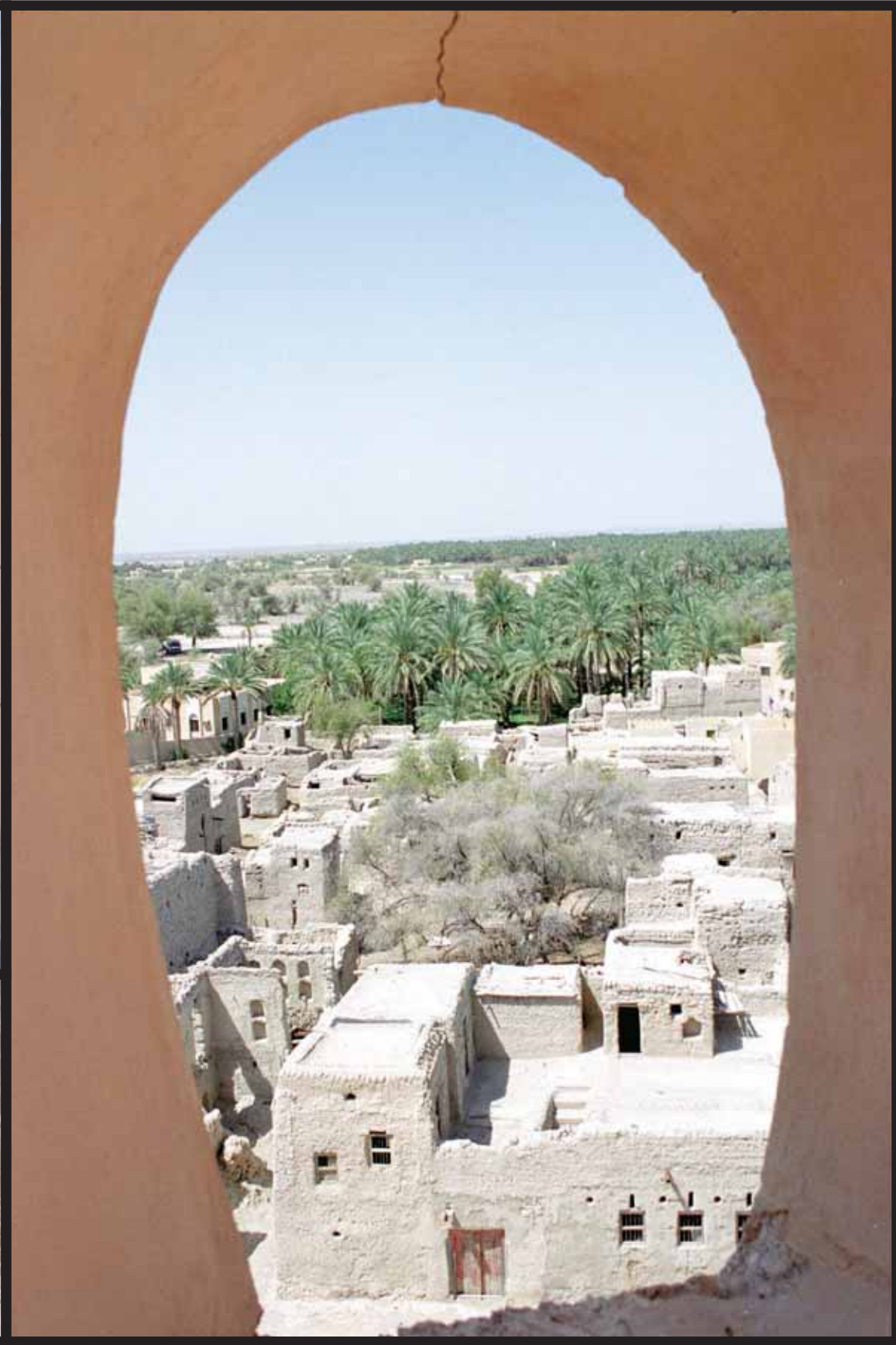
"Several private and public programmes are now also established in the Sultanate and open

to give Omanis the opportunity to start a professional career in nursing and in many cases with provisions for scholarships by the government. ONA is looking forward to working hand in hand with ICN towards advancing

nursing, nurses and healthcare for all," he said.

Howard Catton, ICN Chief Executive Officer said, "We are delighted to be strengthening the voice of nursing across the globe. By joining ICN, the Oman Nursing Association is helping to ensure nurses in their country have a say in how health policy is developed and implemented. By giving nurses that power, we are helping to save lives."

ONA established in 2017 is the only association for nurses in the country. With the addition of ONA, ICN has 10 member associations from the Middle East including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine and the UAE.



OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM, A NEW NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE SULTANATE, WILL PROVIDE A NEW AND REFINED EXPERIENCE TO ITS VISITORS, ESPECIALLY THE YOUTH

Manah



A PEEP INTO THE PAST

The Wilayat of Manah in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is one of the wilayats that has many heritage and tourism attractions, which mirror the rich and deep-rooted history and culture. Today, it is an integrated city with comprehensive services embodied in its markets, houses, mosques, fences and towers. Manah is a must visit for anyone who is curious about Oman's past. Oman Across Ages Museum, a new national monument in the Sultanate, will provide a new and refined experience to its visitors, especially the youth.

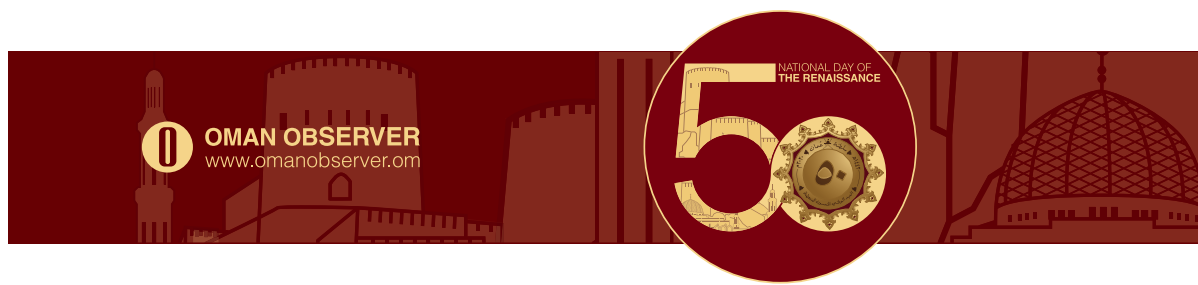
Being constructed in the Wilayat of Manah, the museum, which is reportedly in its 'fit out' stage, is a celebration of the country's economic, cultural and social renaissance since the 1970s. The foundation stone of the iconic project was laid by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in 2015 in accordance with his vision to establish a museum showcasing the history of Oman through ages in both sound and pictures. Being constructed in approximately about 40,000 sq metres, the distinctive design of the museum has been inspired by the geometric profile of the majestic Hajar Mountains crisscrossed by ravines. According to Australian

company Cox Architecture, which is designing the museum, the new project will be a cultural and educational hallmark for Omanis and visitors to Oman. "The museum acknowledges the rich foundations of the country's past while celebrating its bright and opportunistic future. Forging a bridge between past and future, space will transcend knowledge of the country's achievements in an innovative, informative and interactive manner," says a note in the company's website. When completed, the museum is expected to be the largest of its kind in the Gulf region. Visitors will experience a simple, yet immersive and interactive way of expressing

modern narrative techniques which depict the geographic diversity of Oman. The wilayat also embraces other archaeological landmarks including the Al Fiqain Castle. It is located in Al Fiqain village, which was built almost 400 years ago. The castle has been completely renovated. The damaged parts have been restored and reopened for the public in 1994. Since that time, it has received tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate. The wilayat is home to Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers which teaches the students to communicate and interact effectively in any Arab society. Another notable landmark

in the Wilayat of Manah is 'Harat Al Bilad'. It is located at the centre of the wilayat. It is the oldest residential area in the wilayat. 'Harat Al Bilad', which maintains the old Omani architectural designs, includes four mosques namely Al Sharah, Al Ain, Al Rahba and Al Aa'li, which date back to 909 AH. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is implementing a project to renovate 'Harat Al Bilad' to maintain it in a good condition. Bait Al Hisn or Hisn Najad, located at the southern side of 'Harat Al Bilad', is one of the attractions of the wilayat. In 1350 AH, some towers were added and a boundary has been fixed.

The Grand Mosque, a rectangular mosque built of mud in 941 AH/1534, is located near Bait Al Hisn. The wilayat is also known for many traditional crafts such as Omani Halwa, rose water, silver works, textiles, date-palm frond works and carpentry. The wilayat is also known for traditional art performances such as Razha, A'zi, Taghroud, Hamble Al Boosh, Al Tariq, Al Wailiyah, Zafat Al Kaitha and Al Maghayidh. Since Manah is an agricultural oasis, it relies mainly on aflaj and irrigation. There are renowned aflajs like Al Asgharin, Al Akhtam, Al Masraj and Al Mahyool, which feed the vast wheat farms.



Sultanate at GCC joint action meeting



MUSCAT: The Sultanate participated in the 21st meeting of the Ministerial Committee of following-up the Implementation of decision pertaining to the GCC joint action.

The Sultanate was represented

by Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthi, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

The virtual meeting discussed a number of topics related to following up the implementation of the decisions taken by the GCC

Supreme Council, in a way that contributes to enhancing the pace of joint action among the GCC countries and supports the council's blessed march to achieve the noble goals that the GCC leaders seek. — ONA

Solar car-parks project at Mina al Fahal now complete

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A path breaking solar car park project launched by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) at Mina al Fahal in Muscat is now complete.

A PDO official commented that this will pave the way for 'green energy' and power the head office and surplus electricity will be fed back into the local grid.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Environmental Forum 2020, held recently under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, PDO's Executive Director of External Affairs and Value Addition, Engineer Abdulmir bin Abdul Hussein al Ajmi, said the company has installed sufficient numbers of solar panels atop car parks at its Mina Al Fahal complex.

"We have completed the project that generates power from the parking lots in the Mina al Fahal area and we have succeeded in installing thousands of photovoltaic panels whose production capacity exceeds 10 megawatts (MW) at peak output," Al Ajmi said.

He added that the electricity output will meet a large part of the demand at Mina Al Fahal while any surplus will be channelled into the grid.

The company was also able to implement a similar project in the parking lots at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals with a number of local SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) specialised in the field of renewable energy having participated in the implementation phase.

"These pioneering projects are successful examples that can be easily applied in various institutions of the country, and

they will undoubtedly have a great impact in promoting a culture of adopting renewable energy sources and seeking environmentally friendly solutions," Engineer Abdul Amir said.

He said that the company has embarked on studying innovative solutions such as in the production of alternative energy resources to power its operations in place of conventional fuels amid efforts by the governmental and private sectors to exploit renewable energy sources such as solar and wind energy.

Al Ajmi pointed out that the priority of "environment and natural resources" in the "Oman 2040" vision includes objectives to achieve a high-quality environment that is free of pollution, to create a green and circular economy, and to raise environmental awareness with regard to conservation.

■ INNOVATIVE CAMPAIGN ON STREETS OF MUSCAT



JCDcaux Oman launched an innovative campaign along the streets of Muscat in Al Shatti Beach road and Jawharat Al Shatti in Qurum for residents and locals to share their significant moments as they celebrate the 50th National Day. This can be done by scanning the QR code, and the people can share their pride for Oman on Twitter along with the trending national day hashtag. Says Bechir Chehab, Managing Director: "JCDcaux Oman celebrates with the nation in an innovative manner in line with 2040 Vision. I am proud of the capability in introducing innovation and creativity that blends with the traditional and local environment." JCDcaux is known to be the largest outdoor advertising specialist in the world and the only international player in the Middle East and a key partner of Muscat Municipality and Oman Airports.

Muscat Science Fest to host science fair online

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 21

Muscat Science Fest, the science section of the Indian Social Club Kerala Wing, is organising a science fair, exhibition and competition of science projects for students in Oman online at the Science Project Contest — SPC 2020.

Schoolchildren under the age of 18 in Oman can participate in the online competition which will be held on December 18 and 19.

The organisers have announced attractive prizes for the best projects.



Children wishing to participate must register their name at the link on or before November 25, on spcreg.muscatsciencefest.org. The bylaw of SPC 2020 is also available in above link.

"In the past, Muscat Science Fest has organised science fairs as part of the Keralotsavam and later as part of the Indian Community Festival.

