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# Sultanate marks international day for elimination of violence against women

MUSCAT: The Sultanate participated in a 16-day campaign marking the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The annual campaign, organised by the United Nations since 2008, aims to raise public awareness against the social phenomenon of violence against women and girls in some parts of the world.

The Ministry of Social Development will observe the event by organising an awareness campaign titled 'Qarri Aynan' or 'Cool Thine Eye' (Holy Quran quote evoking respect for a female).

The campaign includes the broadcasting of a documentary film and the dissemination of awareness messages via telecom companies or platforms or social media networks affiliated to the ministry and other participating departments.

There will also be radio, television and newspaper interviews on the topic of the campaign.

Wadha bint Salim al Alawi, Director of Women's Affairs Department at the Ministry, in an interview to Oman News Agency (ONA) said that two discussion sessions will be held on November 30 and December 7.

In her interview, Wadha said: "The first session will discuss 'The reality of legislations and soft programmes for the protection of women'.

"It will highlight the ministry's role in fostering the empowerment of women and their participation in sustainable development, as well as the role of civil society institutions and the private sector in supporting national efforts in this direction.

"The second session will see the participation of legal specialists and workers in the field of family and women's affairs."

It will discuss proposals to develop legislations of relevance within the approaches of Oman Vision 2040 and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The campaign will be themed in orange colour designs, symbolic of bright future, to counter violence against women and stem gender discrimination.

In addition, an awareness week will be organised in cooperation with civil society institutions and other parties on women's empowerment and building strong family bonds and laws pertaining to women's rights and protection.

The campaign will begin on November 25, the day designated by the UN to observe the event.

The Sultanate has accorded full attention to human rights, since the start of its blessed renaissance. Oman signed a number of agreements to this effect, including the 1996 Child Rights Convention, the 2005 Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the 2008 agreement on rights of the disabled.

Since then, the Sultanate has taken giant strides in these fields.

Official statistics show that Omani women constitute 49.7 per cent of Omani society till August 2020. Girls aged 0-17 make 42.8 per cent of the Omani population till 2019.

The male-female gender ratio is 101:100 till mid-2019. The 65 Omani Women's Associations

The campaign will be themed in orange colour designs, symbolic of bright future, to counter violence against women and stem gender discrimination

undertake the responsibility of following up programmes related to women and children in the Sultanate.

Besides healthcare, the Omani government provides free education for all males and females in the Sultanate. The proportion of females who joined classes 10-12 stood at 96.5 per cent by school year 2018-2019, while illiteracy dropped from 11.4 per cent by 2014 to 6.5 per cent in 2019.

Meanwhile, the number of Omani girls who joined higher education institutions rose to more than 73 per cent. Omani females constituted nearly 40 per cent of students dispatched for study abroad, while Omani women working for government and private sectors stood at 33.2 per cent of the total number of employees by July 2020.

In the private sector, Omani working women constituted 26 per cent, about 66,400 of the total workforce by 2019.

Data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows that Omani women working for government departments constituted 41.9 per cent of the total number of employees.

Omani female entrepreneurs constitute 23 per cent of the total number of entrepreneurs by 2019.

The centre also shows that women constitute 7 per cent of Omani ambassadors abroad by 2019. — ONA

## Oman at GCC archaeology, museums meeting

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, participated in the meeting of the GCC under-secretaries of archaeology and museums which was held on Wednesday via video conferencing. The meeting approved the programmes of surveying, excavation, symposiums, forums and visits that the member states intend to carry out in addition to the joint periodical archaeological museum and the establishment of the archaeology and history society at the Gulf states. It also discussed the draft urban heritage charter.

The Sultanate was represented by Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Khairou, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage. The meeting discussed several topics of common concern regarding the GCC march in the field of archaeology and museums.

The under-secretaries discussed the mechanism and steps required for the implementation of the decisions that were taken at the 17th GCC meeting of archaeology and museums under-secretaries, and debated the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the archeology and museums sector and the precautionary measures adopted by the Gulf states to contain the pandemic. — ONA

## 8,708 deaths reported till October-end

MUSCAT: The total number of live births registered in the Sultanate during the first ten months of this year amounted to 66,932 including 61,061 Omanis (30,912 males and 30,149 females). Expat live births registered 5,871 (3,110 males and 2,761 females), according to data obtained from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The overall number of deaths registered across the Sultanate since the beginning of the year until end-October amounted to 8,708 of whom 7,147 were Omanis (82.07 per cent).

A total of 8,581 deaths were registered in the Sultanate for 2019 including 7,086 Omanis (4,145 males and 2,941 females), and 1,495 expats (1,226 males and 269 females).

## One jailed for stripping off tracking bracelet

RUSTAQ: The Primary Court in the South Al Batinah Governorate issued a verdict convicting a suspect who breached the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The offender got the sentence for taking off the tracker wristband aimed to sequester patients infected with COVID-19 virus. The convict also failed to abide by the home quarantine prescribed to him. — ONA

## Sukuk certificates of RO 25 million issued

MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the listing of the fifth issue to Oman Sovereign Sukuk comprising 25 million trust certificates valued at RO 25 million and due in 2022.

The Authority said in a statement that the offer was fully subscribed by individual investors who are entitled to a profit rate of 4.75 per cent per annum payable over a two-year maturity period till the due date on 24 November 2022.

The Sukuk has now been listed on the Bonds and Sukuk Market until its maturity as specified in the prospectus. The Sukuk will be available for trading on the stock market. — ONA

The three-day National Day camel races concluded at Al Bashair Camel Race Track in the Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, on Wednesday.



# GATEWAY TO MUSANDAM

## Dibba

**W**ilayat of Dibba was the symbol of an ancient civilisation in the northern part of the Sultanate, its first capital and the gateway to Musandam peninsula. It was a commercial souq frequented by merchants of India, Sindh, Iraq and Shatt al Arab.

Dibba was well-known among historians, orientalists, Arab and foreign travellers. The wilayat embraced known scholars, poets and leaders during the Islamic Caliphate, especially at the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Omar bin al Khattab.

The Wilayat of Dibba is politically divided into three parts that are Dibba Al Fujairah ruled by Emirate of Fujairah, Dibba Al Hisn ruled by Emirate of Sharjah and Dibba Al Baya ruled by Oman. Al Baya is a small border town in the southeastern corner of Oman's Musandam peninsula exclave.

It faces the Emirati conurbation that is also called Dibba, which lies both in an exclave of the Sharjah Emirate and in the Fujairah Emirate.

The wilayat is a natural maritime harbour on the coast of Sea of Oman. Its residents are mainly engaged in fishing, weaving, making fronds, tanning, farming and livestock breeding.

The Wilayat of Dibba houses various kinds of coral reefs, fortresses, water pools, different species of birds and traditional mud-houses at the top of mountains. Archaeological landmarks stand as an emblem of authenticity of the place as it includes Al Saiba Fort, which was rebuilt during the blessed era of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos; in addition to Subtan Fort. Bays, springs and spacious caves spread across the area.





In brief

SINGAPORE



SINGAPORE NEARLY VIRUS FREE AFTER LOCAL CASES CEASE

Having once had the highest COVID-19 rate in Southeast Asia, Singapore has all but eradicated the virus after reporting 14 days without any new local cases on Tuesday, and saying it had snuffed out the last cluster of infection at a worker dormitory.

The cramped dormitories for young, low-wage labourers, mainly from Bangladesh, India and China had been at the centre of the city-state’s spiralling cases earlier this year.

While Singapore has reported zero local cases for two weeks, there has been a trickle of infected people arriving from abroad who have been immediately isolated, authorities say. — AFP

JAKARTA



INDONESIA MINISTER BUSTED IN BABY LOBSTER GRAFT CASE

Indonesia’s fisheries minister was arrested on Wednesday in a sweeping bust over allegations of graft linked to exporting baby lobsters, the anti-corruption agency said. Edhy Prabowo was nabbed early on Wednesday along with his lawmaker wife, Iis Rosita Dewi, at Jakarta’s international airport as they returned from a trip to the United States. The couple were among 17 people arrested on allegations that they took bribes for issuing permits to export the crustaceans, investigators said.

