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AN APEX MEDIA PUBLICATION

WEDNESDAY, 30 DECEMBER 2020
20 PAGE ISSUE
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Email: muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

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SEEB STAY ON TOP IN OMANTEL LEAGUE
GO TO PAGE 10 SPORTS



HM receives invitation to attend 41st GCC Summit

Muscat - Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Tuesday.

The Secretary General delivered a formal invitation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to attend the 41st GCC Summit being held in Saudi Arabia on January 5, 2021.

Sayyid Fahd and Hajraf reviewed the topics of the GCC summit's agenda, as well as ways to foster GCC cooperation and realise the aspirations of the region's peoples.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and the delegation accompanying the GCC Secretary General.

Hajraf said, "I would like to thank Sayyid Fahd for his hospitality as we recalled the major milestones of the past four decades and the role of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in establishing the GCC and his pivotal role in its sustainability."

The 41st Summit marks the beginning of a new chapter for the GCC as it enters its fifth decade with economic integration and cooperation being a key objective since the council's formation in 1981, a media re-



lease from GCC Secretariat General stated.

'Beginning in 1983, member states gradually began implementing unified GCC policies to facilitate intra-GCC businesses, such as tariff waivers for intra-GCC trade, and culminated in the creation of a GCC Customs Union in 2003 and the introduc-

tion of a unified customs tariff on inter-GCC imports. These two landmark policies set the foundation for the establishment of the GCC Common Market in January 2008, and for the introduction of policies that granted Gulf citizens equal treatment across member states in business licensing and business activities.'

The GCC is one of the biggest economic blocs with a GDP of US\$1.6tn and exports amounting to US\$609.5bn, making it the sixth-largest exporter in the world. In its fifth decade, the GCC countries will focus on restoring economic growth in the region after the COVID-19 pandemic, overcoming its chal-

lenges, and resuming free trade negotiations and strategic partnerships with friendly countries. The council will also seek to enhance its competitiveness at the global stage by adopting modern methods and harnessing them to form new horizons of desired cooperation.

Agencies

Artificial reefs project wins top Arab prize for environment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has won the top prize at the Arab Scientific Society Organisation Award for the best project in the Arab world in the field of environment in 2020.

The organisation announced the winners in several categories at a ceremony held in Doha on Tuesday.

The ministry won the award for its project to develop artificial coral reefs. A total of 90 projects submitted by individuals and institutions from 13 Arab countries vied for the awards.

The aim of the awards is to encourage innovation in sustainable and successful projects, and to demonstrate the existence of practical solutions to many environmental problems in the Arab region.

The awards focused on creative projects and ingenious technologies in environmental sciences, water and soil quality, and pollution treatment.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has implemented large-scale artificial coral reef projects in 14 wilayats of the sultanate. A total of 13,906 artificial reefs were grown in these sites from 2003 to 2019.

The development of these



projects aims to increase fish stocks, provide an environment conducive to fishing and, consequently, increase income of fishermen. The ministry also seeks to develop the tourism sector by creating an attractive environment for diving and related tourist activities, and create a suitable environment to carry out scientific studies.

In 2019, the ministry inaugurated its largest artificial coral reef off the coast of Suwaiq spread over an area of 20 x 7km. The project, called Suwaiq Marine Farm Artificial Reef Complex, has 4,280 coral reef units. Besides benefitting Suwaiq's fishermen, it will boost tourism.

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THE FUTURE'S IN THE PAST

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highlight the cannon,
conflicts, conquering armies...
I believe history is a flowing
river of culture that we sip
from to receive cultural
nourishment

SAYYID NOOH BIN
MOHAMMED AL BUSAIDI

The Historical Association of Oman resuscitated with appointment of new chairman

Tridwip K Das
Muscat

The Historical Association of Oman has received a shot in the arm following the appointment of Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Busaidi, member of State Council, as its new chairman. The announcement in November came via a ministerial decision with Royal consent.