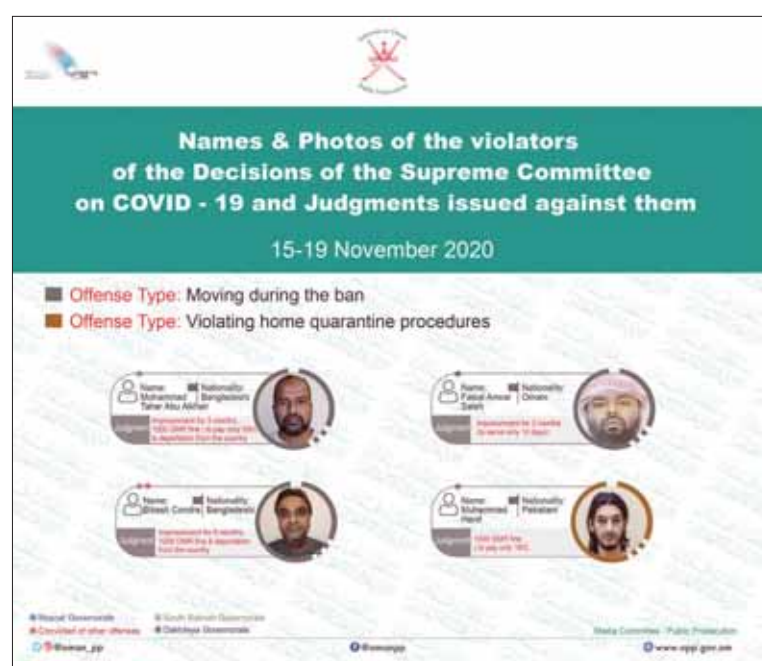
"More than 100 projects from various schools in Oman were on display. With the event taking place online this year, participation is likely to increase," the organisers said in a press release.

Courts penalise four offenders

MUSCAT: The primary courts in different governorates of the Sultanate have issued verdicts convicting offenders who violated the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The verdicts, issued during the period November 15-19, awarded prison terms of six

months and fines of RO 1,000 to each offender, with the expatriate ones ordered to be deported after serving the sentence. The legal process was initiated by the Public Prosecution Department which interrogated four persons who had reportedly violated the ban on night-time movement and breached home quarantine instructions. — ONA



Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar

Auction Announcement

The Committee for the Sale of Government Movables affiliated to the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar announces a sealed-bid auction for the sale of a number of second-hand vehicles and furniture, electrical materials, iron scraps and used spare parts will be held as per the following requirements:

Auction Requirements:

1. A bidder should pay an amount totaling RO (1000/-) One thousand Omani Rials in cash or with an endorsed cheque as an entry fee where it shall be refunded if the auction is not placed on the bidder.
2. The vehicles and movables displayed for sale can be inspected as per the places and dates mentioned below.
3. **The entry fees should be paid during official office hours at the Movables Department in Area (5) as of Sunday November 22, 2020.**
4. **Envelopes should be deposited into the Tender Box at the Movables Department before 10 am on Thursday 3/12/2020.**
5. Successful bidders should pay the value in cash or with an endorsed cheque in the date and place of the auction.
6. The buyer should pay a brokerage fee totaling 3 per cent of the purchase amount.
7. The displayed items are sold as is where is.
8. The Committee is not responsible for any movables handed to the buyer who has to move them no later than 3 days from the date of the sale.

Places and dates of inspection:

Monday & Tuesday 23-24 November 2020 during official office hours as per the following:

1. The workshop of the Movables Department at the Dhofar Municipality; the sale of vehicles, furniture, office movables and general scraps.
2. The sale of used furniture and electric devices and miscellaneous scraps is at the Stores of the Directorate General of Administration and Finance (Department of Administrative Affairs and Stores) at the Area of Al Sina'iyat Al Jadeedah.

Note: You can view the announcement on the website of the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar (www.omsd.gov.om)

Yemen in ‘imminent danger’ of world’s worst famine: UN

UNITED NATIONS, US: War-torn Yemen is in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen in decades, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Friday.

“In the absence of immediate action, millions of lives may be lost,” Guterres said of the country that has endured a five-year war between Ansar Allah fighters and government forces.

The government in Yemen is supported by the coalition, assisted by Western powers including the United States.

The warning from Guterres, the latest in a series from the UN

on Yemen, comes amid reports that the Trump administration is considering labelling the Ansar Allah a terrorist organisation.

That could cripple aid deliveries and make things even worse in Yemen, aid groups say.

In his statement, Guterres made only an indirect reference to this possibility. “I urge all those with influence to act urgently on these issues to stave off catastrophe, and I also request that everyone avoids taking any action that could make the already dire situation even worse,” the secretary-general said. — AFP



Pedestrians, mask-clad due to the coronavirus pandemic, walk past closed shops along a street in Tehran on Saturday. — AFP

Iran tightens COVID-19 curbs, but some streets still busy

TEHRAN: Iran introduced tougher restrictions on Saturday to stem a third wave of coronavirus infections, including closing non-essential businesses and travel curbs, but state media reported widespread flouting of the rules.

“Tehran streets are crowded despite the restrictions,” state TV said on Saturday morning. It said some non-essential businesses were open, but later showed mostly empty streets and shuttered shops.

The semi-official ISNA news agency posted photos of crammed metro trains with the hashtag “Coronavirus kills.”

Other media sites posted photos of packed buses. Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi said the 10 per cent of people who ignore the health regulations could spread the virus to 80 per cent of the population, adding that family gatherings were the main cause of infections.

To encourage people to stay at home, the government has ordered the closure of non-essential businesses and services in 160 high risk “red” towns and cities, where more than 53 million people live, as well as a ban on cars leaving or entering these locations.

— Reuters

Coronavirus crisis to dominate Saudi-hosted G20 summit

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia opened the G20 summit on Saturday in a first for an Arab nation, with the virtual forum dominated by efforts to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and the worst global recession in decades.

The two-day meeting of the world’s wealthiest nations comes as President Donald Trump refuses to concede a bitter election and campaigners criticise what they call the G20’s inadequate response to the crippling economic crisis.

World leaders are huddling virtually as international efforts intensify for a large-scale rollout of coronavirus vaccines after a breakthrough in trials, and as calls grow for G20 nations to plug a \$4.5 billion funding shortfall.

Amid a raging pandemic, the summit is reduced to brief online sessions of “digital diplomacy”, and Saudi hopes for a grand coming-out parade have been dashed.

“It is unfortunate that we are unable to host you in person in Riyadh, due to the exceptional circumstances that we are all facing this year,” King Salman, the summit’s hosts, told world leaders in opening remarks via videoconference.

“Our peoples and economies are still suffering from this shock. However, we will do our best to overcome this crisis through international cooperation,” he



Displayed on a projected screen at the International Media Centre in Saudi Arabia’s capital Riyadh on Saturday, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz gives an address opening the G20 summit, held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic, while surrounding him are other G20-participating leaders. — AFP

said, as de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman looked on. Despite having to abandon much of the usual summit pageantry, the kingdom launched the event with an aerial display of passenger and aerobatic planes over Riyadh.

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

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin are among

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KING SALMAN

leaders expected to speak at the summit, with climate change among the issues topping the agenda, sources close to the

organisers said.

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

As the trailblazing event got underway, there were some early quirks, with someone telling King Salman that “the whole world is watching” before the event started, Xi apparently having to call for technical help, and French President Emmanuel Macron chatting to an aide off camera. — AFP

Grim conditions await refugees in Sudan

GEDAREF, SUDAN: At a sprawling refugee reception centre in Sudan, Ethiopians who fled the deadly Tigray conflict queued haphazardly outside a school-turned-relief facility to receive handouts of food, water and clothing.

“I escaped in these clothes and have been in them since I arrived,” Babosh Alamshed said on Friday, pointing to his stained red T-shirt and worn-out black trousers.

“The war did this to us. We are starving. The help we receive is close to nothing,” said the 21-year-old, who arrived in Sudan’s “Village 8” transit camp two weeks ago, after a three-day trek.

Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region has been rocked by bloody fighting since November 4, when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced the launch of military operations there. The



Ethiopian refugees who fled fighting in the Tigray Region gather to receive snacks at the Village 8 border reception centre in Sudan’s eastern Gedaref State. — AFP

ongoing conflict is reported to have killed hundreds of people and forced thousands more to flee into neighbouring Sudan.

On Friday morning, Alamshed took his place in a long queue outside the aid facility to receive clothes, soap and other

basic items. Ethiopians frustrated by the wait and the sweltering heat jostled to enter, as a couple of Sudanese security forces standing guard tried to shoo them away with sticks.

Hours later, refugees broke through the metal gates and

rushed to compete for handouts.

SHORT ON RESOURCES

Neighbouring Sudan, itself suffering from a severe economic crisis, was caught off-guard when the conflict broke out earlier this month.

It now hosts some 36,000 Ethiopians, with many in transit camps near the border, according to Sudan’s refugee commission.

Many at “Village 8” said they had left behind modest lives as farmers with just the clothes on their backs to escape intense bombings, shootings and knife attacks in Tigray. Family members and relatives were left behind, their fate unknown, they said.

“Village 8” alone is estimated to house around 14,000-15,000 refugees, said Fouad Tesfay of the Khartoum-based Tigray Development Association. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

RABAT

Call for migrant returns after Morocco talks

Spain’s Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska on Friday called for deportations of migrants — suspended amid the coronavirus pandemic — to resume, after meeting his counterpart in Morocco.

Arrivals of migrants have soared in Spain’s Canary Islands, off the west coast of Morocco, with more than 18,000 arriving from Africa so far this year, more than 10 times the number seen in the same period of 2019, according to Spanish interior



ministry data.

Grande-Marlaska, who met with Moroccan Interior Minister Abdelouafi Laftit, ruled out the transfer of migrants to mainland Spain, a suggestion made earlier this week by local authorities in the Canary Islands. — AFP

BAGHDAD

US extends Iraq sanctions waiver

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

Baghdad buys gas and electricity from its neighbour Tehran to supply about a third of its power sector, worn down by years of conflict and poor maintenance.

The US blacklisted Iran’s energy industry in late 2018 but granted Baghdad a series of temporary waivers, hoping Iraq would wean

itself off Iranian energy by partnering with US firms.

The lengths of the exemptions have become a key tool in US policy towards Iraq, demonstrating the level of satisfaction or frustration with Baghdad. In May, Washington granted Iraq a four-month extension as a gesture of goodwill towards Mustafa al-Kadhemi, who had just formed a cabinet seen as US-friendly. But when it renewed the waiver in late September, the Trump administration gave Iraq just 60 days. — AFP

BEIRUT

Over 60 prisoners escape Lebanese jail

More than 60 prisoners broke out of a Lebanese jail on Saturday and five of them were killed when their car hit a tree while under pursuit, security sources and the state news agency said. They fled from Baabda district prison at dawn after breaking open cell doors, state news agency NNA said, adding security forces had cordoned off surrounding areas.

Security forces said that some 69 prisoners had escaped and that eight had been caught. Five of



the prisoners died after a car they seized crashed into a tree, they said. Authorities have launched an investigation into the jailbreak, NNA said. — Reuters

In brief

■ SHANGHAI

MAINLAND CHINA
REPORTS 16 NEW
VIRUS CASES

Mainland China reported 16 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, down from 17 the previous day, with seven cases of local transmission and nine cases originating overseas, the country's health authority said on Saturday.

China's National Health Commission said in its daily bulletin that five of the local transmissions took place in Tianjin and two in Shanghai. Tianjin, which neighbours the capital Beijing, will launch a three-day universal screening programme covering nearly 3 million of its residents on Saturday. — Reuters

■ LAHORE

THOUSANDS ATTEND
CLERIC'S FUNERAL
DESPITE CURBS

Tens of thousands of mourners attended the funeral of a hardline Pakistani cleric in the eastern city of Lahore on Saturday, defying a government ban on large public gatherings in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases in the country. Khadim Hussain Rizvi, 54, died of cardiac arrest on Thursday.

Daily coronavirus infections have risen in Pakistan this month, and the government banned big events and meetings as it declared the country was witnessing a "second wave" after a three-month lull in cases.

— Reuters

■ KATHMANDU

RESEARCHERS FIND
MICROPLASTICS
ON TOP OF EVEREST

Traces of microplastics have been found close to the top of Mount Everest, a study showed on Friday, likely originating from equipment used by the hundreds of climbers who summit the world's highest peak every year.

Fluorescent tents, discarded climbing equipment, empty gas canisters and even frozen excrement have long littered the well-trodden route to the 8,848-metre high summit, earning it the name of "the highest dumpster in the world".

But in the first study of microplastics on Everest, by a research team part of the 2019 National Geographic and Rolex Perpetual Planet Everest Expedition, the tiny pollutants were found as high as 8,440 metres above sea level, although concentration levels were higher at the mountain's base camp. — AFP

Rocket attack on Afghan capital kills 8 as Pompeo arrives in Doha for peace talks

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

The salvo slammed into various parts of central and north Kabul — including in and around the heavily fortified Green Zone that houses embassies and international firms — just before 9:00 am (0430 GMT).

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

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

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

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

The Taliban denied responsibility, saying they "do not blindly



An injured man is carried to a hospital after rockets hit residential areas in Kabul, on Saturday. — Reuters

fire on public places".

At least one rocket landed in an office inside the Green Zone, but did not explode. Several buildings sustained damage to walls and windows, including at the large Sana Medical Complex.

Mariam Rahimi, 26, a nurse at the facility, said she had been

thrown off her feet when a rocket struck the hospital.

"The impact broke windows and tables and damaged some parts of a wall. I screamed for help and called other staff members to evacuate the children who were admitted at the hospital," Rahimi said.