This year, Prabowo gave a green light to restarting baby lobster exports, a practice banned under his predecessor due to sustainability concerns. — AFP

TOKYO



JAPAN FIGHTS CORONAVIRUS WITH MILLION-YEN MASKS

Japanese trend-setters can now protect against the coronavirus in luxurious style with opulent masks adorned with diamonds and pearls for a cool million yen (\$9,600) each.

Cox Co’s Mask.com chain began selling the hand-made masks last week, with the aim of cheering up people and spurring sales in a fashion industry depressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The diamond masks are embellished with a 0.7 carat diamond and more than 300 pieces of Swarovski crystal, while the pearl masks contain some 330 Japanese Akoya pearls. “It would be great if they could feel better by looking at one of these glittering masks”, Azusa Kajitaka, a mask concierge. — Reuters

Homes evacuated as cyclone threatens India

**PUDUCHERRY:** Several thousand people in south-eastern India fled their homes on Wednesday, out of the path of a cyclone due to slam coastal areas after midnight, bringing with it heavy rain.

Nivar, classified as a very severe cyclonic storm, was expected to pack winds of 120 kilometres per hour and gusts of up to 145 km/h when it makes landfall, forecasters said.

Thousands of state and national emergency personnel have been deployed in the southern regions of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, where the cyclone was due to hit in the early hours of Thursday morning.

Local authorities have declared a public holiday, shutting everything except emergency services, and a spokesman for the National Crisis Management Committee said thousands had been evacuated from their homes.

Heavy rain was already falling in the region, and was expected to intensify in the next few hours.

In Puducherry, the rain-soaked streets and markets were all deserted.

Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi appealed to locals to stay indoors and abide by authorities’ instructions.

“Move to high places wherever you have to. There are relief centres. Please move there”, Bedi said in a video message on Twitter.

But people in some pockets along the coast were reluctant to abandon



People use plastic sheets to cover from heavy rains in Chennai as cyclone Nivar approaches the southeastern coast of the country. — AFP

their homes and fishing boats and move to government shelters, a reporter said.

In Tamil Nadu’s capital Chennai, authorities said they were also closely observing the level of reservoirs and lakes to avoid a repeat of floods in 2015 when several hundred people

died in the state.

Lake Chembarambakkam outside Chennai was expected to discharge extra water because of the heavy rains, and people in low-lying areas around the discharge area had been warned.

The cyclone’s centre was expected to pass some 175 kilometres northeast

of Sri Lanka’s northern tip early on Wednesday. No evacuation orders were issued in Sri Lanka but heavy rains were forecast, particularly in the north of the island nation.

Fishermen there were advised not to go out to sea.

More than 110 people died after

“super cyclone” Amphan ravaged eastern India and Bangladesh in May, flattening villages, destroying farms and leaving millions without electricity.

But the death toll was far lower than the many thousands killed in previous cyclones of that size, a result of improved weather forecasting and better response plans.

It is expected to cross the southern Indian coast in the late evening of November 25 “as a very severe cyclonic storm with a wind speed of 120-130 kmph gusting to 145 kmph,” the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The storm is likely to bring very heavy rainfall and thunderstorms to northern Tamil Nadu, the adjoining region of Puducherry and the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh, the IMD said.

The heavy rains and strong winds were likely to damage houses and roads, uproot power lines, destroy crops and break trees along the coast of northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh, the weather office said in a statement.

Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, said ponds may leak due to heavy rains and ordered officials to monitor them and take precautions.

Both Palaniswami and Reddy ordered fishermen to not venture into the sea in order to protect life and property. —AFP/Reuters

Foreign donors pledge \$12 bn aid to Afghanistan



Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar with Finland’s Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto after a press conference closing the 2020 Afghanistan donor conference hosted by the United Nations in Geneva. — AFP

**GENEVA:** Foreign donors pledged a projected \$12 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan over the next four years at a conference on Tuesday, but many made it conditional on protecting human rights and making progress on peace talks in a major shake-up for the country’s economy.

Ville Skinnari, Finland’s Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade whose government co-organised the conference, said donors had pledged \$3 billion for next year, with annual commitments expected to continue at roughly the same level through to 2024, adding: “This would amount to \$12 billion.”

That preliminary figure was a drop from \$15.2 billion pledged in 2016 for four years, despite coming at a time when Afghanistan’s needs are growing due to rising violence and the coronavirus pandemic. Many donors also put strict conditions on future funding and some officially committed for just the next year.

Diplomats said keeping financing for Afghanistan on a tight leash could provide foreign governments with some leverage to inject a greater sense of urgency into a halting peace process.

The United States said it had pledged \$300 million in civilian aid to Afghanistan next year and would make available another \$300 million based on progress in peace talks.

“We stand ready to support

Afghanistan and to that end we’ve made available \$600 million for civilian assistance needs in 2021. We’re pleased to pledge today \$300 million of that money with the remaining \$300 million available as we review progress in the peace process”, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale said via video link at the conference in Geneva.

The United States has contributed roughly \$800 million a year in civilian aid in recent years.

Another top donor, Germany, pledged 430 million euros (\$510.88 million) in 2021 and signalled it would keep contributing until 2024 but also stressed that progress towards ending almost 20 years of war was needed.

Talks in the Qatari capital Doha between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents began in September but have been mired in procedural wrangling as violence has resurged around the country. But Hale said “significant progress” had recently been made, including a tentative agreement on ground rules that could allow negotiators to proceed to the next stage of forming an agenda. Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar said the “legal basis” for talks was one issue that still had not been resolved, though he expected progress soon. — Reuters

Sri Lanka keeps out hungry elephants at bay

**AMPARA, Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka’s government is digging a moat around one of its landfills to keep out hungry elephant herds and reduce conflicts between the animals and villagers.

Dozens of elephants lumber out of the forest daily into a garbage dump near the eastern town of Ampara, rummaging through mounds of rubbish for wilted vegetable scraps.

This has become a common sight at the country’s three largest landfills, which are located next to wildlife protection zones. The elephants consume plastic along with the food scraps, which slowly kills them, officials say. In 2019, a record 361 elephants died mainly because of humans, local environmental groups reported.

The Ampara landfill was created around a decade ago in the middle of an elephant corridor that is home to 200 to 300 elephants. Electric



fences have not worked to keep the determined animals away.

“There is no proper plan or a system for this”, said P H Kumara, part of the Gal Oya Farmers Committee, a farming collective in the region around Ampara. “Government institutions have established landfills on the border of wildlife protection

zones. Once that is done, the wild elephants and other wild animals who eat the rubbish die.”

The government is now trying trenches around the facility to deter the animals. Villagers who have had an uneasy co-existence with the wild herds, say the situation is only getting worse. — Reuters

PM Suga calls for stable ties with China in first high-level meeting

**TOKYO:** In his first high-level meeting with Beijing, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said stable ties with China were important, as his country pursues a balancing act with its neighbour.

On Wednesday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Suga at the end of his two-day trip in Japan, marking the first high-level visit since Suga was elected as new leader in September.

“A stable relationship between the two countries is important not only for Japan and China but also for the region and the international community,” Suga told Wang in a meeting that lasted about 20 minutes.

The visit by China’s foreign minister comes amid growing concerns over Beijing’s assertiveness in the region. While Suga has steered clear of the harsh anti-China rhetoric used by Japan’s ally the United States, he has moved to counter its influence by deepening ties with Australia and choosing Vietnam and Indonesia for his first overseas trip.

Japan’s security strategy is grounded on its alliance with the



China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi speaks to media after his meeting with Japan’s prime minister in Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

United States, but it also has pursued economic interests with China, its top trading partner.

Chinese President Xi Jinping wants to build “good working relations” with his Japanese counterpart, Wang said, citing a message from Xi that he delivered to Suga.