Established in 1972 under the patronage of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the association is a platform that brings together citizens and expats engaged in gathering, collecting, studying and disseminating information on Omani civilisation and culture.

Noting the circumstances under which the association started, Sayyid Busaidi said the late Sultan had several priorities in those early days of the Omani Renaissance. “There were numerous issues to be dealt with urgency and simultaneously. There was unrest in the country, too. So why would His Majesty Sultan Qaboos think of a historical association in that situation?”

Sayyid Busaidi believes the late Sultan was keen to send a clear message since the very beginning to citizens and “our guests of other nationalities” that the sultanate’s history would be at the core of the Omani Renaissance. “He wanted Omani history as the pillar of the new renaissance. It is important to the new world.”

While open to all with no limit on numbers, in the early 70s and 80s there were more expat members “probably because of fewer activities available. They visited archeological sites, forts and castles, and toured wadis. This was before the days of package tourism”.

Sayyid Busaidi emphasised that the association is inclusive rather than exclusive. “It’s not like a gentlemen’s club. It’s for those interested in historical tourism, not just history and heritage. That is why the association is under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism which approves its board of nine directors. So there is an official link.”

Besides visits to historical sites, the association publishes studies, leaflets and books in English and Arabic on subjects such as Omani cave inscriptions, architecture and artefacts. “The association has the function of raising awareness of Omani history; we have to crystallise the idea that Oman is the meeting point for the Indian Ocean nations. We are at the crossroads between the subcontinent, the Arab world and Africa.”

Defining Omani history is an extension of Indian, Persian, African, European and even Far Eastern histories, Sayyid Busaidi is keen that the sultanate’s pioneering role in establishing contact with other lands and peoples not be forgotten. Being the first Arab nation to establish contact with China, the Malabar and the Gujarat coasts, and to have an ambassador in the USA, history has always given Omanis a sense of pride, he noted.

“So the Historical Association has this undeclared task of promoting integration of cultural diversity and respect for others. This was a strong belief of Sultan Qaboos and is key to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s vision – to maintain Oman’s image of being multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and welcoming to everybody,” he said.

Considering the turmoil not just in the Middle East but the whole world as a result of fundamentalism, Sayyid Busaidi believes there is urgent need of an association like the Historical Association that promotes human co-existence, tolerance and the message of peace.

“Compare Oman with the other countries in the region. See the devastation and the havoc in so many places arising from extremism and the rejection of the other. Let us appreciate what we have.”

Asked why he was chosen for the job, he said, “They don’t tell you why, but it’s a big honour.” Having retired from service to his country in 2018 following stints in Germany and Malaysia, among other places, and travelled widely, Sayyid Busaidi believes his appointment to the role may have something to do with the fact that he’s a firm believer in multiculturalism and tolerance.

“I promote the idea of peace and co-existence in my articles in Arabic language publications and have some idea about Omani history. But it is a different interpretation of history. I am not enthusiastic about the warring history. We should not only highlight the cannon, conflicts, conquering armies... I believe history is a flowing river of culture that we sip from to receive cultural nourishment.”

Describing himself an internationalist and a humanist, he said, “God created us different so that we can enjoy each other. The differences create flavour. God gave us gastronomic condiments, and he also gave us cultural spices.”

Calling on both Omanis and expats to join the arguably oldest association in the country, he said it has a ‘flavour’ for everyone.



(Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

Over 1,700 get the jab in two days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 1,717 people were vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioN-Tech vaccine in the first phase of the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign on Sunday and Monday, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

The ministry also called on all those in the target groups to visit the identified health centres to get the vaccine without waiting for their appointment.

Statistics indicate that North Batinah recorded the highest number of people who were vaccinated (509 recipients), while Muscat recorded the vaccination of 302 people, Buraimi - 171 recipients, Dakhliyah - 84 recipients, Dhahirah - 98 recipients and Musandam - 81 recipients.