"I am scared and have a headache from the shock of the attack. These attackers must die, they don't even spare hospitals."

Recent major attacks in Kabul, including two horrific assaults on educational institutions that killed nearly 50 people, follow a familiar pattern in the aftermath, with the

Taliban denying any involvement while the Afghan government pins the blame on them or their proxies.

DOHA TALKS

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Doha on Saturday to meet negotiators from the Afghan government and the Taliban, amid signs of progress in their talks as Washington speeds up its withdrawal. The State Department said that Pompeo will meet separately with the Afghan government and Taliban negotiation teams in the Qatari capital.

He will also see Qatar's ruler, Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, and the foreign minister on his stop in Doha, the Taliban's base for diplomacy.

The outgoing top US diplomat is on a seven-nation tour of Europe and the Middle East, as President Donald Trump shores up late-term priorities.

Earlier this week, the Pentagon said it would soon pull some 2,000 troops out of Afghanistan, speeding up the timeline established in a February agreement between Washington and the Taliban that envisions a full US withdrawal in mid-2021. — AFP

Japan dials back domestic travel campaign

TOKYO: Japan said it will suspend a domestic travel campaign in areas where coronavirus infections are especially high as cases nationwide hit a record high on Saturday. The partial suspension of the domestic travel campaign marks a change in direction for the government, which was holding back on curtailing a domestic travel subsidy programme. "We will suspend new reservations under the Go

To Travel programme for trips destined for regions seeing a rise in coronavirus infections," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said.

Suga has been attempting a balancing act of revitalising Japan's hard-hit economy while keeping the spread of the coronavirus under control. However, an expert panel recommended on Friday that the government curtail the programme if there is a further rise in cases.

The government has not confirmed details of the partial suspension, such as which regions would be excluded from the domestic travel campaign or cancellation policies. New coronavirus cases have continued to climb nationally, with cases topping 2,500 for the first time and reaching a new high of 2,560 on Saturday, according to public broadcaster NHK. In Tokyo, the daily infection rate reached a record 539 cases. — Reuters

Thai students and dancing dinosaurs rally in Bangkok



This photo taken with a tilt-shift lens shows protesters dressed in dinosaur costumes during a 'Bad Student' rally in Bangkok on Saturday. — AFP

BANGKOK: Thousands of high school students upset about Thailand's lacklustre education system rallied alongside protesters dressed as dancing dinosaurs in Bangkok on Saturday.

It was the first mass gathering in the kingdom since Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha warned authorities would use all laws, including harsh royal defamation charges, to crack down on pro-democracy protesters.

Since August, emboldened by a broader political protest movement sweeping Thailand, a group called the "Bad Students" have campaigned for the resignation of Education Minister Nataphol Teepsuwan, demanded cultural change, equality, a curriculum overhaul and relaxation of strict rules.

Ahead of Saturday's rally three student leaders were summoned for police questioning and Thai Lawyers for Human Rights said there were now four juveniles facing potential prosecution.

But despite the threats the youngsters remained defiant

as they danced alongside half a dozen T-Rex characters representing Thailand's "political dinosaurs" and bounced around giant "asteroid" balls.

"We have to come out and make our voices heard to force change," Leaf, 15 said.

Many students wore coloured wrist bands to indicate they were underage, so older protesters could protect them.

"School is not a safe place (for girls)," one student's placard said.

Hundreds of protesters at the rally wore rubber duck hair clips, a reference to pro-democracy protesters using inflatable pool toys to shield themselves from police water cannon and tear gas on Tuesday.

Many protesters were upset families have to fork out extra money on tutoring because of the poor quality of teaching.

"I spend so much for my daughter's tutoring fees and need to enrol her in a faraway school so that she could get a good education. It should not be like this," said Supaporn Pratumnrat, 41, who attended the rally with her daughter. — AFP

Philippines ends overseas travel ban on healthcare workers

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has approved ending a ban on deploying the nation's healthcare workers, his labour minister said on Saturday, clearing the way for thousands of nurses to take up jobs overseas. "The president already approved the lifting of the temporary suspension of deployment of nurses and other medical workers," Labour Secretary Silvestre Bello said.

Bello said the spread of the novel coronavirus was slowing down in the country and conditions were improving, so the government could afford to let its healthcare workers leave. The Philippines has the second-highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Southeast Asia, but daily case numbers and death rates have dropped. To ensure the Philippines has enough medical professionals to continue to fight the pandemic at home, only 5,000 healthcare workers will be allowed to leave every year, Bello said.



Graduate nurses take their oath during an oath taking ceremony of professional nurses inside a mall in Manila. — Reuters file photo

"We are starting only with a cap of 5,000 so we will not run out (of medical workers), but this may increase eventually," Bello said. Last year, almost 17,000 nurses signed overseas work contracts data from the Commission on Higher Education and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration shows.

The government in April barred nurses, doctors and other medical workers from leaving,

saying they were needed to fight the coronavirus crisis at home. Thousands of health workers, who call themselves "prisonurses", had appealed to the government to let them take jobs abroad, Reuters reported in September.

The nurses say they feel underpaid, under-appreciated and unprotected in the Philippines.

— Reuters



Violence erupts in Brazil after Black man beaten to death by security guards

PORTO ALEGRE: More than 1,000 demonstrators attacked a Carrefour Brasil supermarket in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre on Friday after security guards beat to death a Black man at the store.

The killing, which has sparked protests across Brazil, occurred late on Thursday when a store employee called security after the man threatened to attack her, cable news channel GloboNews said, citing the Rio Grande do Sul state military police.

Amateur footage of the fatal beating and tributes to the Black victim were published on social media. He was identified in local



People take part in a protest against the death of Joao Alberto Silveira Freitas in front of supermarket Carrefour, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, on Friday. — AFP

media by his father as 40-year-old Joao Alberto Silveira Freitas. News website G1 later reported that an initial analysis by the state forensics institute indicated the cause of death could be asphyxiation.

In a statement on Friday, the local unit of France's Carrefour SA said it deeply regretted what it called a brutal death and said it immediately took steps to ensure those responsible were legally punished.

It said it would terminate the contract with the security firm, fire the employee in charge of the store at the time of the incident and close the store as a mark of respect. In a series of tweets in Portuguese on Friday night, the Chairman and CEO of Carrefour, Alexandre Bompard, said that the images posted on social media were "unbearable."

"Internal measures have immediately been implemented by the Carrefour Brazil, notably towards the security company involved. These measures do not go far enough. My values, and the values of Carrefour do not allow for racism and violence," Bompard said. He called for a complete review of employee and sub-contractors' training on security, diversity and tolerance values. — Reuters

Two weeks after Biden's victory, Trump faces stinging setbacks

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden on Saturday reached the two-week mark since becoming president-elect, with President Donald Trump stinging from back-to-back setbacks in his desperate, unprecedented bid to undo his election defeat. Biden, a Democrat, is preparing to take office on January 20, but Trump, a Republican, has refused to concede and is seeking to invalidate or overturn the results through lawsuits and recounts in a number of states, claiming — without proof — widespread voter fraud.

That effort, which critics call an unparalleled push by a sitting president to subvert the will of voters, has met with little success. Trump's campaign has suffered a string of legal defeats and appears to have failed to convince key fellow Republicans in states that he lost, such as Michigan, to buy into his unfounded conspiracy theories.

Trump's bid to cling to power appeared ever more tenuous on Friday after Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger announced a manual recount and audit of all ballots cast in the southern state had confirmed Biden as the winner there.

A pair of Michigan Republican leaders delivered another blow when they declared on Friday night after a White House meeting with Trump: "We have not yet been made aware of any information that would change



President Donald Trump speaks on lowering prescription drug prices on Friday, in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

the outcome of the election in Michigan."

Trump, in his first public comments in days about the election outcome, again asserted "I won" during a White House event on lowering drug prices earlier on Friday. After a series of court defeats, the Trump team is resting its hopes on getting Republican-controlled legislatures in battleground states won by Biden to set aside the results and declare Trump the winner, according to three people familiar with the plan.

It is a long-shot effort focusing on Michigan and Pennsylvania for now, but even if both those states flipped to the president, he would need to overturn the vote in another state to vault ahead of Biden in the Electoral College.

Such an event would be unprecedented in modern US history.

FORMAL TRANSITION

Biden, who became president-elect on November 7 after his win in Pennsylvania prompted major television networks to call the election, was due to spend Saturday meeting with Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris and transition advisers.

Trump will participate virtually this weekend in the last summit of the 20 biggest world economies (G20) of his term.

Trump's nationalistic "America First" approach has often created waves at multilateral summits like the G20, and many US allies have quietly welcomed the coming change of leadership in Washington. — Reuters

AstraZeneca starts new trials of antibody cocktail

LONDON: AstraZeneca started late-stage trials on Saturday of an experimental long-acting monoclonal antibody combination drug it hopes could be used as a so-called prophylactic to prevent COVID-19 infection in at-risk people for up to 12 months.

The Phase III international clinical trial will recruit a total of 5,000 people across countries in Europe and the United States to assess the safety and effectiveness of the antibody cocktail, known as AZD7442. The prophylactic treatment differs from a vaccine in that it introduces antibodies, rather than prompting the body's immune system to make them. It may prove useful in people whose immune systems are weaker or compromised, and who don't respond to vaccination. Separately, AstraZeneca is developing a COVID-19 vaccine in conjunction with researchers at Oxford University.

In Britain, where the trials of the monoclonal antibody combination kicked off on Saturday, 1,000 participants will be recruited at nine sites, researchers leading the UK arm said. — Reuters

Pfizer/BioNTech seek first vaccine approval in US



WASHINGTON: US biotech giant Pfizer and German partner BioNTech sought approval on Friday to roll out their coronavirus vaccine early, a first step towards relief as surging infections prompt a return to shutdowns that traumatised nations and the global economy earlier this year.

The world is looking to scientists for salvation from the global pandemic, as a new wave of infections forces New York to shut schools and California to implement night time curfews.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said its vaccines committee would meet on December 10 to discuss the request for emergency use authorisation.

"The FDA recognises that transparency and dialogue are critical for the public to have confidence in COVID-19 vaccines," the organisation's head Stephen Hahn said in a statement.

"I want to assure the American people that the FDA's process and evaluation of the data for a potential COVID-19 vaccine will be as open and

transparent as possible."

He said he could not predict how long the review would take but the federal government said earlier the final green light would probably come in December.

"Filing in the US represents a critical milestone in our journey to deliver a COVID-19 vaccine to the world," Pfizer Chief Executive Albert Bourla said.

The BioNTech/Pfizer shot and another one being developed by the US firm Moderna have taken the lead in the global chase for a vaccine.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the European bloc could also approve both before the end of the year.

NO QUICK FIX

But the vexed and enormously complex question of how to expedite production and distribution means there will be no immediate reprieve.

And the latest wave of the pandemic is hitting many regions harder than the first that swept the globe after the virus emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Trump's son Don Jr positive for COVID-19

US President Donald Trump's eldest son Donald Trump Jr has tested positive for COVID-19 and is quarantining without symptoms, the latest in a long list of infections among those with links to the White House. "Don tested positive at the start of the week and has been quarantining out at his cabin since the result," his spokesman said.

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



guidelines," the spokesman said of the 42-year-old.

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

NAIROBI

Ethiopia pushes towards Tigray capital

The Ethiopian government said on Saturday its forces had seized another town in their advance on the rebel-held capital of northern Tigray region, and rebuffed an African diplomatic push to mediate. More than two weeks into Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's offensive, his government said Tigrayan forces were digging in and using bulldozers to plough up roads around the regional capital Mekelle, home to about half a million people.



The conflict has spread beyond Tigray, whose forces have fired rockets at the neighbouring Amhara region and the nation of Eritrea, spurring concern of a wider war and the splintering of multi-ethnic Ethiopia. — Reuters

WARSAW

Poland to reopen malls, warns against travel

Shopping centres will reopen in Poland in a week's time, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Saturday, in a boost to retailers in the run-up to Christmas, but he added that the government was working on rules to limit travel. The government closed entertainment venues and some shops from November 7 after a surge in COVID-19 cases, but infections have levelled off since then, allowing some loosening of restrictions.



"There is one condition: ... the discipline of every shop, mall, furniture store. If not, these stores will be closed," Morawiecki told a news conference. — Reuters

As one door closes... a birthday shared can be such a joy...

November 18 has always proven a special day for me, and even more since arriving in Oman during 2009. It is really quite something to think that you are sharing your birthday with that of a nation.

Of course, late Sultan Qaboos, was born on this day back in 1940, and the continued observance of his birthday as the Sultanate's National Day is a testament to his 49-year reign, and even globally, as a man of peace, his achievements put the others of us born on the same day, very much in the shade. Only Darwinian botanist, Asa Gray, who charted the genetic relationships of plants has had a similar global impact. Though he too reflected immense modesty, writing "Upon much that may have to say, I expect rather the charitable judgment, than the full assent, of those whose approbation I could most wish to win."