Wang also said that bilateral relations have “finally returned” to a normal development path. Wang met

his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi on Tuesday. They agreed to cooperate on trade and fighting the coronavirus, but maintained their stances on territorial disputes, leaving a security concern unresolved. Japan and China agreed to resume coronavirus-hit business travel this month and to continue talks on disputed isles in the East China Sea. — Reuters



Salma al Najjar, who works at a petrol station to help her family with income, refuels a car in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

## Gaza's first female gas station attendant challenges 'traditions'

**KHAN YUNIS, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES:** Salma al Najjar, a petrol station attendant in the Gaza Strip, sees her part-time job in larger terms than the traditional act of filling a customer's tank.

The 15-year-old trailblazer is the first female to work at a gas station in the Palestinian territory, which has been controlled by the Hamas since 2007. Sporting an orange and black vest and poised for her next vehicle, Najjar said she wanted to "support Palestinian women and show they can do whatever they want, despite the criticism they face."

Gaza, under an Israeli blockade since 2007, had unemployment and poverty rates of roughly 50 per cent before the COVID-19 pandemic further devastated the enclave's economy. While the job of pump attendant may be facing extinction in much of the world, Palestinians still prefer to have a paid professional fill their tanks.

When the boss of a petrol station in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza

**In addition to being a pioneer for women in Gaza, Najjar said she is also representing young people**

informed her she had been hired, Najjar said she was both surprised and happy.

"Why not become the first woman to do this job and challenge traditions in our conservative society," she said, adding that she was encouraged by her family. Boss Mohammed al Agha said he was more than willing to hire a female.

"I am a businessman and I support all girls and women who want to achieve their dreams," Agha said.

In addition to being a pioneer for women in Gaza, Najjar said she is also representing young people.

"I'm young but not a child," she said. "I want to prove that it's not age that matters, it's skills." — AFP

# President-elect Biden picks security, foreign policy team

**WILMINGTON:** President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday introduced a slate of veteran diplomats and policy-makers who will make up his national security and foreign policy team, saying: "America is back, ready to lead the world."

Biden, 78, presented his picks for secretary of state, national security advisor, homeland security secretary, intelligence chief, UN ambassador and climate change envoy.

"These public servants will restore America's global leadership and moral leadership," Biden said as the six men and women stood behind him wearing face masks.

Biden said that after he is inaugurated on January 20 and Donald Trump leaves the White House, the United States will "once again sit at the head of the table, ready to confront our adversaries and not reject our allies."

"It is a team that reflects the fact that America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it," he said in a jab at President Trump's go-it-alone "America First" policies.

Biden's remarks came after Trump suffered further setbacks in his efforts to overturn the results of the election with unsubstantiated claims of fraud.

Pennsylvania and Nevada certified the November 3 election results on Tuesday, a day after the state of Michigan did so, a move which triggered the General Services Administration (GSA) to launch the transition process.

As more members of his Republican Party came out demanding an end to the impasse, Trump signed off on the GSA move, effectively admitting

### Biden's first cabinet picks

| Secretary of State                                                                    | Treasury Secretary                                                                    | Climate Envoy                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Antony Blinken</b><br>Aged 58                                                      | <b>Janet Yellen</b><br>74                                                             | <b>John Kerry</b><br>76                                                               |
|    |    |    |
| Former deputy secretary of state                                                      | First female head of the treasury. Former Federal Reserve chairwoman                  | Former secretary of state. Helped broker the Paris climate agreement                  |
| UN Ambassador                                                                         | Homeland Security                                                                     | National Intelligence Director                                                        |
| <b>Linda Thomas-Greenfield</b><br>Aged 68                                             | <b>Alejandro Mayorkas</b><br>61                                                       | <b>Avril Haines</b><br>51                                                             |
|  |  |  |
| Former assistant secretary of state for Africa                                        | First Latino head of Homeland Security. Former deputy secretary of homeland security  | First female head of intelligence. Former deputy national security advisor            |
|                                                                                       |                                                                                       | <b>National Security Advisor</b>                                                      |
|                                                                                       |                                                                                       | <b>Jake Sullivan</b><br>43                                                            |
|                                                                                       |                                                                                       | Former national security advisor to then vice-president Joe Biden                     |

Source: AFP photos

defeat. But the president on Tuesday tweeted a picture of himself in the Oval Office with the caption "I concede nothing!!!!"

The 74-year-old Trump later attended a traditional Thanksgiving

turkey-pardoning event at the White House.

He appeared to indirectly address the election, saying: "I say America First — shouldn't go away from that."

The GSA determination gives Biden

access to classified information and will allow his aides to coordinate with officials on addressing the worsening coronavirus pandemic.

"We're already working out meeting with the Covid team in the White House... The outreach has been sincere," Biden told NBC in his first TV interview since winning the presidency.

Biden said that in his first 100 days in office he would tackle the Covid crisis, scrap Trump policies "damaging" the environment and push legislation offering millions of undocumented residents a route to citizenship.

And he said he wanted to get all students back in classrooms, despite the huge cost of adapting schools to be Covid-safe.

The slate that Biden unveiled included veterans of the Barack Obama administration and signalled a return to traditional US diplomacy and multilateralism.

Biden said that "America's going to reassert its role in the world and be a coalition builder," but he denied it would be like a third term of Obama — whom he served as vice president.

"We face a totally different world," the president-elect said. "President Trump has changed the landscape. It's become America First, which meant America alone."

Antony Blinken, Biden's choice for secretary of state, said the United States cannot solve global problems on its own.

"We need to be working with other countries," the former State Department official said. — AFP

# African envoys head for Ethiopia where thousands of war dead reported

**ADDIS ABABA/NAIROBI:** African Union envoys headed to Ethiopia on Wednesday hours before a government ultimatum was to expire for northern forces to surrender in a three-week war that has shaken the region and killed thousands of Tigrayan fighters according to one report.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government has set a 72-hour deadline for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to lay down arms or face an assault on their highland capital Mekelle, home to half a million people.

The deadline was due to run out on Wednesday evening. Large numbers have died and there has been widespread destruction in aerial bombardments and ground fighting since the war began on November 4.

Some 42,000 refugees have fled over the border to Sudan and TPLF rockets have hit neighbouring Eritrea. AMMA news agency, run by authorities in Amhara region who back Abiy, said



Members of the Ethiopian Defence Forces ride in the back of a truck in a road near the city of Humera, Ethiopia. — AFP

that more than 10,000 Tigrayan "junta forces" had been "destroyed" with more than 15,000 small arms and heavy weapons seized in battles from Dansha to Adwa.

There was no immediate response from the TPLF, Tigray's dominant

political party which is spearheading the fighting. It too has spoken of killing large numbers of its enemies during a stream of often contradictory claims by both sides. With phone and Internet connections to Tigray largely down and access to the area strictly controlled,

Reuters could not verify the AMMA report or other statements from all sides.

On the ground, long lines of cars formed at fuel stations in Mekelle, according to November 23 satellite images provided by Maxar Technologies. Fuel has been rationed since the conflict began.

Three African Union (AU) envoys — ex-presidents Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Kgalema Motlanthe of South Africa — were due into Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa on Wednesday, diplomatic sources said.

Abiy, who won last year's Nobel Peace Prize for ending a two-decade standoff with Eritrea, has said he will receive them but not talk with TPLF heads until they are defeated or give up. European nations discussed the conflict at a closed-doors meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, diplomats said. — Reuters

### ROBOT TO PERFORM COVID TESTS



Cira 3, a remote-controlled robot that runs tests on suspected Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients to limit the human exposure to the virus is seen next to a healthcare worker in a corridor of the hospital, amid a second wave of infections in Tanta, Egypt. — Reuters

### SHORT TAKES

#### LONDON

### Meghan Markle reveals miscarriage

British charities helping families deal with miscarriages on Wednesday praised Meghan Markle for lifting a taboo on a first-person essay in the *New York Times*.

"I just applaud Meghan for showing the courage to share their story so beautifully and eloquently," said Zoe Clark-Coates, head of the Mariposa Trust, which supports people who have had miscarriages or lost children.

"It gives people insight into a subject that is often not discussed and brought into the light," said Clark-Coates, who has written books about grief and pregnancy.