North Sharqiyah governorate recorded the vaccination of 89 people, South Batinah - 166 people, South Sharqiyah - 131 recipients,



MoH called on all those in the target groups to visit the identified health centres to get the vaccine without appointment

ents, Dhofar - 66 recipients and Al Wusta - 20 recipients.

'Citizens and residents targeted in the first stage of the COVID-19 vaccination programme can visit the health centres across the governorates without the need to adhere to the scheduled appointments for taking the vaccine depending upon the working hours in each institution,' MoH stated.

Target groups in the community include the elderly who are 65 years of age and older with diabetes, those with kidney failure

and who are on dialysis, those with chronic lung diseases including chronic obstructive pulmonary syndrome, asthma (with the severity of the disease varying between medium and high) as well as those with interstitial lung disease.

The ministry said target groups of healthcare workers include ICU staff, staff working in COVID-19 wards as well as employees who have diabetes, obesity with BMI of more than or equal to 40, those on dialysis, those with chronic lung disease as detailed in the target groups in community.

According to the MoH, most potential COVID-19 vaccines will be in two doses. 'The time between doses depends on the type of vaccine, ranging from 21-28 days. Please comply with the health institution's instructions when taking the vaccine and follow up updates,' MoH stated.

93 youth to be honoured for success at international contests

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to encourage young people to innovate and work hard in all fields, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports will honour 93 who have achieved success at regional and international competitions.

The ministry said, 'Ninety-three young men and women from all the governorates of the sultanate have received awards in a number of regional and international competitions in various fields during the year 2020. We are pleased to honour them as part of the 'Thank You Our Youth' project from the General Directorate of Youth.'

The ministry said the project aims to honour young Omani youth, train them and document their success.

70 new COVID-19 cases reported

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday announced 70 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 128,633. The number of deaths reported during the same time was two.

The number of those who have recovered also increased by 174. 'The number of recoveries has increased to 121,356, while the number of deaths has reached 1,497,' an MoH statement said, adding the rate of recovery is now 94.3 per cent.

CASES FROM DEC 23 TO DEC 29	
Dec 23	93
Dec 24	54
Dec 25 to 27	182
(Average of 60)	
Dec 28	91
Dec 29	70

As of Tuesday, a total of 85 patients were admitted in health

institutions, including 34 being treated in ICUs.

MoH calls upon all to adhere to the isolation procedures by staying in an isolated room with an attached toilet and serving the isolated person from outside the room as instructed. It said that social distancing also helps curb the spread of the virus.

MoH advises all citizens and residents to continue washing hands with water and soap, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and following healthy habits when coughing and sneezing.

National Museum holds anniversary event

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Museum, represented by the Learning and Community Outreach Department, organised a virtual session on Monday to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the inscription of the Land of Frankincense in the Unesco World Heritage List.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism joined the National Museum for the evening session organised through the video-conferencing platform Zoom.



Ali bin Salem al Kathiri, director of the Land of Frankincense Sites Department at the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar governorate,

participated in the event.

Several topics were discussed in the session, including the outstanding universal value of the Land of Frankincense in the

World Heritage List, which includes the Wubbar, Samahram, Al Baleed, and Wadi Dokka sites, dealing with the stages of rehabilitation and development of the site, as well as its sustainable development, and lastly information about the frankincense tree, its types and uses.

The Land of Frankincense gallery, which is one of the Pre-history and Ancient History galleries in the museum, showcases the long-distance trade in frankincense during the 3rd millennium BCE, types of frankincense and ancient incense burners.



SEARCHING FOR MISSING IRANIAN CREW

The Maritime Security Centre, in coordination with the Royal Air Force of Oman, Royal Navy of Oman, and the Coast Guard of the Royal Oman Police, is carrying out a search and rescue operation for the crew of an Iranian merchant ship that sank in the Omani territorial sea near the Strait of Hormuz on December 25 (ONA)



Omani woman wins regional, global awards



H E Laila al Najar, Minister of Social Development, presents the Middle East Women Inventors and Innovators Network - Kuwait prize to Farah Zahir al Kindy; (right) women train at the Bahr al Massarah factory in Musannah (Supplied photos)



Our Correspondent

An Omani woman entrepreneur has raised the sultanate's flag on an international stage. Farah Zahir al Kindy won the third place in Mewiin - Kuwait. The Middle East Women Inventors and Innovators Network held in Kuwait helps woman progress in the fields of technology and economy.