The date of one's birth, it is said, is "written in the stars," and we under the star sign of the Scorpio are often seen as aggressive, but it is a water sign, like Cancer and Pisces, and are generally passionate, powerful, emotional and intuitive. We are patient, plan effectively, and work hard, while always aware of our environment, or at least, so I am told. Like most of us, I don't see myself in such a way



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ONLY
DARWINIAN
BOTANIST, ASA
GRAY, WHO
CHARTED
THE GENETIC
RELATIONSHIPS
OF PLANTS HAS
HAD A SIMILAR
GLOBAL IMPACT

that my future is determined by my birth, however, I am intrigued that this country, of which Hanya Yanagihara said, "If the only thing you knew about it was its location, you may never go there at all." Yet, I have come to appreciate it so much, and it, and myself, are inextricably linked.

So... what did I want to do to celebrate my birthday? I wanted to go fishing, which is something Lena and I can do together from the Sultanate's lovely beaches and coastline, but the beaches are closed. So we decided on a trip up Jabal al Akhdhar, as we hadn't been there since last November for the UTMB race.

We chose a modestly priced 'newish' hotel with nice views, booked a room for the night, and drove up around midday.

As we did so, I reflected upon the much-improved road and safety barriers, as I am not great with heights, and I recalled that first-ever drive up the mountain in 2010 challenged me 'vertiginously'. It was certainly much easier this time!

We arrived in the early afternoon to the Sama Hotel in Al Aqar, and checked in, and on impulse, Lena said to the gentleman in reception, "Did you see my husband's birth date on his ID card, it is his birthday today, on

National Day, is there any chance of an upgrade?" To our astonishment, it was approved immediately, and we found ourselves accommodated in a modern chalet with all 'mod-cons' as they say, overlooking the pool and the grandest of canyons. It was superb!

Lena asked what I wanted to do on my day, and I suggested a look at the mountain-top fossils, as we usually do, and to check out the new tourism construction sites and locations, of which there were many. The Jabal is obviously becoming a tourism magnet, as the number of establishments is growing significantly, with some iconic shapes emerging, all tastefully developed, and hopefully, after COVID-19, perfectly placed to respond to the tourist industry.

Remember Lena asked what I would like to do? I also said I wanted a "lazy" day and evening and sitting out on the viewing area in a comfortable chair, lemonade in hand, watching the sun go down, a time of reflection, it met the brief perfectly. Stargazing at night, and a gigantic breakfast on the terrace the next morning, both fitted the 'lazy' brief too! This may not have been the birthday 'celebration' I had wanted, but one I genuinely enjoyed, thanks to Lena, and the Sana's Satish, Bantu, and the team... unforgettable.

CARBON-POSITIVE

Africa shrugs off net-zero emissions push

LAURIE GOERING

As more countries, cities, investors and businesses set net-zero emissions goals, they now cover about half of the world's economy — but Africa is largely left out of the picture so far. Of its 54 countries, only South Africa has set a net-zero aim — and failure to revamp policies to benefit from a global low-carbon shift may mean Africa misses out on investment, said Wendy Hughes, a carbon markets manager at the World Bank Group.

But officials from the continent noted that with sub-Saharan Africa currently producing less than 4 per cent of global emissions, "carbon-cutting" goals have limited relevance, with most African nations focused instead on creating jobs and economic growth. With international investment already lacking in Africa - and some countries burned by disappointing promises of cash from sluggish carbon markets - many African countries are struggling to see net-zero policy as a priority, they added.

"Without the financing, it's hard to have that incentive," said Damilola Ogunbiyi, special representative of the UN secretary-general for Sustainable Energy for All, noting investment in low-carbon energy systems in Africa had lagged.

Without the financing, it's hard to have that incentive. The funding is just not there

DAMILOLA OGUNBIYI
UN official

is just not there," she said. Globally, a growing flood of countries, cities and regions from China to the European Union have set zero-carbon emissions targets over the last year or two, said Helen Mountford, vice president for climate and economics at the

Washington-based World Resources Institute.

More than 1,000 major companies also have committed to emissions cuts in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change, as have over 30 large investment groups managing \$5 trillion, she said. As those governments and companies put their plans in place, Africa could see both risks and benefits — from being shut out of tightening supply chains to winning a big share of carbon offset cash, African analysts told an online event during London Climate Action Week.

Gabon officials said Africa, with its key Congo Basin forests, is well-positioned to tap into new, fast-growing markets for carbon credits, which are sold to compensate for emissions elsewhere.

Lee White, Gabon's environment minister, said his Central African nation, which has protected its forests carefully, was already absorbing 1 million more tonnes of carbon dioxide a year than it emitted.

"We don't think about net zero. We think about how we maintain our net-positive contribution to climate change," he said. But having financial incentives for safeguarding forests is crucial, he added - from ensuring what timber is cut is processed at home, creating jobs and income, to tapping into carbon markets as companies globally seek to offset emissions they cannot manage to eliminate.

"That's how we're going to get the Gabonese people and therefore Gabonese politicians thinking about how you maintain these forests. The forests have to become a valuable resource for us," White said. Without a clear financial incentive to keep forests standing and "make the Congo Basin forests working for the Congo Basin people and countries", no amount of aid or conservation grants will protect them, he said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

WIDESPREAD FRAUD

Amid Trump attacks, Americans are less confident in vote count

MELANIE MASON

President Donald Trump's repeated — and baseless — insistence that widespread fraud undermined this month's presidential election has left a mark on Americans' faith in the voting process, a post-election USC Dornsife survey has found.

Using a 0-100 scale to measure their confidence that all ballots were tallied correctly, the average ranking from voters was a middling 58. Democrats gave higher marks - 79 - that the vote count was accurate, while Republicans, on the whole, rated their confidence in the election results' accuracy at just 34.

"What's really very clear is that the large group of voters who voted for Donald Trump in this election have absorbed the message that the vote may not have been completely, fairly counted," said Jill Darling, the director of the USC Dornsife survey.

Democrats, she said, may have lost confidence because of concerns about voter suppression or problems with the US Postal Service. The final pre-election tracking poll estimated a national electoral outcome of Joe Biden with 53 per cent of the popular vote and Trump with 44 per cent. The actual results were a narrower spread: Biden with 51 per cent and Trump getting 47 per cent, with results still being tallied.

"Clearly, we were overestimating Biden a little bit and underestimating Trump by a little bit more," Darling



US President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at Cecil Airport in Jacksonville, Florida. — Reuters

THE ACTUAL
RESULTS WERE A
NARROWER SPREAD:
BIDEN WITH
51 PER CENT AND
TRUMP GETTING
47 PER CENT

said. To explain the discrepancy, Darling said the USC team has begun to look into whether its probability questions, in which respondents ranked their answers on a scale of 0 to 100, did not work as well this election year or if it was missing any key population of voters.

The team's analysis found that the survey did do a good job of predicting the overall likelihood of voting. It also found no evidence that people lied or were inconsistent in their responses. One possible reason for the polling miss could be the deep polarisation in the electorate. "We used to get a range

of what people would say about their likelihood of voting for each candidate. This election, everyone was clustered at either 0 or 100 - yes or no," Darling said.

"The question is: Is that just what the electorate looks like now or are people who are still making up making up their minds a missing piece of the puzzle?" Other factors that could account for the results could be that young respondents tended to overstate their likelihood of voting, some voters stopped participating for the duration of the tracking survey and people who decided their vote on the day of the election slightly favoured Trump. — dpa

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

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

DJOKOVIC OUT-DUELS ZVEREV

LONDON: Novak Djokovic out-battled Alexander Zverev to qualify for the last four at the ATP Finals on Friday, staying on track to match Roger Federer's record of six titles at the end-of-season event.

The Serbian top seed, who was beaten comprehensively by Daniil Medvedev in his second round-robin match, was again below his best in London but did enough to win 6-3, 7-6, (7/4).

In the evening match at the elite eight-man event, which was a dead rubber, Russian fourth seed Medvedev beat debutant Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 6-3.

In a repeat of the 2018 championship match, Djokovic saved all three break points he faced to gain revenge against the German, and will face Group London 2020 winner Dominic Thiem in the semifinals.

Medvedev, who topped Group Tokyo 1970, will meet Spanish second seed Rafael Nadal in the other last-four clash at the empty O2 Arena.

The group-stage results mean the four top-ranked players in the world will all be involved in Saturday's semis.

Djokovic has already tied Pete Sampras' record mark of six year-end number-one finishes and is eyeing Federer's record at the season finale.

The top seed broke Zverev at the first time of asking and raced into a 3-0 lead, threatening to run away with the match.

The 33-year-old looked focused after his uncharacteristic mauling by Medvedev, serving himself out of trouble when he found himself trailing 15-40 in the seventh game.

That proved to be the last chance for Zverev in the set and

17-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic hammered a backhand winner down the line to take it 6-3.

Djokovic handed Zverev a break point in the fourth game of the second set after double-faulting but the German could not capitalise.

The 23-year-old fifth seed saved two break points on his serve in the following game, letting out a roar as he kept his nose in front.

The set went to a tie-break. Zverev earned an early mini-break but Djokovic levelled and the pressure was back on the German, who faltered to hand the Serbian victory.

Djokovic said he had managed to find the right shots at the right moments, in contrast to his performance against Medvedev.

THIEM MATCH-UP

He said Austrian third seed Thiem, who won his first Grand Slam at the US Open in September, would be a tough opponent.

"Obviously, earlier in his career he played his best on clay but of course being one of the hardest workers on the tour, the most dedicated players, Dominic found his 'A' game on all other surfaces," said Djokovic.

"His first Slam came on hard courts earlier this year in New York. I played him last year here — I lost 7-6 in the third set. It was really a thrilling match. Hopefully we can have another great match but this time with a different outcome."

Medvedev's victory against Argentine eighth seed Schwartzman gave him three wins out of three in the group stage — a far cry from his debut last year, when he lost all three matches.

The Russian, who is on a hot streak after winning the Paris Masters earlier this month, found some astonishing angles in a breathtaking display of hitting.

The giant Medvedev, 28 centimetres taller than Schwartzman, who stands just five feet seven inches tall (170 cm), broke twice in the first set and once in the second. — AFP

WORLD NO 1 REACHES SEMIFINALS AT ATP FINALS

ATP FINALS RESULTS

SINGLES

Group Tokyo 1970

Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Alexander Zverev (GER x5) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4)

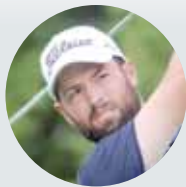
Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Diego Schwartzman (ARG x8) 6-3, 6-3

DOUBLES

Group Bob Bryan

Mate Pavic/Bruno Soares (CRO/BRA x1) bt John Peers/Michael Venus (AUS/NZL x6) 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 10-8

Jurgen Melzer/Edouard Roger-Vasselin (AUT/FRA x7) bt Marcel Granollers/Horacio Zeballos (ESP/ARG x4) 6-6 (1/0) – retired



Streb grabs lead at RSM Classic
Robert Streb overcame gusting winds to fire a spotless nine-under 63 to grab a two-stroke lead after the second round of the RSM Classic on Friday. Camilo Villegas is lurking two back.



Kim goes one clear at Pelican
South Korea's Kim Sei-young fired a five-under-par 65 to take a one-shot lead at the halfway stage of the LPGA Tour's Pelican Women's Championship in Florida on Friday.



Blaauw in charge at Joburg Open
South African Jacques Blaauw shot an eight under par 63 to grab a one shot lead after the second round of a rain-hampered Joburg Open at the Randpark Golf Club on Friday.

Stoinis eager to continue floating experiment against India



Australia's Marcus Stoinis

SYDNEY: Aggressive Australia all-rounder Marcus Stoinis is confident he could become the ultimate floating batsman in limited overs cricket after a successful stint opening in the Indian Premier League.

Stoinis, who has fashioned a successful career as a hard-hitting middle-order batsman who can close out an innings, was promoted to open for the Delhi Capitals by coach Ricky Ponting on their journey to the final.

Ponting has now joined Justin Langer's staff for the limited overs series against India that starts on November 27 in Sydney and Stoinis has told the former Australia captain he is willing to continue with the flexibility experiment.

"Punter's (Ponting) a big believer in me and wants to give me responsibility in the teams that he's been in charge of, but I've got to be adaptable," Stoinis told reporters on Saturday.

"I'm just happy to be involved

wherever they feel I can have my biggest impact in the game."

"Whether that's at the top or the middle... and I've had these conversations with Ricky and said 'just let me know and I'll put the pads on'"

Stoinis, who scored 352 runs in this year's IPL at a strike rate of 148.52, added that Ponting had proven to be a major factor in helping him improve his batting while in the United Arab Emirates.

"The confidence he instils, the

way he teaches you, he's as good as you'll get," Stoinis said.

"I don't think he's in the business of changing careers but like all those good coaches you don't really know you're being coached until you look back and realise (what he did was) bloody important."

Australia and India play three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 matches in Sydney and Canberra before a four-Test series starts in Adelaide on December 17. — **Reuters**



Cheteshwar Pujara

Rahane, Pujara must raise game in Australia, says Gavaskar

NEW DELHI: India need not lose sleep over Virat Kohli's absence in the last three Tests against Australia but Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara will have to shoulder extra responsibilities, batting great Sunil Gavaskar has said.