Every time a celebrity talks about miscarriage or a storyline in a TV show covers the subject "we see a massive surge in people asking for support", she said. — AFP

#### COPENHAGEN

### Denmark's culled minks rise from mass grave

A rushed cull of Denmark's minks over concerns about a coronavirus mutation has left the country facing a new horror, as cadavers of the animals re-emerge from the earth. The macabre phenomenon was observed in a military training field outside the western town of Holstebro, where thousands of minks had been put into an improvised mass grave.

The carcasses rose to the surface, lifted by pressure from gases released by the decomposition, according to local police.

The environment ministry said minks should be covered by at least 150 centimetres of earth, but according to public broadcaster DR they were only buried under 100 centimetres of dirt in the field outside Holstebro.

"The authorities are playing with our environment and using it as a dumping ground," Leif Brogger, a local politician, told *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper.

Adding to the frustration, the animals had been buried too close to a lake, raising fears of phosphorus and nitrogen pollution, though officials have promised to fix the situation.

The ministry insisted the minks' escape from their tomb was a "temporary problem tied to the animals' decaying process". — AFP

#### BERLIN

### German govt sets Sept 26 for national elections

The German government on Wednesday agreed on September 26 next year for the general election to choose a successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel, a government spokeswoman said.

Merkel has said she will not stand for a fifth term and will retire from politics next year after 16 years at the helm of Europe's top economic power and the EU's most populous country.

Her departure will mark a new, less certain phase in German politics and at the heart of the European Union, whose rotating presidency Merkel currently holds.



The government "proposes to the federal president the date of Sunday, September 26, 2021 for the election of the 20th Bundestag (lower house of parliament)," spokeswoman Martina Fietz told reporters. — AFP

# \$169 billion for 29,000 lives? Study calculates cost of US shutdowns

CHRIS STEIN

There's little doubt that government-ordered business shutdowns to stop the spread of COVID-19 damaged the US economy, but the exact cost has not been clear.

Researchers from HEC Paris business school and Bocconi University in Milan have reached a sobering calculation: The closures beginning at the pandemic's onset in March through May saved 29,000 lives — at a cost of \$169 billion, or around \$6 million per person.

"Governors saved lives on the one hand, but reduced economic activity on the other", Jean-Noel Barrot, a professor at HEC Paris and member of France's National Assembly, said.

How to address the world's largest coronavirus outbreak has become a vexing, politically charged question in the United States, where the virus has infected more than 12.2 million people and killed nearly 257,000.

Virus cases are surging nationwide, prompting many states to again implement restrictions on businesses.

But Barrot warns that changes in Americans' behaviour may make renewed business restrictions

HOW TO ADDRESS THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK HAS BECOME A VEXING, POLITICALLY CHARGED QUESTION IN THE UNITED STATES

less effective.

"As people become, perhaps, more responsible, as they wear more masks and so on, the effect that we're seeing on infection is going to probably go down", he said.

**UNPRECEDENTED SHUTDOWN**

The March orders were applied unevenly by state and local governments, but caused unprecedented disruptions to the world's largest economy, prompting a debate over the government's role in forcing people to change their lifestyles in the name of public health.

Critics have said the restrictions, which were relaxed to varying degrees in the spring and summer, are a costly assault on personal freedom, while supporters say they're one of the ways the out-of-control virus can be contained.

A June study published in *Nature* found that without social distancing and business restrictions, the US would have seen cases hit 5.2 million in early April, rather than their actual level of around 365,000.

Researchers at Columbia University meanwhile found that more than

35,000 lives could have been saved had such measures been put in place just a week earlier than their mid-March imposition.

Though nowhere near as stringent as in other countries where curfews were strictly enforced and rulebreakers penalized, the restrictions' effects on the US economy were seen almost immediately.

Weekly applications for jobless aid shot up, with nearly 6.9 million filings in the week ended on March 28, while the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 14.7 per cent in April from its historic low of 3.5 per cent in February.

Using data from JHU and the US Census Bureau, Barrot determined the various US shutdowns cost about 0.8 percent of total US GDP, but reduced the death toll in the period surveyed by around a quarter.

States' moves to loosen the restrictions and massive stimulus spending helped the economy heal, pushing the unemployment rate to 6.9 per cent in October and weekly jobless aid filings down to around 750,000 — still higher than the worst single week of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis. — **AFP**

## INVESTING IN NATURE

# Norway hikes cash for rainforests

ALISTER DOYLE

Norway is doubling the price it guarantees developing nations to keep their tropical forests standing, in a step to slow catastrophic losses and encourage big companies to invest far more in nature to combat climate change.

In exchange for boosting the floor price it offers nations to slow deforestation to \$10 per tonne of carbon dioxide from \$5 — until now the international standard — countries must adopt better monitoring, said Per Fredrik Pharo, Director of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI).

Norway is the top donor for safeguarding rainforests, ahead of nations including Germany and Britain, and has spent up to 3 billion crowns (\$330 million) a year since 2008.

But despite concentrated efforts to curb losses, tropical forests are being cleared at a rate of a soccer pitch every six seconds — and deforestation accounts for about 11 per cent of man-made greenhouse gas emissions each year, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Trees naturally curb global warming by soaking up carbon dioxide from the air to grow, which makes protecting forests a cost-effective way to deal with climate threats.

What we are saying to countries – like Gabon, Indonesia, Colombia – is that ‘You have our price guarantee. If you deliver tonnes under ART TREES we will pay you \$10 a tonne, up to some ceiling

PER FREDRIK PHARO  
Director, NICFI

US President-elect Joe Biden called in September for the world to mobilise \$20 billion to protect the Amazon.

That rainforest locks up an estimated 500 tonnes of carbon dioxide in every hectare — roughly the size of a football pitch.

At \$10 a tonne, tropical forest countries could earn \$5,000 for every hectare of rainforest they conserve compared to a benchmark of historic rates of losses.

**TOUGHER MONITORING**

On one side of the chicken-and-egg dilemma, developing nations have found it less profitable to safeguard rainforests — at least in the short-term — than to allow logging or to permit farmers to burn down forests to produce soya, palm oil or beef.

On the other, donor nations and companies are wary of paying to protect forests when their investments may literally go up in smoke. Deforestation has risen in Brazil, for instance, since populist President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019. To qualify for the \$10 floor price, Pharo said tropical forest governments will have to adopt a rigorous accounting and monitoring system for forests, known as ART TREES, worked out in February.

"What we are saying to countries — like Gabon, Indonesia, Colombia — is that 'You have our price guarantee. If you deliver tonnes under ART TREES we will pay you \$10 a tonne, up to some ceiling,'" he said.

The hope is that compliance tracked by satellites and on-the-ground inspections will make big companies confident enough to invest \$10 per tonne or more, allowing Norway to stand aside and act mostly as a back-up.

Western Europe's top oil and gas exporter, Norway also has helped set up non-profit group Emergent to act as a broker to promote forest investments by companies.

Still, it is unclear if the \$10 floor price will be enough to unlock investments. — **Reuters**

## VIOLATION OF ELECTION LAWS?

# Japanese Prime Minister Suga under pressure over predecessor's scandal

SAKURA MURAKAMI

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was grilled by opposition lawmakers on Wednesday over whether he made inaccurate claims in parliament last year about a potential breach of laws on gift-giving by his predecessor.

Former prime minister Shinzo Abe is under fire after sources told local media his office helped cover the costs of dinner parties for supporters, in a possible violation of funding and election laws and in direct conflict with Abe's vehement denials in parliament last year.

Politicians in Japan are forbidden to provide anything to constituents that could be construed as a gift. The rule is so strict that one cabinet minister quit in 2014 after distributing paper fans during the summer.

Suga has been linked to the scandal, which dogged Abe in the final year of his tenure, as he was the then-prime minister's right-hand man during his 2012-2020 term.

He told a parliamentary committee on Wednesday that he had "always checked in advance with former Prime Minister Abe" on his responses about the matter, deflecting the blame for any potentially inaccurate statements.

"I will refrain from commenting further, as it involves the activities of an investigative force", he added, when pressed further about inconsistent statements in parliament.