The award was received by the Minister of Social Development on Monday.

Farah's project, called Bahr al Massarah - or Sea Delight - also claimed the third place at the Global Women Inventors & Innovators Network (GlobalWIIIN) awards held in UK.

GlobalWIIIN, formally known as GWIIN, is an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated

Bahr al Massarah produces seven different products, including salted fish, fish burger, dry shak and marinated cuttle fish

FARAH ZAHIR AL KINDY

to assisting and advancing women inventors and innovators so that they can succeed in the global marketplace.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Farah informed that her factory in the wilayat of Musannah was started in 2018. Eighty women

from several wilayats trained in cutting and packaging before joining the factory.

"Bahr al Massarah produces seven different products, including salted fish, fish burger, dry shak and marinated cuttle fish." The products come in 270g, 500g and 2kg packs.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Industrial Innovation Centre

have supported Farah by sending experts to visit and advise on Bahr al Massarah's production operations.

"The company aims to develop local fish products and raise their nutritional value. It conducts various training programmes for women to work in fishery industries and also helps them set up small projects to improve their economic status," Farah said.

Recalling the early days of the company, she said marketing the new brand was difficult. "Over time, our products began to be accepted and bought."

Farah is hopeful of making Bahr al Massarah products popular all over the sultanate, besides expanding production operations to other wilayats. She also has plans to export to create a brand known internationally.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	25	15
Doha	24	16
Kuwait City	21	12
Manama	22	16
Riyadh	21	8

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.28am
Sunrise	6.48am
Duhr	12.14pm
Asr	3.15pm
Maghrib	5.35pm
Isha	6.51pm

Omani team wins at Huawei ICT event

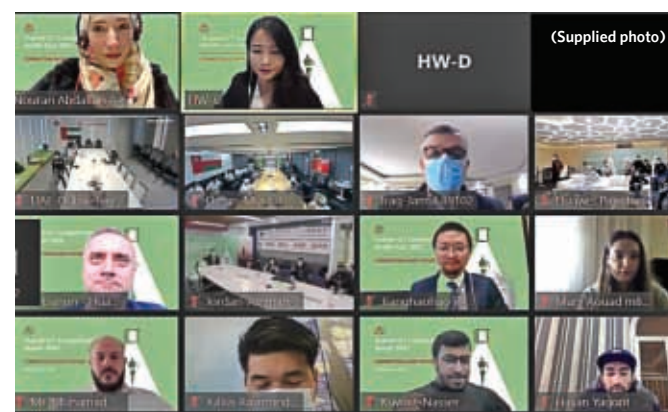
Muscat - The Huawei Middle East ICT Competition 2020, one of the biggest competitions for students and universities in the region, has ended with winners of the annual event being announced following several months of national and regional competitions.

The competition sees participation of some of the region's brightest young minds and leading academic institutions. Held virtually this year to observe social distancing measures, the finals saw 13 teams of students compete from ten countries.

The competition sees Huawei and various partners in government and academia contribute

towards the development of ICT talent ecosystems, nurturing young talent while also fostering an innovation mindset among the next generation of ICT leaders. In 2020, the competition witnessed the participation of 20 ministries and government authorities, and received 15,000 entries from 440 local colleges and universities in ten Middle East countries.

This year a team from Pakistan comprising students from the National University of Sciences and Technology and Mehran University of Engineering and Technology won the first prize of US\$20,000. The second prize was won by two teams - a



team from Iraq and the other from Pakistan.

The third prize was claimed by three teams jointly - a team from Bahrain and the third from Lebanon.

ogy and Applied Sciences - Shinas, Higher College of Technology and Arab Open University, a team from Bahrain and the third from Lebanon.