Regular skipper and batting mainstay Kohli will return home after the opening Test in Adelaide next month to attend the birth of his first child with deputy Rahane set to lead in the remaining three Tests.

"Indian players do tend to raise their game when he is not around," former India captain Gavaskar told *Times of India*, citing some of India's wins in Kohli's absence.

"They understand they have to make up for his absence."

"It's going to be tough for Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara. Both these players have to bat out of their skin." Rahane has occasionally led India and would

enjoy the responsibility, Gavaskar said.

Pujara was adjudged man-of-the-series when India beat Australia 2-1 in 2018/19, becoming the first Asian side to win a Test series Down Under. Known for his impeccable temperament, Pujara prefers to grind down attacks with his compact defence and Gavaskar said the top order bat should be allowed to play his natural game.

"That's what got him here. You don't tamper with a player's natural aptitude or temperament," said Gavaskar, who was the first batsman to score 10,000 Test runs.

"...nobody should be telling Pujara how to get runs as long as he is getting the runs and the hundreds. "If he is let alone and no pressure is put on him, that's going to work in India's favour. He is so rock steady, the others can score around him and play shots."

— **Reuters**

Muscat stay unbeaten; IT Works, Renaissance win too

MUSCAT: Oman opener Jatinder Singh finally found some form with the bat, striking an elegant 45 as unbeaten Muscat CT defeated Al Turki NMC by 71 runs, stretching their winning streak to five in Premier Division T20 League at Oman Cricket's Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Apart from Jatinder, young Wasim Ali (32) and Ayaan Khan (32) batted well too as table-topping Muscat posted 160 for 6 on the board.

Teetering at 38 for 7 in 13 overs, Al Turki found the going extremely tough, ambling to a disappointing 89 for 8 in 20 overs. Hemalkumar Tandel top-scored with an unbeaten 35. Siddharth Bukkapatnam and Rajesh Ranpura took two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES (PREMIER DIVISION): Muscat

CT 160 for 6 in 20 overs (Jatinder Singh 45 - 3x4, Wasim Ali 32 - 2x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 32 - 2x4) beat Al Turki NMC 89 for 8 in 20 overs (Hemalkumar Tandel 35 not out - 2x4, 2x6, Siddharth Bukkapatnam 2-8, Rajesh Ranpura 2-21) by 71 runs.

WASEEM BOWLS IT WORKS TO VICTORY
IT Works secured their third win in five matches, beating Arm Alpha by 31 runs in a low-scoring Premier Division match at the same venue on Saturday.

Finding runs hard to come by, IT Works had to be content with 121 for 8, Khawar Ali (30) and Khurram Khan (22) being their main scorers. Chetan Mallya, Bilal Khan and Sanuth Ebrahim all captured two wickets each.

Arm Alpha failed to mount any challenge, folding up for a lowly 90 in the 18th over against brilliant bowling by captain Waseem Akhtar who picked up 3



Muscat CT stars Wasim Ali, Jatinder Singh and Ayaan Khan.

for only 8 runs. Zeeshan Maqsood and Muhammed Nadeem bowled well too, taking two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES: IT Works 121 for 8 in 20 overs

(Khawar Ali 30 - 3x4, Khurram Khan 22 - 1x4, 2x6, Chetan Mallya 2-11, Bilal Khan 2-16, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-17) bt Arm Alpha 90 all out in 17.5 overs (Ansar Raza 21 - 2x4, Waseem Akhtar 3-8, Zeeshan Maqsood 2-16, Muhammed Nadeem 2-29) by 31 runs.



IT Works' Waseem Akhtar

RENAISSANCE WIN
In another Premier Division T20 game on Saturday, Renaissance run machine

powered his team to another victory with a solid 64 off 54 against winless AER.

Apart from Machhi's superb knock, Abdul Rauf's 56 off 43 was the other highlight of Renaissance's 161 for 5. Young Muzahir claimed 2 for 33.

AER's Mr Dependable Danish Mohammed struck a strokeful 63 off 38, including three big sixes, but his side still fell short by 25 runs, managing only 136 for 8 in 20 overs.

Syed Muzammil was the pick of Renaissance bowlers, taking 3 for 29 while young Yash Mehta bagged 2 for 17.

BRIEF SCORES (PREMIER DIVISION): Renaissance 161 for 5 in 20 overs (Pruthvikumar Machhi 64 - 2x4, 2x6, Abdul Rauf 56 - 6x4, 2x6, Muzahir Raza 2-33) beat AER 136 for 8 in 20 overs (Danish Mohammed 63 - 7x4, 3x6, Syed Muzammil 3-29, Yash Mehta 2-17) by 25 runs.



Chelsea blank Newcastle to go top

LAMPARD'S SIDE MOVES ABOVE LEICESTER ON GOAL DIFFERENCE



Chelsea's Tammy Abraham scores their second goal against Newcastle United at Newcastle, Britain. — Reuters



Chelsea's Tammy Abraham celebrates scoring their second goal against Newcastle United at Newcastle, Britain. — Reuters

NEWCASTLE: Chelsea climbed to the top of the Premier League for the first time in over two years with a convincing 2-0 win at Newcastle on Saturday.

Frank Lampard's side moved above Leicester on goal difference thanks to Federico Fernandez's first-half own goal and Tammy Abraham's strike after the interval.

Chelsea are unbeaten in nine games in all competitions and haven't lost in their last six league matches.

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

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

But Lampard's squad are more formidable than his predecessor's fragile team and a serious title challenge looks increasingly possible.

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

The west Londoners had won only once in their previous seven visits to Newcastle, but for once St James' Park didn't prove a house of horrors.

Lampard had complained about having to play in the Saturday early kick-off when several of his players had only returned from international duty on Thursday.

Thiago Silva was not even available to feature on the bench after the 36-year-old played for Brazil in a World Cup qualifier against Uruguay on Tuesday.

German centre-back Antonio Rudiger came in for his first league start of the season, while Ben Chilwell at left-back started despite limping out of England's game with Belgium due to a back injury.

CHELSEA PRESSURE

Chelsea's weary stars shrugged off their fatigue to make a strong start as Timo Werner raced onto a through ball for a low strike

that Karl Darlow pushed away for a corner.

Darlow was at full stretch again when Abraham met Hakim Ziyech's cross with a powerful header that the Newcastle keeper tipped over.

The Blues' pressure was rewarded in the 10th minute when a short corner caught Newcastle flat-footed.

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

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

With Lampard's men monopolising possession, Werner should have doubled their lead from Mount's pass, but the German forward scuffed his shot wide from 10 yards.

Callum Wilson, who had scored six of Newcastle's 10 league goals this season, was missing with a hamstring injury and the Magpies were toothless in attack without their top scorer.

Chelsea had a golden opportunity to kill them off when Werner robbed the dawdling Fabian Schar and raced into the Newcastle area, but instead of shooting, he played an awful pass that was easily cleared.

Blues defender Kurt Zouma headed just wide moments later before Chelsea had a momentary wobble.

Isaac Hayden blazed over from close-range as Newcastle finally had a sight of goal and Joelinton curled over from the edge of the area moment later.

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

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

Newcastle's Sean Longstaff hit the bar from long-range, but Chelsea's lead was never in jeopardy. — AFP

Miller tops Portuguese MotoGP practice

PORTIMAO, Portugal: Australia's Jack Miller topped the timesheets after Saturday's third Portuguese MotoGP practice with world champion Joan Mir struggling to make an impression in the Algarve.

Mir's hopes of celebrating his title in the season-closer with victory look slim, as he must first negotiate Q1 to progress to Q2 to have a shot at figuring in the first four rows of Sunday's grid.

While Mir may have wrapped up the title last week in Valencia there is a six-way battle for second place between Franco Morbidelli, Alex Rins, Maverick Vinales, Fabio Quartararo, Andrea Dovizioso and Pol Espargaro.

Mir's Suzuki team are hoping to seal the constructors' title too but face opposition from Ducati and Yamaha.

On Friday, France's Johann Zarco claimed the fastest time in practice.

Zarco on the Avintia Ducati was pushed hard by Spaniard Maverick Vinales at Portimao but was just slightly quicker with a time of 1min 39.417sec.

Vinales will happy with an encouraging showing though as he looks to win a six-way battle for second place in the standings, after his compatriot Joan Mir secured the World Championship last weekend in Valencia.

Mir posted the sixth fastest practice time as the Suzuki rider looks to add a final flourish to his maiden title, which made him the first new MotoGP champion since Marc Marquez in 2013.

But second place remains up for grabs this weekend while a new race winner would make it 10 for the season, beating the all-time record.

Alex Espargaro is among those hoping to claim that honour and he completed the top three in practice, ahead of Fabio Quartararo and KTM's Brad Binder, in fourth and fifth respectively.

Andrea Dovizioso and Pol Espargaro, who are also in contention for the runner-up spot, came after Mir, with Australian Jack Miller and Franco Morbidelli taking the last Q2 spots in ninth and tenth.

Miguel Oliveira made the most of home comforts to clock the fastest time in the morning session but faded in the afternoon and ended up sitting 13th.

Nine-time champion Valentino Rossi, who is making his last appearance for Yamaha's factory team before leaving for the satellite Petronas team in 2021, suffered a fall and finished 21st. — AFP



Pramac Racing's Australian rider Jack Miller takes part in the qualifying session ahead of the MotoGP Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao. — AFP



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\$400m mega water projects to come up in Oman

MAJOR SCHEME: Ghubrah III IWP, with a capacity of 300,000 cubic metres per day will be largest greenfield water desalination project in the Sultanate when it comes into operation by around mid-2024.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

South Korean-based global construction heavyweight GS Engineering & Construction (GS E&C) has announced that consortiums led by its wholly-owned Spanish subsidiary, GS Inima, have secured mandates to build a pair of major Independent Water Projects (IWPs) in the Sultanate with a combined investment of over \$400 million.

The first of these water desalination schemes will come up at Ghubrah in Muscat Governorate, while the other is planned at Barka in South



Al Batinah Governorate. Wholly financed, developed and operated by the private sector, both projects will help meet robust potable water

demand growth in the capital city, as well as the populous Batinah belt over the long term.

In its announcement over the

weekend, GS E&C said its Spanish subsidiary received Letter of Awards for the two IWPs from Oman Power and Water Procurement Company

The first of these water desalination schemes will come up at Ghubrah in Muscat Governorate, while the other is planned at Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate.

(OPWP), the sole procurer of new electricity and water capacity and the offtaker of output.

The bigger of the two IWPs — a reverse osmosis (RO) based water scheme — is planned at Ghubrah in the capital city.

Dubbed 'Ghubrah III IWP', it will be built adjoining Ghubrah II IWP of Muscat City Desalination Company, which came into operation in 2017.

Significantly, Ghubrah III IWP, with a world-scale capacity of 300,000 cubic metres per day (equivalent to 66 million imperial gallons per day MIGD) will be largest greenfield water desalination project in the Sultanate when it comes online by around mid-2024.

GS Inima has projected the total investment in this project at \$275 million.

At Barka, already a major water desalination hub, GS Inima says it has been selected by OPWP to add a new desalination plant with a capacity of around 101,000 cubic metres per day (22 MiGD). The Barka 5 IWP, as the project is called, is estimated to cost around \$129 million, with commissioning slated during mid-2023.

Separately, Italian water desalination infrastructure services giant Fisia Italmimpianti announced that it will participate in the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) of the two water projects as a joint venture partner alongside GS Inima.

Milan-headquartered Fisia Italmimpianti, a unit of the Webuild Group, said on Friday that it had won two EPC contracts worth a combined \$330 million for the two projects. Fisia Italmimpianti has a 50 per cent stake in both joint ventures, it added.

Fish landings in Oman increase 41 per cent



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 21

The total quantity of fish landed at various points along the Sultanate's coastline reached 513,000 tonnes by the end of September 2020 compared to 361,857 tonnes during the same period of 2019, representing a steep 41.8 per cent increase, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

The total value of the landings was RO 238.87 million in 2020, representing a growth of 19.8 per cent over last year's corresponding figure of RO 199.37 million.

Traditional fishing accounted for 487,858 tonnes of the total, presenting an increase of 40.7 per cent over the previous year's corresponding tally of 346,646 tonnes.

Coastal fishing and commercial

fishing contributed 2,659 tonnes and 22,483 tonnes of total landings respectively.

Al Wusta Governorate contributed the lion's share with 178,829 tonnes, followed by South Al Sharqiyah (144,719 tonnes), North and South Al Batinah (61,385 tonnes), Dhofar (55,874 tonnes), Musandam (23,596 tonnes) and Muscat (23,455 tonnes).

Around 278,092 tonnes comprised small pelagic species this year, up 32.8 per cent from the previous year's total of 209,358 tonnes.