Abe vehemently denied his office had subsidized parties during parliamentary sessions last year

POLITICIANS IN JAPAN ARE FORBIDDEN TO PROVIDE ANYTHING TO CONSTITUENTS THAT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS A GIFT



Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (R) bumps elbows with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the start of their meeting in Tokyo on Wednesday. Suga has been linked to the scandal, which dogged Abe in the final year of his tenure, as he was the then-prime minister's right-hand man during his 2012-2020 term. — **AFP**

where he was grilled by opposition lawmakers.

On Tuesday, Abe said he was aware of the accusations and promised that his office will "fully cooperate" with Tokyo prosecutors who are looking into the matter, but declined to comment further.

Opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan leader Yukio Edano said on Tuesday the media revelations meant Abe had lied in parliament when he denied his office subsidised parties.

"Prime Minister Suga was also the

ringleader of the Abe administration in his position as chief cabinet secretary, and he can't escape that responsibility", Edano said, according to NHK.

Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, stepped down in September due to health problems, but has stayed on as a lower house lawmaker.

The opposition had demanded he address the accusations during a parliamentary hearing on Wednesday, but the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) refused to concede to the request, saying it was "unreasonable." — **Reuters**

Banking credit ticks up to RO 26.4 bn in September

**STRONG GROWTH:** The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased to RO 5 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system’s assets by the end of September 2020

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, NOV 25

Total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks in the Sultanate (together known as other depository corporations or ODCs) grew 2.1 per cent to RO 26.4 billion by September 30, 2020, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Credit to the private sector rose 0.3 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 22.8 billion, the apex bank noted in its latest report on banking and monetary developments during September 2020.

Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector



(mainly under personal loans) accounted for respective shares of 46.3 per cent and 45.1 per cent, while financial corporations received a 5.1-per cent share.

Total deposits held with ODCs

reached RO 24.3 billion at the end of September 2020, up 5 per cent from the corresponding figure of September 2019.

Total private sector deposits increased 9.5 per cent to RO 16.4

billion by the end of September 2020.

A sector-wise analysis of private sector deposits shows that households contributed the largest share (51.2 per cent), followed by non-financial corporations (31.7 per cent), financial

**Banks also invested RO 306.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1 billion at the end of September 2020**

corporations (14.5 per cent) and the other sectors (2.6 per cent).

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks indicates a Y-o-Y growth of 1.3 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-September 2020. Conventional bank credit to the private sector decreased marginally by 1.1 per cent to RO 18.7 billion. Conventional banks’ overall investments in securities amounted to RO 4 billion. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased 19.5 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion.

Banks also invested RO 306.8 million in Government Treasury Bills, while their investments in foreign

securities stood at RO 1 billion at the end of September 2020. Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased to RO 20.5 billion in September 2020, registering a growth of 4.5 per cent over the level a year ago, the report noted.

Government deposits with conventional banks decreased 13.8 per cent to RO 4.6 billion, while deposits of public enterprises increased 20.1 per cent to RO 1.3 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased 10.2 per cent to RO 14.1 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.2 billion as of end-September 2020, recording a growth of 6.7 per cent over.

Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased 7.7 per cent to RO 3.7 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased to RO 5 billion and constituted about 14 per cent of the banking system’s assets by the end of September 2020.

Kenya’s economic growth to rebound next year: WB



A security guard stands next to a currency exchange in Nairobi. – Reuters

**NAIROBI:** Kenya’s economic growth is expected to bounce back next year, the World Bank said on

Wednesday, as it emerges from a projected decline in output this year caused by the coronavirus crisis.

East Africa’s biggest economy is expected to contract by 1.0-1.5 per cent this year as the COVID-19 pandemic pushes 2 million people into poverty and takes a toll on the government’s finances, the World Bank said in a new report.

“The economy is projected to rebound relatively quickly in 2021, lifting real GDP by 6.9 per cent year on year,” the bank said in its twice a year review of the Kenyan economy, boosted by the resumption of learning in all educational institutions in January.

The government forecast 6.4 per cent growth next year. The World Bank said its forecast for growth in 2021 still faced significant risks,

including the uncertainty around the length and severity of the pandemic, unpredictable weather conditions and the pace of the global economic recovery.

Kenya’s economy contracted by 0.4 per cent in the first half of this year, compared with an expansion of 5.4 per cent a year earlier. The bank said the pandemic increased poverty by 4 percentage points as incomes dropped and people were laid off from work.

“The unemployment rate increased sharply, approximately doubling to 10.4 per cent in the second quarter,” it said, citing official data. Kenya’s total debt jumped to 65.6 per cent of gross domestic

product in June this year from 62.4 per cent a year earlier, as the fiscal deficit widened.

The bank urged the government to take advantage of debt service relief offered by richer nations, to free up liquidity that would have gone into repayments. Finance Minister Ukur Yatani said that the government planned to make a final decision soon on joining the G20’s Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), aimed at helping poor countries weather the pandemic.

“As economic conditions allow, policy should progressively prioritise returning to a medium-term fiscal consolidation path,” the World Bank said. — Reuters

India import hurdles hit Apple iPhone, Xiaomi devices from China



A man speaks on his phone inside an Apple store in New Delhi. – AFP

**NEW DELHI:** India’s tight control of quality clearances for electronic goods from China slowed the import of Apple’s new iPhone model last month and held up other products made by companies like Xiaomi, according to two industry sources.

Applications to the quality control agency, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), typically used to be processed within 15 days, but some are now taking up to two months or longer.

BIS started delaying approvals in August for China-made imports of devices like smartphones, smartwatches and laptops, part of the fallout from deteriorating ties with China after a border clash in June that left 20 Indian soldiers dead. Since the clash India has tightened rules for investments from China and banned hundreds of Chinese mobile apps, including from tech giants Tencent, Alibaba and ByteDance. It banned 43 more apps on Tuesday.

When Apple’s new iPhone 12 was caught in the delays, Apple India executives called on BIS to speed its approval up, giving assurances that the company would continue to expand its assembly operations in India, the two sources said.

It was not clear how long the iPhone 12 application was delayed.

The company has assembly operations in India, but newer models and the iPhone 12 are imported from China, where contract manufacturers make the bulk of Apple’s devices.

As of Wednesday, 1,080 applications to BIS for laptops, tablets and other devices were pending, with 669 of those waiting more than 20 days, according to the agency’s website. — Reuters

Oil prices rise as vaccine optimism sustains rally

**TOKYO:** Oil rose for the fourth straight session on Wednesday as the market shrugged off an industry report showing US crude stockpiles rose more than expected, extending a rally driven by hopes that a COVID-19 vaccine will boost fuel demand.

Brent crude was up 38 cents, or 0.8 per cent, at \$48.24 a barrel by 0616 GMT, having risen almost 4 per cent in the previous session. West Texas Intermediate crude gained 27 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$45.18, after rising more than 4 per cent on Tuesday.

Both contracts are at their highest since early March and have rallied around 9 per cent in the last four days.

“With an orderly presidential transition in sight, vaccine boosters and expectations that Opec+ will extend production cuts next week, oil markets completely ignored the unexpected 3.8 million-barrel climb in API US crude inventories,” said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA.

AstraZeneca said its COVID-19 vaccine was 70 per cent effective in trials and could be up to 90 per cent effective, providing another weapon in the fight to control the pandemic after positive results from other major pharmaceutical developers.

— Reuters

EU eyes tougher measures against foreign industrial espionage

**BRUSSELS:** European Commission is planning tougher measures to prevent foreign countries acquiring European firms’ intellectual property, a move that could strain relations with China, the United States and other trade partners.

Most of the 27-nation bloc’s exports are of goods produced by industries which rely on patents, such as cars and other high-tech products. But outside the EU, there is insufficient intellectual property (IP) protection for EU firms, the European Union executive said.

“Our businesses still face major challenges when operating in third countries, including uneven protection standards, or regulatory frameworks forcing transfer of IP as a de facto pre-condition for accessing local markets,” the Commission said in a document published on Wednesday, hinting at practices that are common in China.

In an action plan which outlines possible future moves, the Commission said it would take stronger measures to prevent foreign nations appropriating EU firms’ intellectual property through research projects, takeovers or outright espionage.