All winning teams received

special certificates and trophies presented virtually by local Huawei representatives.

Among other categories, the 'Excellent Tutor' award was handed to Salama Said al Kalbani from Oman.

On the occasion, Charles Yang, president of Huawei Middle East, said, "On behalf of Huawei, I offer hearty congratulations to our winners and everyone who participated in this year's competition. This has been an exceptional year in many ways, but it has also never been a more important time to support young people in developing their talent and creativity with cutting-edge technology."

Yanqul dual road 85% completed

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology confirmed on Tuesday that 85 per cent of the Yanqul internal dual carriage road has been completed.

The road project starts at Al Uqda roundabout and ends at what was earlier the headquarters of Yanqul Municipality.

Eng Said bin Ali al Yahyaei, Director of Roads Department in the ministry in Dhahirah, said, "The road project includes the construction of a roundabout near the Sultan Qaboos Mosque



and another opposite the office of the governor of Yanqul. It is connected to a number of joining roads and exits on both sides. It includes tunnels for vehicles and has new LED light poles."

Yahyaei informed that the

road aims to facilitate traffic movement between various villages and towns, stimulating commercial goods movement as well as providing access for tourists to several natural attractions in the governorate.

KNOW THE LAW



Jail, fine for preventing flow of natural water

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Strict action, including jail term and fine, will be levied on anyone who prevents the flow of natural water from its sources. Penalties are imposed by the Public Prosecution keeping in mind the rights of civilians.

"Covering water wells, aflaj or water channels designated for irrigation or committing any act that prevents the flow of water from its sources is an offence," the Public Prosecution said. "The offence is punishable by imprisonment for a period of up to three years and a fine of up to RO1,000 or one of the two," it added.

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Students' mental health focus of MoH workshop



Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) started a workshop on training trainers on the instruction manual for school mental health services on Tuesday in the presence of Dr Bader bin Ali al Habsi, director of Al Massara Hospital, at City Seasons Hotel.

The three-day workshop is being organised by the ministry, represented by the Directorate General of Primary Health Care, Department of School & University Health, in cooperation with

Al Massara Hospital and the World Health Organization.

The Department of School & University Health has prepared the instruction manual for school and university health services to enhance mental health at schools. The training workshop, being conducted by a selection of trainers specialised in mental health, targets 23 school health nurses across the sultanate.

Faiqah bint Ali al Sinani,

MoH's director of School & University Health, underlined the importance of mental health at schools and the early detection of psychological symptoms. She also praised the WHO's role in this regard. Most mental health problems emerge during adolescence period.

The workshop seeks to qualify the trainers on understanding the social and psychological development of students, identifying roles and responsibilities

of professionals in mental health services, and on how to perform an initial assessment for the students in order to identify those with psychological difficulties.

In addition, it aims to integrate mental health in the school activities, enhancing the school environment to be a health-promoting environment and training the participants in dealing with the most common psychological problems in schools.

VEHICLE REPAIR SHOP CATCHES FIRE



Firefighting teams of the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances extinguish a fire that broke out at a vehicle repair shop in Samail, Dakhliyah. The incident caused no injuries (PACDA)

SAI organises awareness seminar in Nizwa

Nizwa - The State Audit Institution (SAI) on Tuesday conducted an awareness seminar at the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa.

The seminar came in line with SAI's media and awareness plan to raise awareness on the protection of public money and preserving the country's accomplishments.

Organised through video-conferencing, the event saw the participation of a number of academic and administrative staff and college students. It aimed to raise awareness on SAI's role and partnership with relevant entities to protect public properties and promote integrity in light of SAI's execution of its mandate.

Specialists from SAI presented the seminar's themes with the attendance of the di-

rector of Financial and Administrative Audit Department in Nizwa.

The seminar covered several themes, including reviewing specific definitions relevant to audit work, audit types, objectives and importance. The presenters also gave a brief on the State Audit Law, Protection of Public Fund and Avoidance of Conflict of Interest Law, SAI's mandate and jurisdiction as well as the mechanisms adopted in different audit tasks.