The share of large pelagic fish rose 78.4 per cent to reach 119,789 tonnes as of September-end 2020 compared to 67,157 tonnes last year. Demersal fish landings soared 30.5 per cent to 71,386 tonnes this year, up from 54,707 tonnes last year. — ONA

Pledge to strengthen partnership with private sector in Oman

National Day tribute: Officials of Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion laud Sultanate's economic, investment and commercial achievements

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 21

A number of officials of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion have lauded economic, investment and commercial achievements made by the Sultanate since the dawn of the blessed renaissance under the leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos. They emphasised on the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to achieve high and sustainable economic growth. They said that His Majesty's vision and approach was to take care of the citizens and work for their prosperity and development. They, particularly, emphasised on private-public partnership.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: "We are



celebrating the 50th glorious National Day at a time when Oman enjoys security, welfare and prosperity. On behalf of all those associated with the ministry, I use this opportunity to extend our thanks, gratitude and greetings to His Majesty the Sultan and pray that Allah bless the country and its people with all his bounties in form of peace, prosperity and development."

During the last 50 years of the renaissance, the Sultanate has made lots of achievements and accomplishments at various levels

emerging as a developed country with a focus on the principles of equality among citizens. It values the complementary roles played by both the private and public sectors for each other. Oman is proud of its achievements and accomplishments, said the minister.

Abdullah bin Ahmad al Majini, Acting Director of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in South Al Batinah Governorate, said: "The South Al Batinah Governorate has seen many economic and investment projects

over the last fifty years of the blessed Renaissance. Khazaen Economic City as one of the achievements of this renaissance as it provides many facilities to attract investors. There is constant contact between officials in the ministry and Khazaen Economic City to discuss various aspects of cooperation, especially in regards with the facilities of issuing licenses to investors through the Invest Easy portal and others such platforms."

Khalifa bin Mohammed al Rasbi, Director of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, said: "The governorate seen many developments since the blessed Renaissance. These achievements were made in various economic and investment sectors. The governorate provided many facilities for the establishment of local and foreign projects."

Shaikh Salim bin Nasir al Muslehi, Director of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, said: "This governorate, like rest of the governorates of the Sultanate, has seen huge development in infrastructure of various investment and economic projects."

Pact signed for waterfront tourism complex in Al Ashkarah

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 21

Well-known Omani real estate developer Sandan Development Company has signed a contract for the construction of a luxurious residential tourism complex at Al Ashkarah in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.



Ali bin Hassan Sulaiman, CEO — Sandan Development Company, signed the agreement with Talal Marhood al Maamari, General Manager — Oman Lebanese Construction. It covers the construction of 'Al Seef', a waterfront township of 75 lavish villas set on a

24,000 sq metre plot overlooking the Arabian Sea off Al Ashkarah.

In a statement, the Sandan official said the Al Seef project is the latest of Sandan's portfolio of investments in the tourism, hospitality and real estate sectors.

Around 90 per cent of the units

earmarked for construction as part of Al Seef have already been sold to interested buyers, he noted.

The waterfront development will add to Al Ashkarah's tourism appeal, as well as open up new economic opportunities for SMEs operating in the area, he added. — ONA



How banks are helping Africa cope during the pandemic

Lower commodity prices and scarcer demand have been pushing some African countries into deeper recessions, especially those heavily depending on the export of metals and oil. According to Global Trade Review (GTR), the risk of sovereign default has grown across countries in Africa because of currency risk and higher debt levels.

A country like Kenya, which is traditionally and historically very close to the Sultanate of Oman, had plunged into a current account deficit in 2015 and subsequently managed to recover half of the debt in less than 2 years. But Kenya is now back to 2015 level.

Despite the optimistic forecast of growth from 2021 to 2023,

Kenya just recorded an annual drop in GDP to negative 5.7 per cent and a recent quarter decline of 9.1 per cent.

On a positive note though, the new decentralisation model of production that was forced on global trades by COVID-19 in 2020, brought a glimpse of hope for many African countries, including Kenya, where last May, the trade balance nearly hit parity for the first time in a long while. In other words, the country produced nearly as much as it produced.

A similar effect can be witnessed in Tanzania and Uganda: countries that are also very close to Oman. But out of the 3 countries in this instance, only Tanzania actually managed to reduce the current account deficit



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POLICY MAKERS AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS ARE STRIVING TO HELP SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO BE RESILIENT IN THESE CHALLENGING TIMES.

to one of the lowest in the past decade.

In the middle of October, 2020, a collaborative report that assessed the impact of COVID-19 on trade finance, Making Finance Work for Africa (MFW4A), was co-authored by the African Development Bank, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), the International Trade Center, the International Chamber of Commerce, Islamic Development Bank, West African Development Bank (BOAD) and East African Development Bank (EADB).

Policy makers and development organisations are striving to help sub-Saharan African countries to be resilient in these challenging times. It is vital for both economic and social survival of millions of

Africans to keep flowing trades of goods and services. Prior to the pandemic, the trade finance gap in Africa was already estimated to be above \$100 billion.

To further demonstrate traction in these regions, recently the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the pan-African multilateral EXIM bank, partnered with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), the Trade Finance Arm of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group; and the Arab Bank For Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), to launch a \$1.5-billion Collaborative COVID-19 Pandemic Response Facility ("COPREFA") to support African economies with rapid financial assistance to reduce the impact of COVID-19.

Eng Hani Salem Sonbol, CEO of ITFC, commented: "Providing fiscal bandwidth and practical support to SMEs and medical communities in African countries will deliver immediate relief from the supply side restraints on personal protective equipment caused by the pandemic."

"ITFC has worked extensively since the very start of the COVID-19 outbreak to provide comprehensive support to some of the most vulnerable countries."

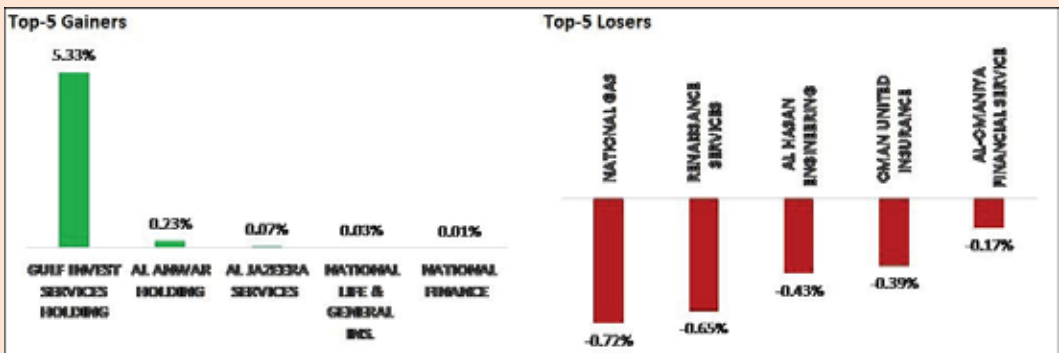
We often hear that "it has to get worse, before it gets better" and this seems to fit clearly what is happening to Africa. Unlike the 2008/2009 crisis, this time banks can be part of the solution and not the problem.

(The writer is a member of the International Press Association)



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Services sector weighs down MSM Index



MSM 30 ended the week lower by 0.01 per cent. Services Index was down 0.98 per cent while Industrial was down by 0.26 per cent, and the Financial Index was down 0.12 per cent. The MSM Shariah Index was also down 0.36 per cent.

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

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has issued a financial circular on regulating financing instruments and means, whereby MoF instructed all government units and companies to provide Debt Management Office (DMO) at MoF with their proposed annual financing plans by no later than January 31 of every year.

MoF emphasised the importance of coordination with DMO before initiating any procedure to select local or foreign lenders for any form of borrowing, and also prior to liaising with the issue managers or financial advisers in relation to the bonds or Sukuk proposed to be issued.

MoF stated that it is essential to obtain an

approval from DMO for any proposed loan contracts before and after negotiating with the lenders. DMO approval must also be obtained for the details and Terms and Conditions of the bonds or Sukuk prior to the issuance.

Oman's biggest petrochemicals project to date — is set to dramatically ramp up the global market portfolio of OQ, the Sultanate's integrated energy company, when the \$6.7 billion complex comes on stream at Sohar Port next month.

According to a high-level executive of wholly government-owned OQ, a stream of new petrochemical and polymer products from Liwa Plastics will bolster OQ's already sizable portfolio and market footprint.

At full capacity, Liwa Plastics will boost OQ's production of polyethylene and polypropylene to 1.4m tonnes. The product portfolio will include linear Low-Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) and Polypropylene (PP) — part of a product portfolio that will enable OQ to meet the growing global demand for polymers.

As of 9M20, 22 companies have reported accumulated losses, of which 10 companies accumulated losses are over and above 50 per cent of the share capital of the company.

In terms of accumulated losses in absolute Rial terms, Al Hassan Engineering (RO -77.8m) leads followed by Galfar Engineering

(RO -47.2m) and Dhofar Tourism (RO -10.9m).

As of October 2020, foreigners have continued to remain as the net sellers in Oman amounting to \$87m. In the month of October, foreigners were net sellers of \$5.5m.

In October, Top-5 gainers were: Gulf Invest Services Holding, Al Anwar Holding, Al Jazeera Services, National Life and General Ins and National Finance. While Top-5 losers were: National Gas, Renaissance Services, Al Hassan Engg, Oman United Insurance and Al Omaniya Financial Services.

Inflation in Oman fell by 1.51 per cent in October 2020 compared to the same month in 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on consumer price index. According to the report, the inflation rate in October declined by 0.11 per cent compared to September 2020.

The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages witnessed a rise by 0.32 per cent, health by 0.02 per cent, education by 0.08 per cent, recreation and culture by 0.51 per cent.

However, the prices of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels dropped by 0.42 per cent, communication by 0.03 per cent, transport by 7.02 per cent, and furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 0.29 per cent in October 2020 compared to the same month of 2019.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, NOV 21

Nama Group is targeting the training of 625 Omanis as licensed electrical technicians — a move that will see the percentage of licensed Omani electrical technicians jump from 9 per cent presently to 20 per cent by 2023.

Since the launch of the third edition of 'Naqlah', a programme conceived under the economic pillar of its sustainability policy, Nama Group continues to upgrade the capabilities and skills of Omani professional cadres. The Group continues to train programme recruits and help them obtain electrical licences to



establish and manage SMEs and increase Omanisation rates in the sector.

The training is conducted by Numo Institute for Competency Development, a member of Nama Group, which built an integrated educational platform for the programme covering all training curricula and activities. The programme started on October 6 this year and expected

to end on December 15, 2020. It is presented to 125 participants, distributed into four training batches based on the project approved plan for 2020.

The programme covers various topics essential to improve the technician skills, including: Electricity Sector Understanding, Power System Engineering, Oman Electrical Standard 4 and Soft skills (interviewing skills). It also includes site visits.

The programme targets electrical technicians (high diploma and bachelor degree holders in electrical engineering or equivalent) of various educational institutions from all the governorates.

PRESS RELEASES

BANK MUSCAT CROWNED THE BEST DOMESTIC BANK AND BEST CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANK IN OMAN

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

Ahmed al Balushi (pictured), Chief Corporate Banking Officer, Bank Muscat, said: "In line with our vision, 'To serve you better, everyday', our commitment of providing the best banking services and solutions to each of our customer is more than ever."



LG LAUNCHES WEARABLE AIR PURIFIER IN OMAN

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

As a global leader in clean air solutions, LG has long been associated with empowering healthy, hygienic lifestyles and this reputation has resulted in the creation of an entire new category of wearable air purifier technology to deliver a new level of portable protection.

LG's ever-expanding lineup of PuriCare air purifiers includes single and double tower models for residential spaces, a commercial model for offices and even a portable device for use on-the-go.

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



APOLLO HOSPITALS MUSCAT LAUNCHES HOME CARE SERVICE



On the occasion of the 50th National Day, Apollo Hospitals Muscat has launched a much awaited service — Apollo Homecare with the Ministry of Health's protocol.

The service was inaugurated by Sayyid Said bin Sultan bin Yaarub al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, in the presence of other dignitaries.

"We wanted to take Apollo's services to the next level and since homecare is the new buzzword and what societies crave for all types of patients, especially our elderly patients, post-operative patients and others who might be weak and home bound. We decided to go ahead with this brand new service for our patients," said VT Saileswaran, Managing Director of Apollo Hospitals Muscat. He noted that home medical services, especially among Muscat's geriatric population, is a necessity.

Italy approves stimulus package to help businesses

ROME: Italy's government has approved a new package worth around 10 billion euros (\$11.9 billion) to support businesses hit by the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Under the measures, Rome will immediately offer 1.95 billion euros in grants to businesses and food aid for the poor. The government is also preparing an additional 8 billion euros to beef up aid schemes already in place.

On Friday, the health ministry reported 37,242 new coronavirus infections and 699 deaths, as the country struggles to curb a resurgence of cases and fatalities which are stretching its health service to breaking point. Italy's economy is expected to contract by at least 9 per cent this year due to lockdown measures aimed at reining in the epidemic.

The new measures are not expected to push this year's budget deficit above the current goal of 10.8 per cent of gross domestic product, the Treasury said, as there was already spending leeway built into the target.