The Commission is developing



European Union flags fly outside the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters

new rules to regulate cooperation with foreign research labs, it said. “It will also take a critical look at foreign takeovers targeting critical IP assets,” the document added.

In March, the EU in effect blocked an attempt by the United States to gain access to patents developed by CureVac, a German biotech firm that

is pioneering a new technology to produce vaccines.

CureVac’s messenger RNA (mRNA) COVID-19 vaccine candidate, which uses the same technology as shots being developed by United States firms Pfizer and Moderna, is one of those booked by the European Union and in the

shortlist of a global procurement scheme co-led by the World Health Organization for the fight against the new coronavirus.

Brussels also plans to step up its fight against counterfeiting and simplify rules on patents to boost the ability of smaller firms to protect their intellectual property. — Reuters



# Saving in the time of a pandemic

Savings are an important resource and safety net for both individuals and governments to help them cope with the negative effects of downturns and disasters, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which is due to complete a year in January 2021.

Japan is a country that encourages its people to begin saving from childhood in the face of a plethora of temptations to spend on everything from electronics, entertainment and other goods and services. Shunning any extravagant

spending and excessive consumption, the Japanese have learnt to save for a rainy day, as the idiom goes.

The pandemic has reinforced this important premise — that it is imperative to set aside funds in the good times to ride out the rough times. Today, many people have lost part of their wealth and business livelihoods due to lockdowns and institutional closures triggered by the pandemic.

For my PhD thesis two years ago, I studied the Japanese model of saving — a culture that begins at a young age. Deposits accrued



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IT IS IMPERATIVE TO SET ASIDE FUNDS IN THE GOOD TIMES TO RIDE OUT THE ROUGH TIMES

from savings help with economic development, internal investment, and even lending to other countries.

This has made Japan one of the largest creditor countries buoyed by huge savings generated by individuals, housewives and other groups.

An Indian economist recently told me that the Japanese save a lot by being thrifty in their spending. The country enjoys a huge trade surplus averaging more than \$100 billion annually as its exports more than it imports.

This is unlike the Americans who spend a lot of money and also

import a lot of imports, leaving them saddled with a trade deficit of over \$400 billion annually. They consequently have to borrow from countries such as Japan, China, Korea and others. This debt is transformed into bonds, foreign currencies and other financial instruments.

This dynamic is however changing as countries engage in trade wars, trade protection barriers, and hefty taxes on imports.

This approach has been adopted by the current US administration under President Trump who is opposed to anything that is non-

American.

In recent years, the US has borrowed around \$5 trillion to spend on institutions that are characterised by large consumption. Thus, it can be said that countries such as Japan, China and others are investing in the US by lending these amounts.

This trend will persist as long as there are people who save and others spend generously. But the pandemic is a learning experience for countries, notably the Americans, on the importance of thrift in order to secure the welfare and well-being of their peoples during adverse times.

## Stocks hit record high as Biden transition, vaccines brighten outlook

TOKYO: Global shares reached record highs on Wednesday after the Dow Jones broke 30,000, with investors relieved at the prospect of a smooth handover of power after the US presidential election and confident a COVID-19 vaccine would soon be ready.

President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday introduced his foreign policy and national security team after President Donald Trump cleared the way to prepare for the start of his administration.

Reports that Biden planned to nominate former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen as Treasury Secretary, potentially easing the passage of a fiscal stimulus package to counter COVID-19 damage, also cheered markets.

The renewed demand for shares pushed MSCI's broadest gauge of world stocks to a record high of 622.12.

European shares Euro STOXX 600 followed suit, gaining 0.1 per cent in early trading to hold near nine-month highs, with banking stocks gaining ground, then falling back.

In Asia, Japan's *Nikkei* earlier rose to a 29-year high. MSCI's index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan traded down 0.2 per cent as Chinese shares were capped by worries about rising debt defaults.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average on Tuesday crossed 30,000 for the first time on Tuesday Futures for the S&P 500 added 0.2 per cent.

"The world is going to look a lot better this time next year than it does now, and that's what equity markets are reflecting", said Mike Bell, global market strategist at JP Morgan Asset Management. "The fact is the outlook has dramatically changed in the last month."

Amid the improved outlook, investors bet that forthcoming virus vaccines would ease the pain of industries hit hardest by the pandemic, from tourism to energy.

Global energy shares have risen almost 34 per cent so far this month, on track for their best month on record as crude prices rally. — Reuters



Men look at stock quotation boards outside a brokerage in Tokyo. — Reuters

## European Central Bank warns against 'abrupt' end to pandemic aid

If fiscal support is not maintained for the full length of the crisis, firms most affected by social distancing restrictions "may face severe solvency issues or a more permanent disruption to their business models", even as other sections of the economy recover



Workers dismantle the large Euro sign sculpture for maintenance, in front of the headquarters of ECB in Frankfurt. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank warned on Wednesday that a premature withdrawal of government support to the eurozone's pandemic-hit economies could derail the recovery and trigger a wave of bankruptcies.

An "abrupt" end to the measures could "result in a more severe economic contraction than during the first wave of the pandemic", the ECB said in its twice-yearly financial stability report.

Eurozone governments have taken unprecedented steps to shield companies and workers from the pandemic fallout, including through guarantees on bank loans and repayment moratoriums, massive short-time working schemes and aid for businesses hit by shutdowns.

Despite recent optimism about COVID-19 vaccines, "there is a long road ahead," ECB Vice-President Luis de Guindos said in a statement.

"Authorities will have to make difficult decisions on whether and how to extend policy measures and, eventually, deal with the debt

they create", he said.

If fiscal support is not maintained for the full length of the crisis, firms most affected by social distancing restrictions "may face severe solvency issues or a more permanent disruption to their business models", even as other sections of the economy recover, according to the ECB report.

Concerns over a slew of bankruptcies are already high due to the levels of debt incurred by companies and households during the first wave of the pandemic.

ECB President Christine Lagarde has previously said her

biggest concern was governments creating a "cliff effect" by taking away fiscal support before a full-fledged recovery was under way.

However, while government support schemes continue to be essential, they should "remain targeted towards pandemic-related economic support and avoid giving rise to debt sustainability concerns in the medium term", De Guindos said.

The ECB has said that its own pandemic stimulus package, which includes a 1.35 trillion euro emergency bond-buying scheme (\$1.6 trillion) to help keep credit flowing, will continue until the

"crisis phase is over".

In the previous edition of its report in May, the Frankfurt-based institution said the risk of the eurozone collapsing could re-emerge as public debt in some countries explodes to cope with the coronavirus shock.

Lagarde at the time however said she was "not overly concerned", and the risk is no longer mentioned in the latest report despite EU leaders bickering over a 750 billion euro recovery plan agreed in July.

Lagarde called for the Next Generation EU fund to become available "without delay". — AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### JAKARTA

### China, Indonesia sign \$1.5 bn thermal coal deal

China will buy \$1.467 billion worth of thermal coal from Indonesia next year, the Indonesian Coal Mining Association (APBI) said.

The trade deal was signed between APBI and China Coal Transportation and Distribution on Wednesday.

"It is hoped that there will be an increase of coal exports to China by 200 million tonnes in the coming year", APBI said. "The target quantity will be reviewed every year."



Indonesia, the world's top exporter of thermal coal, has resorted to diplomatic channels to promote coal sales around Southeast Asia, particularly in Vietnam, as exports to China slowed. — Reuters

#### LONDON

### Brexit affects economy for longer than Covid

Bank of England interest-rate setter Michael Saunders (pictured) said the long-term effects of Brexit could have a bigger impact on companies than the coronavirus pandemic.

"Businesses will shake off the effect of COVID-19 as they're temporary, but the long-term effects of Brexit could be more permanent", Saunders said in an interview.

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey said on Monday that a no-deal Brexit would cause longer-term



damage to Britain's economy than the pandemic, and the impact of the change might be felt for decades.

Saunders also said Britain's economy was unlikely to fall into a recession. — Reuters

#### MANILA

### Philippine Airlines plans court protection

Philippine Airlines plans to seek court protection from creditors while it pursues debt restructuring with government help, the finance minister said on Wednesday, as it fights to survive a pandemic that has battered the industry globally.