The seminar also touched upon the available tools utilised by SAI such as the Financial Disclosure Statement (FDS) for government officials as well as the activities carried out by SAI to promote integrity and combat corruption.

ONA

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S



In the last decade, a country which has a very strong diaspora and tremendous possibilities, gradually lost its confidence

Lebanon, with its 7,000 years of history, was the home of the Phoenicians till 64 BC. It then became the leading centre for the Christians under the Romans and was housing Maronites, Sunnis, Shias, Druze, Roman Catholics and others before becoming an independent country after the French Mandate in 1943, following the long presence of the Ottoman Empire.

It became known as the 'Switzerland of the Middle East', and since its independence, is a parliamentary democracy based on confessionalism, with a Maronite President, representing once the majority religion, a Sunni Prime Minister, a Shia head of Parliament, a Jewish community, etc.

But the population has changed and the majority is no more the Maronites. The politicians of the country aimed at conserving their positions and gradually forgot the people they were supposed to represent.

Lebanon is a country of mixture, with three main languages - Arabic, French and English. The food is well known with its mezze and a mixture of a variety of starters. And the vast majority of its people being profoundly religious, are truly believers; and are proud to be so.

With time, in the last decade, a country which has a very strong diaspora and tremendous possibilities, gradually lost its confidence and as a result the 7mn population is not capable of finding

LEBANON - TOWARDS A SOLUTION

solutions for the problem of managing the country. The situation is worsening since the massive explosion in Beirut.

A possible solution, which requires the final approval of the people, and the

support of foreign powers, would be to let the religious leaders of the country cooperate and run a new government, allowing the right decisions to be made for the benefit of the country and not for individuals as it has been recently done. Not because they know politics, but because they represent the people. Many of them have expressed their willingness to co-operate. Once the confidence is re-established, it is easy to identify the right people for the right jobs, amongst a largely educated populace.

In the new world, it has to be the people who need attention and not individuals. Lebanon can once again become a paradise of the Middle East, by modifying its approach to politics. Each and every citizen needs to support the changes for the benefit of its future.

An old Lebanese saying goes like this: 'Good advice was once worth a camel, now that it is free of charge, no one takes it.'

Hope Lebanese prove it wrong.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Omran workshop discusses good governance

Muscat - Omran Group, the executive arm of the sultanate for tourism development, conducted a workshop, titled, 'Governance - Moral Compass, Concepts, Premises and Applications', in collaboration with Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability (OCGS). The workshop was organised as part of Omran's objectives to introduce tools, mechanisms and the necessary legal framework to implement principles of corporate governance.

Omran's chairman of Board of Directors, Eng Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidi, together with the chief executive officer of OCGS, Sayyid Hamid bin Sultan al Busaidi, attended the workshop. Other attendees included the Board Members, CEOs of the group's subsidiaries, senior executives from Omran's management and other representatives.

"The Board of Directors of Omran recognises the importance of governance as a modern concept of management, which



aligns with the requirement of the current phase. Hence, this workshop was organised to discuss the best practices in applying principles of corporate governance, improving performance and governance mechanisms. The workshop further examined the administrative readiness and identified practices, which serve the group's

goals and directions," commented Eng Busaidi.

"Omran's interest in hosting such a workshop reflects the group's optimistic approach towards good corporate governance. Applying the concept of governance positively influences competitiveness and therefore, Omran is using best practices for implementing good governance," said Sayyid Busaidi.

"Promoting the culture of corporate governance is a necessary tool for business development and motivation. This is what OCGS seeks to achieve by conducting such workshops," he added.

The workshop's programme focused on a number of subjects that included the main concepts

of governance, general framework for accountability, premises for governance of state-owned companies and corporate social responsibility. To further enhance the skills of board members, the workshop explored subjects related to the nature of their work, the capacity of its members and separating the executive management from the board.