The government is planning to spend an additional 15-20 billion euros early next year to help the economy, which will push up the deficit in 2021, sources have said. — **Reuters**



Two tourists are seen at the Piazza Duomo in Milan. — **Reuters**



A screenshot shows participants of the virtual APEC Economic Leaders Meeting 2020 pose for a group picture, in Kuala Lumpur. — **Reuters**

Asia Pacific leaders make joint appeal for free and fair trade

Leaders of the 21-nation Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which included US President Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping, also said they would not resort to protectionist policies

KUALA LUMPUR: Asia Pacific leaders set aside differences with their first joint communique in three years, calling for free and predictable trade to help a global economy laid low by the coronavirus pandemic.

Leaders of the 21-nation Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which included United S President Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping, also said they would not resort to

protectionist policies.

Their joint statement, after a virtual summit hosted by Malaysia, is set against a backdrop of ongoing trade tensions between the world's two largest economies.

"The impact of (the US-China) trade war has been eclipsed by the COVID-19 pandemic," Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin told reporters after the meeting.

"APEC has also pledged to refrain from backtracking and resorting to protectionist measures to keep markets and borders open," he said.

In the communique, the leaders said they recognised "the importance of a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable trade and investment environment" to drive

growth during the crisis.

APEC countries failed to reach agreement in 2018, after talks were stymied by discord over trade and investment between the United States and China, and last year's gathering in Chile was cancelled due to violent street protests.

Trump, who has yet to concede defeat in the Nov. 3 US election and begin a transfer of government to President-elect Joe Biden, largely focused on domestic issues in his remarks at the meeting and spoke of the successes of his time in office, a source who heard his address said.

It was an unusually subdued performance by Trump, who has often attacked China over COVID-19, declared it a strategic rival and imposed tariffs on billions of dollars in

Chinese goods.

A White House statement said Trump had "reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to building on our unprecedented economic recovery from COVID-19, as well as promoting peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region through strong economic growth".

It said Trump and APEC leaders had endorsed the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 "that will make free and fair trade the focus of the APEC agenda for the next two decades".

Although Trump's administration declared the Asia-Pacific and competition with China to be foreign policy priorities, he has been criticised for limited personal engagement in Asia. — **Reuters**

Malaysia Airlines seeks aid from wealth fund Khazanah

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Airlines' parent company has sought financial aid from its sole shareholder, the nation's sovereign wealth fund, as debt restructuring talks with creditors drag on, the company said on Saturday.

"Malaysia Aviation Group has requested financial support from our shareholder Khazanah Nasional although the company isn't in a position to comment on the amount at this point in time," it said.

The group said it remains in talks for restructuring and that it was targeting a commercial agreement in the first week of December.

The airline could be seeking as much as \$500 million, said Malaysia's Edge weekly, which first reported the news, citing unnamed sources.

Malaysia Airlines is seeking to restructure after the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to slash operations.

The parent company had warned leasing companies that Khazanah would stop funding the group and force it into a winding down process if restructuring talks with lessors were unsuccessful.

— **Reuters**



An airport staff works beside a Malaysia Airlines plane at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Malaysia. — **Reuters**

India's RBI recommends reshaping domestic banking industry

MUMBAI: A working group at India's central bank, Reserve Bank of India, has recommended a series of changes that could transform the country's banking landscape by paving the way for large industrial conglomerates to set up banks.

The proposals could also allow large non-banking finance companies and niche payment banks to convert into lenders.

In a report made public on Friday, the committee

recommended that banking regulations be amended to allow large industrial houses to act as so-called bank promoters, meaning they could take a significant stake in a lender, something the central bank has strongly resisted in the past.

"Allowing corporates into banking is a path that the regulator should tread on carefully because how much ever ring-fencing they do, problems may crop up," said Ashvin Parekh, an independent



A woman walks past the Reserve Bank of India headquarters in Mumbai. — **Reuters**

financial services consultant.

Analysts said the move could be aimed at pumping more capital into the banking sector and increasing competition, but warned supervisory challenges could intensify.

Bajaj Group, Piramal Group and Reliance Industries are well-positioned to expand into banking, said an investment banker who did not wish to be named.

As well as opening up the

banking sector, the committee suggested adjusting the size of the stakes major shareholders can hold in a lender.

For investors not involved with the bank at the outset, or non-promoter shareholders, a uniform cap of 15 per cent instead of a current tiered structure was suggested by the committee, which was formed in June to review ownership guidelines and the corporate structure of Indian private sector banks. — **Reuters**

MOSCOW

Russia extends Western food imports embargo

Russian President Vladimir Putin (pictured) on Saturday extended an embargo on Western food imports introduced in 2014 until the end of 2021, an economic measure that mainly affects EU imports.

The Russian embargo was in response to EU sanctions introduced after Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula, sanctions that Brussels renewed for another six months at the end of June.

The EU has refused to recog-



nise Russian's annexation of Crimea and has condemned Moscow's support for separatists that control parts of eastern Ukraine that border Russia as a violation of international law. — **AFP**

LAGOS

Nigeria slips into recession after its GDP contracts

Nigeria has slipped into a recession after its gross domestic product contracted for the second consecutive quarter, according to data released by the statistician general on Saturday. Africa's biggest economy was last in recession in 2016, its first in a generation, and emerged the following year.

But growth had been fragile and the coronavirus pandemic hit the economy hard, as did low oil prices. The continent's top oil exporter relies on crude sales for

90 per cent of foreign exchange earnings.

"Q3 2020 Real GDP contracted for second consecutive quarter by -3.62 per cent," Yemi Kale said on Twitter. "Cumulative GDP for the first 9 months of 2020 therefore stood at -2.48 per cent," he added.

The government had previously said it expected the economy to contract by as much as 8.9 per cent this year in a worst-case scenario without stimulus. — **Reuters**

HONG KONG

Hong Kong-Singapore travel bubble to be delayed

A travel bubble between Hong Kong and Singapore, due to launch on Sunday, will be postponed for two weeks, Hong Kong's Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development said on Saturday as the city reported a rise in daily coronavirus cases.

The travel bubble, which allows people to travel between the two cities without observing quarantine, will be revisited in early December, Edward Yau told media.

"Today's decision is a



responsible decision," he said. The suspension comes as the Asian financial hub reported 43 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, the highest daily toll in nearly three months. It is also facing more than 60 preliminary cases. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

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SMART Indian professional, excellent English, double Masters — journalism & communication, finance, writing & research skills, Arabic speaker, 15 years diversified Oman experience in Muscat Airport project, healthcare, media, EPC, seeks suitable role. NOC. 99283938

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Planning Engineers	4	400 - 500		Khalifa Al Tourshi: +968 99224602		

features

OMAN OBSERVER f t i o u t v www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om



‘Kitab fi Ma’rifat al Hiyaal al Handasiya’: Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari

Born in Jazira, where in ancient Mesopotamia, the Asian and Arabic civilisations merge, in 1136AD, Badi Az Zaman Abu Il Izz Ibn Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari, is not widely known outside the Arabic world, yet as an artist, scholar, mathematician, engineer, inventor and the most cultured of artisans, he surely ranks in the pantheon of global inventors who have changed the world... **P18**

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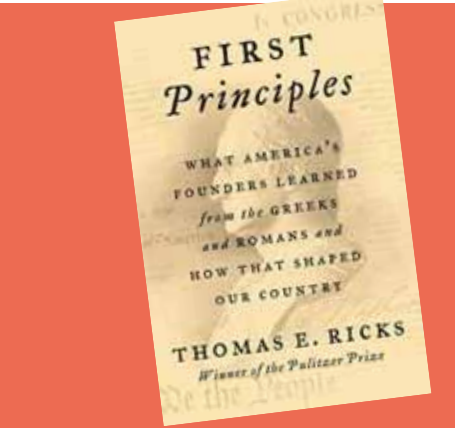
COOK LIKE A CHEF



NIKUYAKI UDON

For today’s recipe, Chef Rajesh is showcasing how to prepare a good Nikuyaki Udon. The Japanese word Niku means meat in English and yaki means something cooked in hot plate/pan. Udon is a type of thick noodles made from wheat. .. **Story on Page 19**

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FIRST PRINCIPLES

BY THOMAS E. RICKS

The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist explains the influence of the ancient Greeks and Romans on the thinking of America’s founding fathers.

DIGITAL TREND



BELGIAN RACING PIGEON FLIES PAST RECORD IN AUCTION

A two-year-old Belgian racing pigeon called New Kim set a world record of 1.6 million euros (\$1.89 million) at an auction that ended on Sunday, the online auction house said.... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



GO FOR A RIDE DAY

November 22 is an important day for various areas of the transportation industry. To celebrate the various developments in the sector, Go For A Ride Day encourages people to get out into the world – hop on your bike, into your car, or simply get your walking boots out of storage and go on a trip.



‘Kitab fi Ma’rifat al Hiyal al Handasiya:’ Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari

BY RAY PETERSEN

What a wonderful thing is knowledge, and while the Sultanate is absolutely and correctly celebrating the launch of its very first laptop, the Onsor, this month, and the public debut of several new entrepreneurial ventures through the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology's (MTCIT), second Sas Accelerator programme, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on the stunning achievements of a somewhat earlier scholar, inventor and engineer.

Born in Jazira, where in ancient Mesopotamia, the Asian and Arabic civilisations merge, in 1136 AD, Badi Az Zaman Abu Il Izz Ibn Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari, is not widely known outside the Arabic world, yet as an artist, scholar, mathematician, engineer, inventor, and the most cultured of artisans, he surely ranks with Imhotep of the Pyramids, Archimedes the observer of Syracuse, the inventor of paper, the China's Cai Lun, the steam engineer Heron of Alexandria, and the immaculate Leonardo da Vinci, in the pantheon of global inventors who have changed the world.

Shortly before he died in 1206 AD, Al Jazari published his amazing volume of inventions entitled 'The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Devices,' and in it lie the details of many of today's most commonplace discoveries and inventions. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that every day, everywhere in the world, everyone's daily life is impacted, and their quality of life enriched in some way or ways, by this remarkable polymath.

Donald Hill, of the University of London, wrote at length of Al Jazari, seeing him as incredibly practical, and remarkably honest, as every single machine or process referred to in the book was constructed by him, so proven. He was also able to identify the differences between his own developments compared to those who worked

on similar projects in the past, explaining very clearly the innovations he had wrought and their different technical aspects compared to those who may have had an idea in the past, but were not able to make them work. Al Jazari quite simply, made things work!

Principles that emerge frequently in his work are of automations, hydraulics, clock mechanisms, and crankshafts. His crankshaft was the first to transform a rotary, or circular motion

The nature of the Arab, their reticence, and their preference for shunning the 'limelight,' must be addressed as cultural qualities of yesteryear, or, like the genius that Badi Az Zaman Abu Il Izz Ibn Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari was blessed with, their deeds will be consigned to mediocrity

into the linear power train known today as the piston engine, the basis of every pump and motor used today. Hill wrote that in this one invention featured a myriad of astounding concepts that remain the realm of modern day design and construction including the static balancing of rotary motion, timber laminates to reduce warping, precision engineering using emery powder, sand-box metal casting, paper patterns and wooden templates.

His water pumps were the first to use the double-action, reciprocating meth-

od to lift water, for centuries the only alternative to gravity-fed systems, while many of the same systems carried over into Al Jazari's true passion of automata, or the first robotics. His clever works included a hydraulic musical robot band, a drinks serving waitress, a peacock styled fountain, and a hand-washing machine with a flush mechanism, that inspired today's childishly simple... flush toilet.

Writing in 'Robot Evolution: The Development of Arthrobrotics,' Mark E Rosheim wrote of that invention, in wonder, not whimsy, "Pulling a plug on the peacock's tail releases water out of the beak; as the dirty water from the basin fills the hollow base a float rises and actuates a link which makes a servant figure appear from behind a door under the peacock and offer soap. When more water is used, a second, higher float trips, and causes the appearance of a second servant figure - with a towel!" Amazing!

Even the worthy Encyclopedia Britannica has published that, "The Renaissance inventor Leonardo da Vinci was influenced by the classic automata of Al Jazari. Fascinated too with time and levers, he constructed a combination lock, and numerous mechanical and hydraulic clocks, and while Giovanni de Dondi is credited with the magnificent Prague Astronomical Clock, it is Al Jazari's work that made it work as again, this practical genius found solutions to centuries-old problems.

The nature of the Arab, their reticence, and their preference for shunning the 'limelight,' must be addressed as cultural qualities of yesteryear, or, like the genius that Badi Az Zaman Abu Il Izz Ibn Ismael Al Raza Al Jazari was blessed with, their deeds will be consigned to mediocrity. The young Omani entrepreneurs of today must echo loud and long, their triumphs and innovations.