The loss-making flag carrier, partly owned by Japan's ANA Holdings Inc, informed the ministry of its plans last week but gave no details as to what kind of government assistance it needs, Finance Secretary Carlos



Dominguez told reporters.

In a statement, Philippine Airlines said the company and its shareholders were working on a "comprehensive recovery and restructuring plan" that would allow the carrier to emerge from the global crisis. — AFP

# sport



## Al Rawahi records second place effort in Middle East Rally Championship

“I am glad and proud to be the first Omani rally driver to get this super title in the area, and send a lot of grateful appreciation to all the supporters and family who were behind the scene to make this mission possible

**ABDULLAH AL RAWAHI**  
Omani rally driver

MUSCAT: Oman’s young rally driver Abdullah al Rawahi has created a new record for in Oman motorsport and among rally drivers when he became the first Omani rally driver to capture the second place in the Middle East Rally Championship this season behind the champion Qatari driver Nasser al Attiyah.

The MERC organising committee after cancellation of Lebanon International rally this season due to COVID-19

pandemic, has decided to announce that the championship title this season has gone to the Qatari champion Nasser al Attiyah with co-driver Matheu Baumel, and Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi along with co-driver Atta al Hamoud from Jordan got the second place overall and the third place was bagged by the Kuwaiti driver Mishari al Thufairi with co-driver Nasser al Kuwari from Qatar.

After only two rallies were or-

ganised this season in Oman and Cyprus and the cancellation of Qatar, Jordan and Lebanon rallies due to coronavirus, it was the only solution for the organising committee to hand over the titles to the champions as they were the only three who had participated in all the season which consists of two rounds.

Abdullah al Rawahi was elated with the result.

“I am glad and proud to be the first Omani rally driver to get this

super title in the area, and send a lot of grateful appreciation to all the supporters and family who were behind the scene to make this mission possible.”

**PLAYING FINISH**

Al Rawahi added that “We were having some difficulties in Cyprus rally and were afraid to lose the rally, but by the end reached the flaying finish which helped us to win the second place, and over all this season was for trial and

gaining experience for me and my co-driver.

“Hopefully we can make it and participate with the same pace better next season if we have enough financial support and sponsorship.”

“I would like to thank Bank Sohar for their kind support and hope the preparation for next season will be more professional so we can get better results as all the rounds will be organised as it’s been announced.”



Lewandowski, Flick head shortlist

MUNICH: Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski and coach Hans-Dieter Flick have been named on the shortlist for 'The Best Fifa Football Awards' after their treble-winning campaign last season.



'Pucovski can bat anywhere'

SYDNEY: Australia coach Justin Langer hinted on Wednesday that Joe Burns will continue as opening partner for David Warner in the Test series against India despite calls for Will Pucovski to replace him.



'England to play four Tests in India'

NEW DELHI: India will host England for four Tests in early 2021 in what could become the key clashes in deciding who reaches the world Test championship final. BCCI President Sourav Ganguly said.

# Infantino confirms 22 national teams will take part in Fifa Arab Cup 2021 in Qatar

DOHA: Qatar will unite millions of football fans from across the Middle East and Arab world when it hosts the Fifa Arab Cup 2021 next December.

During a visit to Lusail Stadium on Tuesday, Fifa President Gianni Infantino confirmed that the national first teams from all 22 Arab nations have signed up to take part in the tournament, which will be held from December 1-18, 2021 in the majority of Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums, with a total of 32 matches being held over 18 days.

The Asian Football Confederation nations who will compete in the tournament are: Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The Confederation of African Football nations who will compete in the tournament are: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia.

The tournament will be delivered by Fifa, Qatar Football Association, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy and the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC. Seen as a vital opportunity to test operations and facilities ahead of Qatar 2022, the tournament will take place in the same timeslot as the World Cup. The finals of both the Fifa Arab Cup and Fifa World Cup will take place exactly one year apart — each on December 18, Qatar National Day, which is a public holiday.

Fifa President, Gianni Infantino, said: "We are delighted that all 22 teams from across the Arab world have agreed to take part in the Fifa Arab Cup 2021, and we are looking forward to seeing the region's best teams battle it out to see which nation will become champion. Through football, this tournament will unite over 450 million people from across



During a visit to Lusail Stadium on Tuesday, Fifa President Gianni Infantino confirmed that the national first teams from all 22 Arab nations have signed up to take part in the tournament, which will be held from December 1-18, 2021 in Qatar

the region, and we are confident the Fifa Arab Cup will help to build excitement across the region as we edge ever nearer to hosting the first Fifa World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world in 2022."

QFA President, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Thani, said: "Qatar looks forward to welcoming 22 Arab national teams and their fans, and giving them the opportunity to be one of the select teams that will experience what Qatar has prepared to host the Fifa World Cup."

His Excellency added: "The tournament will give our national team the chance to enhance their preparations ahead of the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022, by going up against some of the best teams in the region."

"Fans from across the region will be treated to the same world-class experience that awaits fans from around the world when they flock to Qatar for the Fifa World Cup in 2022. We welcome our friends from the Middle East and the Arab world to join us in what will be an important milestone and a final test of our preparations, only one year away from us hosting the first Fifa World Cup in the region", added the QFA President.

# Ibrahimovic drops Sweden return hint ahead of Euros

STOCKHOLM: AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said on Wednesday that he missed playing for Sweden and hinted that he may be open to a return to the national side for next year's Euros.

The 39-year-old, who retired from international football after the World Cup in 2016, opened the door for a return after being awarded Sweden's Footballer of the Year award for an astonishing 12th time.

"If you ask me I'll be honest: Yes, I miss the national team", he told Swedish daily *Aftonbladet*. "It's no secret."

"The one who does not miss it, he has already finished his career. And I have not finished my career."

Ibra, who scored 62 goals in 116 internationals, has been in impressive form for AC Milan since his summer move, heading the Serie A scoring charts with 10 goals already this season.

He was more opaque, however, when asked directly how would he respond if coach Janne Andersson called him.

"Give me time, I have to think about it", said Ibrahimovic.

Without him, Sweden qualified directly for the Euros where they will face Spain, Poland and Slovakia there. But a poor Nations League campaign



which produced one win and five losses, and resulted in relegation from the A Group has rekindled thoughts of an Ibrahimovic return.

In November, he posted an old photo of himself on social media, wearing a Sweden shirt and the captain's armband with the phrase "Long time no see".

Andersson appeared less enamoured of the idea when he was also cornered by *Aftonbladet*.

"I'm pretty annoyed," said Andersson.

"He told me in 2016 that he wanted to retire and I respected his choice. So now it's up to him.

"If he wants to be involved in the national team again, to change his mind, he must say it clearly. In this case, it will be up to me to decide.

"I would be lying if I said I was surprised. I'm impressed and struck by how he continues to have that hunger on the pitch, that quality in everything he does. "He's a great athlete, by far the best Swedish player of all time. What he does is amazing, I can only congratulate him."

Ibrahimovic is currently injured after scoring twice in Naples at the weekend but he insists he will not be out of action for long.

"It's nothing serious," he said. "Just one or two weeks." — AFP



# ICC must deliver world events or sport will suffer, says new chairman

**WELLINGTON:** New International Cricket Council (ICC) Chairman Greg Barclay said on Wednesday his organisation must deliver their pinnacle events over the next three years or there will be serious financial consequences for the sport.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the ICC to reschedule three of their world tournaments, and Barclay, confirmed as chairman of the global governing body on Tuesday, said they were contracted to deliver them within the current broadcasting agreement. "We have got to deliver the world events that are to come and those that are postponed," Barclay said on Wednesday.

"Not just for the cricketing outcomes but there are commercial concerns as well."

The men's 2020 Twenty20 World Cup in Australia and 2021 women's World Cup in New Zealand have

been moved to 2022, while the men's 2023 World Cup in India has been pushed back to later that year.

"If we fail to deliver all of those events then we will be penalised by the broadcasters and we won't receive the last of the ongoing payments," added Barclay.

"That, in turn, is going to affect the ICC's ability to invest in its own programmes and enable it to make distributions to members. Unfortunately a lot of the ICC members are heavily reliant on those disbursements."