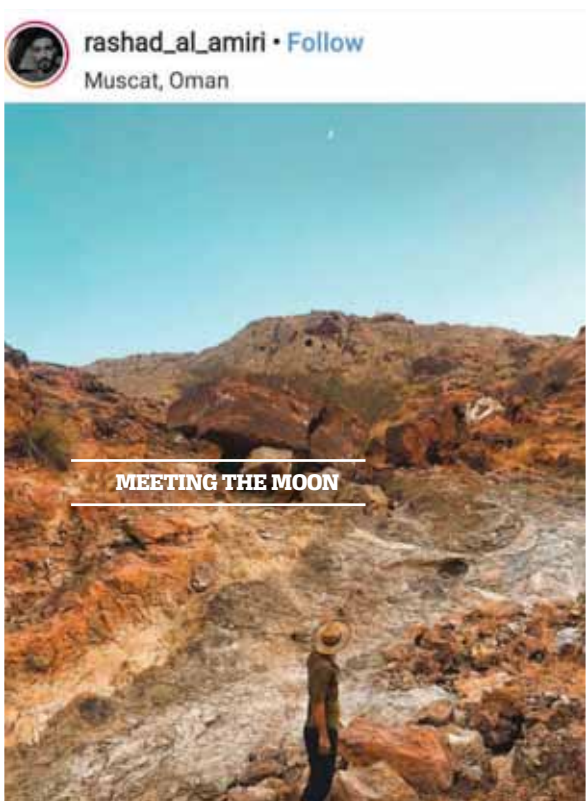
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NIKUYAKI UDON

(Stir-fried Udon noodle with beef)



BEST JAPANESE FLAVOURS

Takara is located inside the Intercontinental Hotel Muscat and is one of the country's best Japanese restaurants offering some of the most delicious and authentic Japanese flavours to the Sultanate. The restaurant currently has different promotions from Hana Nights that allows ladies to spoil their appetite every Tuesdays to Unlimited Ala Carte Weekend Lunch.
For today's recipe, Chef Rajesh is showcasing how to prepare a good Nikuyaki Udon. The Japanese word Niku means meat in English and yaki means something cooked in hot plate/pan. Udon is a type of thick noodles made from wheat.

PREPARATION METHOD

TERIYAKI SAUCE

Grill the beef or chicken bone either in an oven or thick hot pan until golden brown. Grill or sauté all the vegetables (carrot, ginger, white onion and garlic) together until you get its natural aroma.
Take a large stockpot with a thick base, mix soy sauce, mirin, sugar and water. Heat the pot on fire with a high flame, stir continuously until boiling. Put those sautéed vegetables and grilled bones in it and reduce the fire. Simmer continuously at the temperature of 800C to 850C for 2hrs, do not cover while simmering.
Reduce the sauce by 30% by simmering heat. (Do not high the flame, it will burn your sauce and taste will be bitter)
Once sauce ready, strain carefully. Keep the liquid and discard impurities. Take one bowl, mix Katakuriko with water just to dilute. Reheat the strained sauce until it boiled, pour diluted Katakuriko slowly and stir it continuously. Switch off the fire. Teriyaki sauce is ready. Cool down and store in the freezer.

NIKUYAKI UDON

Slice beef thinly. Cut all the vegetable in julienne.
Boil Udon noodles until soft (if frozen boil for 3 minutes) and strain from the water. Heat nonstick pan, add olive oil, add mix vegetable and sauté for 1 minute then add sliced beef and cook for 1 minute in high flame.
Add boiled Udon noodles and stir well.
Add Teriyaki sauce, Tonkatsu sauce, sesame oil, salt and pepper. Stir well until all the ingredients mixed well.
Pour the noodles on the plate and garnish with spring onion and sesame seeds.

INGREDIENTS:

TERIYAKI SAUCE (Yield: 1900ml)



500ml Kikkoman soy sauce
65ml Japanese sweet cooking sauce
Mirin
375gm White sugar
1900ml Water
65gm Carrot
25gm Ginger
65gm white onion
65gm Leeks
25gm Garlic
250gm Bone of chicken/beef or offcuts part of beef meat
50gm Katakuriko (Potato starch) or Cornflour

100gm Beef Meat, strip loin — thinly sliced
30ml Olive
Salt and pepper, to taste
150gm Udon Noodle (Thick noodle made from wheat can find in market dried or frozen)
5ml Sesame oil
10ml Tonkatsu sauce (From grocery)
20ml Teriyaki sauce prepared

MIX VEGETABLE (All julienne cut) (80gm)
15gm Carrot
15gm Mix bell pepper
15gm White onion
10gm Spring onion
10gm Bakchoy
15gm Button mushroom

Garnish:
5gm Spring onion (finely chopped or julienne)
5gm Sesame seeds



ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF RAJESH THAPA
Executive Chef
Head Chef
TAKARA Japanese Restaurant

Born in Nepal, Chef Rajesh Thapa, at a very young age has been inspired by the local chefs of Kathmandu. It is from these chefs that he first learned his culinary experience. After years of mastering many of the Nepalese styles of cooking, he moved to Dubai in 2008 and began venturing into multi-cuisine speciality and working with some of the best 5-star hotels in the country. Working in different restaurants, he eventually gravitated towards Japanese culinary. He would spend the next 10 years working with Jumeirah Group where he pre-opened several of their world-renowned restaurants. As the head chef of Takara, he has dedicated his time into making sure that he prepares not only the freshest ingredients but the best that Japanese dishes have to offer. One of his missions is to train other chefs to become better especially at the Japanese style and art of cooking and inspiring the next generations of Head Chefs.

DIGITAL TRENDS

Belgian racing pigeon flies past record in auction



A two-year-old Belgian racing pigeon called New Kim set a world record of 1.6 million euros (\$1.89 million) at an auction that ended on Sunday, the online auction house said.
Offers for the pigeon had already hit 1.32 million euros in the past week, surpassing the previous record of 1.252 million euros set in March 2019 for another Belgian pigeon, Armando. They then raced even higher in a frantic last 30 minutes of bidding on Sunday.

Bidding started at 200 euros on November 2, but rose to a bid of 1.31 million euros from a South African group within 90 minutes. Two wealthy Chinese collectors then fought it out on Sunday.
"The only thing I can see is we are in total shock," said Kurt Van de Wouwer, whose family bred and own New Kim.
Chinese enthusiasm for long-distance racing of homing pigeons has driven prices up sharply, with



"These record prices are unbelievable, because this is a female. Armando was a male. Usually a male is worth more than a female because it can produce more offspring," Nikolaas Gyselbrecht, CEO and founder of Pipa said.
Gyselbrecht said New Kim was only two years old and only raced in 2018, earning the title of best young bird in Belgium and prompting an early retirement. Pigeons can typically breed until 10 so New Kim has many years of chicks ahead.

birds from the traditional heartland of the sport in Belgium being particularly prized.
Gyselbrecht said no other country had such a high concentration of pigeon enthusiasts as Belgium.
"So you have 20,000 pigeon fanciers in a very small country competing with each other on a very high level. It's like the Champions League," he said, referring to European soccer's elite club competition.
— Reuters



This Oman desert camp offers world's best glamping experience

BY YERU EBUEN

It's one of the four nominated in the World Travel Awards as Middle East's Leading Luxury Desert Resort for 2020. But the ultimate honour cementing its place as best in the world would come from the World Luxury Hotel Awards when it was named Best Luxury Desert Resort in the world for this year.

There are many reasons why the Desert Nights Camp deserve the accolade. Located at the heart of Rimal al Sharqiyah in an area often referred to as Wahaiba in Al Wasil, in a desert valley surrounded by towering dunes, this camp has become front and centre of different activities not only the best that one can do while in Oman's fascinating desert landscape but also in showcasing some of the most treasured traditions of Oman.

"What makes this property unique and captured the hearts of our guests is that it is more glamping than camping and is packed with different activities that give them a different perspective and access to traditional Omani life," shared Anurin Jansen, the camp's General Manager.

"Oman has so much to offer. Time and time again, guests are always amazed by the heritage of the Sultanate. We keep many of those desert traditions. And mixed well with other beautiful Omani heritage, the traditional meets modern concept is at the heart of our operations," he said.

Their camel ride, one of the most popular attractions, not only for Europeans and foreign guests but even among expats in Oman, tapped into the vast knowledge of the Bedouins about the desert. The luxury tent rooms of the camp combined the functional design of Bedouin tents with the established decors and rustic, homey feel of Omani homes usually found in harats all over the country.

"The camp, to clarify this for many, is taking camping to a higher level. In the travel industry, it is known as glamping where people get to experience the outdoors but with the luxury of modern amenities and facilities with access to friendlier service and memorable tour experiences," Jansen said.

The camp started operating in 2007, then with 32 rooms. By 2016, it has expanded into 53 rooms divided into three categories.

"We have six (6) two-bedroom suites or Family Rooms. It is a villa that can accommodate five to six people and have a sitting room and bathrooms. We also have Deluxe and Standard Rooms which have modern toilets and sitting

areas and all of them also have outdoor sitting areas," he explained.

"But we are going into a new concept. In January 2021, we will be introducing a one-bedroom villa with infinity pool. We will have six of those rooms. We are also opening up more Deluxe rooms with bigger room areas and 19 standard rooms that will collectively put the total number of rooms to 88," he shared.

There's more to Oman's glamping scene by 2021. Other than its room expansion, the camp is bringing in Mandara Spa which will diversify what Oman desert camp offers. With a recreation centre that allows guests to play foosball, pool, darts and other board games and with the introduction of a full-blown in-house laundry, the camp will transform into a home away from home. The bonfire and movie watching under the stars are a staple that guests regularly enjoy.

"The best time to visit is winter which is from October to April. But even during the summer, we are open. The opening of the pool villas is to target summer visits since it will give our guests something to do even in the hot months. In summer, while the day is hot, the nights are very nice. Early mornings are also very soothing. We are open 365 days," he said.

COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES

Just like the rest of the country, even the camp strictly adheres to the Covid19 safety measures put in place by the government.

"With the Covid challenge, we adhere to the standards imposed by the government of Oman. From the time you check-in, we have temperatures check and the facilities are sanitized. We have sanitizing dispensers in key parts of the camp. Luggage is sanitized upon arrival. We have a fogging system for sanitization which we do before and after guests check-in. Every area is sanitized by our staff," Jansen said.

"Common areas also require guests to wear masks. They are not allowed to enter, for example, the restaurant without a mask. With the buffet service, everything is served by the staff. We also have barriers to make sure that guests have no direct access and contact to the food," he added.

Jansen said that while the camp faced the same challenge as the rest of the tourism industry, they are hopeful that it will make a comeback soon.

"We are living with Covid19 and our guests' safety is also our utmost concern. Until it's miti-



gated, we do all of our activities guided with the established rules. We want our guests to enjoy responsibly," he said.

CENTRE OF DESERT ACTIVITIES

"We are looking forward to boosting Oman's glamping and desert camp experience. Winning the luxury desert resort hotel award is just the beginning. We are working towards winning some other awards which will cement Desert Nights Camp and Oman's reputation as one of the best places for glamping and the desert experience," Jansen said.

"We are targeting not only the GCC best desert camp category but also eyes the whole Middle East luxury award. We are hoping to achieve more," he added.

Jansen said that there are plenty of activities for their guests to do. As of today, the camp offers camel riding, desert drives, sand bashing, sandboarding, and quad biking.

"From the hotel, we also organize tours to the nearby Wadi Bani Khalid. We have tours going across to the desert and even turtle watching tours to the nearby seas. We also have Bedouin house tours and for those who want to truly experience the desert, we have trekking activities for them," he said.

"The tranquillity of the camp, the peaceful environment and its beauty and setting are the main attractions of the camp. Guests who are looking for proper relaxation and tranquillity amid a beautiful landscape, this is the best spot for them to leave behind the busy, challenging often stressful environment of the city," Jansen said.

"Desert Nights Camp is located in one of the most scenic places in the country, especially of the Wahaiba sands. We hope to capitalize on this beauty and make it known all over the world that Oman has, in fact, the best desert glamping experience," he said.



HOLIDAY TRENDS

Chocolate Santas in marzipan masks - a coronavirus holiday in Hungary



LAJOSMIZSE, Hungary: When confectioner Laszlo Rimoczi decided to put masks on his chocolate Santas in his small workshop in rural Hungary, he intended it as a light-hearted joke to raise people's spirits amid a worsening coronavirus pandemic.

But it turned out to be shrewd business move as orders surged online, and now he can hardly keep pace with demand.

"I think by the time Santa comes he will have to wear a mask because Santa has to show a good example to people," Rimoczi said, sitting in his workshop in the backyard of his village home in Lajosmizse, about 70 kilometres south of Budapest.

To keep up with orders, he has had to simplify the design and now produces about 100



Santas a day, using gluten-free Italian chocolate. He paints the hat red, and makes the masks from tiny white marzipan strips, adding the ribbons with icing.

Rimoczi has even had to change the design of his bigger chocolate Santas, which originally came without masks.

"They were wrapped, but we had to unwrap them and give them masks as our customers now only want masked Santas," he said.

His girlfriend helps with the wrapping.

Rimoczi's business - he also makes other chocolate treats and sells them in a small shop in his house - suffered losses as the pandemic hit in March.

While the masked Santas have been a boost, he doesn't expect it to last if vaccines help the world defeat the pandemic.

"I am sure next year I will sell only a fraction of these, as Santas will no longer have to wear a mask," he said with a smile. — Reuters