Barclay replaces interim chairman Imran Khwaja, who temporarily succeeded India's Shashank Manohar after his second two-year term ended in July.

Commercial lawyer Barclay, who has served as New Zealand Cricket's representative on the ICC board for the last six years, said that while the



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**GREG BARCLAY**  
*ICC chairman*

election process had been "drawn out" he was keen to get to work. One of his tasks is to ensure that women's cricket continues to make progress. "We have an obligation that it's a game for everyone," he said.

"We have got to continue to move towards parity." He was also eager to develop the game in non-traditional markets and felt the United States was an area they could tap into, especially with the work already done in recent years.

"We have to look at regions where there is good potential for growth," he said.

"The US appears to be the place to go. "It has a massive advantage in that its traditional audiences from sub-continental Asia have massive diasporas in North America and there are large audiences there for cricket. "We should continue with that."

— Reuters

## Rahul hopes to hold on to dual roles with World Cups in mind

**SYDNEY:** KL Rahul is enjoying his wicketkeeper-batsman role in India's limited-overs squad and wants to hold on to the job with three World Cups looming in the next three years.

Part-time stumper Rahul kept wickets during India's one-day series in New Zealand in February and reprised the role for Kings XI Punjab in this year's Indian Premier League.

He will continue behind the stumps in the limited-overs series in Australia but denied it was part of India's bigger plans keeping in mind the Twenty20 World Cups in 2021 and 2022 and the 50-overs World Cup in 2023.

"I don't think we as a team are thinking that far," Rahul said in a virtual press conference ahead of Friday's one-day series opener against Australia.

"Obviously World Cups are very, very important. That is the long vision for every team. "If I keep putting up consistent performances with the bat

and the gloves, it obviously gives us the option of playing an extra batter or an extra bowler.

"If the opportunity presents itself, and I can keep in all three World Cups, I'd love to do it"

The versatile batsman owes his new role to the fickle form of Rishabh Pant, who was seen as Mahendra Singh Dhoni's natural successor behind the stumps. Rahul said he learnt a lot from Dhoni, whose inputs from behind the stumps often helped the bowlers plot dismissals.

"I'll probably give them (bowlers) feedback on what I feel can be a batter length or a better pace to bowl at, or if they are doing something wrong or if they can change the field set," he added.

"I've done this in one series in New Zealand and I quite enjoyed it. Hopefully I can get better at reading games and give the bowlers and captain some good feedbacks from behind the stumps."

— Reuters



## Roy concedes battle for places is fierce in England limited overs squad

**CAPE TOWN:** England opening batsman Jason Roy says such is the quality of their limited overs squad in South Africa that nobody is assured of a place in the team and there is pressure on everybody to perform.

England start a six-match limited overs tour on Friday at Newlands with the first of three Twenty20 matches against a South Africa side that has not played international cricket since March.

But it is a different scenario for England, who have built up fierce competition in their squad over the last summer, and ahead of the T20 World Cup that will be played in India in October and November next year.

"It's a beautiful position to be in, to be spoilt for choice," Roy told reporters on Wednesday. "I would

**I would 100 per cent be lying if you said you were not under pressure for your place. The amount of talent that is around us. There is not one person, everyone is getting pushed to their limits. No one can rest on their laurels, it's one of those amazing squads. I have got to get myself physically fit, mentally fit and then I've got to score some runs. It's as simple as that**

**JASON ROY**  
*England*

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everyone is getting pushed to their limits. No one can rest on their laurels, it's one of those amazing squads. I have got to get myself

physically fit, mentally fit and then I've got to score some runs. It's as simple as that."

South African-born Roy endured a poor English summer in One-Day Internationals, managing only 49 runs in six matches, three each against Ireland and Australia.

Now he will face two of the best fast bowlers in limited overs cricket in Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje, and in their home conditions as well.

"You just know you need to switch on or you'll leave with a few broken bones. You've got to make sure your training is on point and ready to face a bit of fire," Roy said.

"It was a tough summer. Injury plus a new environment that is completely alien to me and who I am as a person. Mentally it was very tough."

— Reuters





Barcelona's Martin Braithwaite scores their third goal from the penalty spot. – Reuters

# Barcelona, Juventus join Chelsea and Sevilla in Champions League last 16

**PARIS:** Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla all claimed last-gasp wins as they qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Martin Braithwaite grabbed a double in Barcelona's 4-0 victory at Dynamo Kiev as they also secured a place in the knockout rounds.

They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals.

There was no Lionel Messi for Barcelona, with the Argentine rested for the trip to Ukraine, but Ronald Koeman's side got the job done to make it four wins from four in Group G.

All the goals came in the second half, with Sergino Dest opening the scoring before Danish striker Braithwaite added another and then converted a penalty to make it 3-0.

On as a substitute, Antoine Griezmann wrapped up the win on the night young centre-back Oscar Mingueza, Brazilian midfielder Matheus Fernandes and teenage American winger Konrad de la Fuente were all blooded in the first team.

"We've achieved our objective", said Koeman. "We looked hungry and scored four goals. Important players were able to rest and the youngsters deserved their minutes."

**MORATA, GIROUD STRIKE LATE**  
Juventus joined Barcelona in qualifying from Group G but the Italian champions needed a stoppage-time header by substitute Alvaro Morata to beat Ferencvaros 2-1 in Turin and seal their progress.

Albanian international Myrto Uzuni put the Hungarians ahead but Ronaldo drilled in



Barcelona's Sergino Dest (right) scores a goal during the UEFA Champions League group G match against Dynamo Kiev. – AFP

They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals

the equaliser before half-time, meaning he has scored in 15 consecutive Champions League seasons.

Chelsea are through from Group E after edging Rennes 2-1 in France, with Olivier Giroud coming off the bench to head in an injury-time winner. Serhou Guirassy had cancelled out Callum Hudson-Odoi's breakaway opener.



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo in action with Ferencvaros's Aissa Laidouni. – Reuters

Last season's Europa League winners Sevilla will not get to defend their trophy as they advanced to the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition and did so with a 2-1 win over Krasnodar in Russia, in a rare game played before a sizeable crowd.

Ivan Rakitic's drilled strike put the Spaniards in front only

for the Brazilian Wanderson to equalise, but Munir El Haddadi won it for Sevilla five minutes into added time.

Sevilla and Chelsea are level on 10 points but Frank Lampard's side go to Spain next week, when the winner will secure top spot.

Manchester United are in pole position in Group H after a first-half Fernandes brace set them on



Barcelona's Antoine Griezmann celebrates scoring their fourth goal with teammates. – Reuters

their way to a 4-1 victory over Istanbul Basaksehir that made up for a 2-1 defeat in Turkey last time out.

The opener by Fernandes was a thunderous strike from outside the box, while the second was a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal.

Marcus Rashford added a penalty, but there was a fightback from the away side, with Deniz Turuc's free-kick crossing the line before David de Gea could claw it away. Edin Visca crashed a shot off the bar, but Daniel James made sure of the victory on the counter-attack. "It's a Champions League night at Old Trafford, you'd expect them to enjoy themselves", United Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said of his team. "We scored some very nice goals, I'm pleased."

**HAALAND'S FRIGHTENING RECORD**  
Solskjaer's side are three points clear of both Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, after an early

Neymar penalty gave the French side a 1-0 win over their German visitors.

PSG go to Old Trafford next week.

Borussia Dortmund need just one more point to qualify from Group F following a 3-0 win over Club Brugge as the prolific Haaland netted twice either side of a Jadon Sancho free-kick in Germany.

Haaland has 16 goals for the season, and has now scored 16 Champions League goals in just 12 appearances — Messi had two goals and Ronaldo none after the same number of appearances.

"Erling is a fantastic player. He works hard on and off the pitch and he deserves everything that's coming his way", said Sancho.

In the group's other game Ciro Immobile was on target twice, including from a penalty, as Lazio beat Zenit Saint-Petersburg 3-1 in Rome, a result which eliminated the Russians. Marco Parolo also netted for Lazio, with Artem Dzyuba scoring for Zenit. — AFP