It also looked at the structure of the board and types of committees to ensure just use of authority, whilst avoiding conflicts of interests. Lastly, the workshop discussed the most important factors for successful corporate board management.

Omran operates in accordance with the governance frameworks, policies and guiding principles set by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), to ensure improved operational and investment performance that aligns with OIA's endeavours to streamline policies in line with Oman Vision 2040.

More than 65,000 transactions done through Invest Easy

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion stated that the total number of transactions completed through the electronic portal 'Invest Easy' during the third quarter of this year reached 65,705.

The Statistics Department of the ministry said the number of transactions completed through

self-service counters was 33,124.

Of these, 28,291 transactions were done through Sanad and Injaz offices; 1,761 transactions were through various departments and directorates; 2,084 through the ministry's front offices; 203 transactions were through Sohar, Duqm and Al Mazyona free zones; and 242 were through law firms.

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Ministry of Social Development recognises Bank Muscat's efforts

In recognition of its prominent role in supporting persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Development honoured Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, for its efforts in supporting the ministry's services and programmes in the field of supporting people with disability.

This was part of the celebration that was recently organised by the Ministry of Social Development on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities under the patronage of H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, and in the presence of a number of excellencies and a number of invitees, where Said Salim al Aufi, group deputy general manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat, received the honour from H E Dr Ba'owain.

Bank Muscat has set up a special playground for children with special needs in line with the bank's commitment to CSR and sustainability. The playground is being set up at the Al Aman Centre for Rehabilitation in Al Khoudh. The bank's honour comes to reaffirm the prominent and significant role that Bank Muscat plays in implementing social responsibility



programmes, activities and events.

Aufi said, "We are proud with this honour, which confirms the bank's leadership in implementing important and sustainable projects in the field of social responsibility."

Aufi pointed out that Bank Muscat cooperates greatly with

the Ministry of Social Development in implementing many different programmes and initiatives. As a result, cooperation contributes to achieving successes and achievements that serve society in general and social security groups and people with special needs in particular.

He added that the bank pays great attention to activities, events and social responsibility programmes in general, especially those targeting special needs.

Bank Muscat, in cooperation with the Ministry of Development, has recently started working on inaugurating the

new playground with special tools. Aufi extended his appreciation to the officials in the Ministry of Social Development for their cooperation.

As the nation's leading financial institution, Bank Muscat has been a pioneer in sustainability in the sultanate and has worked steadfastly to the community in different initiatives.

Tadhamun programme has supported a number of Omani social welfare families since its launch by providing them with basic household appliances. Green Sports initiative has further strengthened the sports infrastructure across the nation. The Little Investor financial awareness programme has benefited more than 31,000 students in the sultanate over the past three years.

The Irshad programme, the Al Wathbah Academy, the Maliyat programme along with community driven initiatives such as the Fak Kurba initiative organised by the Omani Lawyer's Association in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development, are some of the bank's other initiatives.

The bank's sustainability programmes have been well appreciated by society and the bank has received a number of awards.



vivo V20: Ultimate front photography experience

As a growing number of smartphone companies target gamers and consumers that are connected to social media channels on the go, the most popular and evolved feature in smartphones today is certainly the camera. Over the past few years, it is clear that cameras have become the primary USP for consumers when purchasing a smartphone, as they don't want to carry a separate device for capturing photos or recording videos. In addition, consumers are not only concerned with the rear camera but are increasingly prioritising the quality of the front camera too.

As a company that focuses on putting its consumers first, vivo's V series has lately enjoyed an upgrade based on consumer insights. The V20 offers users cutting-edge camera capabilities as well as strong hardware and software to support seamless functionality. Here is a look at some of the smartphone's leading front camera features.

night. Through multiple exposures and noise cancellation algorithms, the V20 enhances facial details, and easily defies any challenges posed by the dark.

Its Selfie Softlight Band and studio-standard lighting allow sharp night-time selfies through adjusting ambient light indoors and outdoors. The end result? Perfect color temperature that highlights natural skin tones!

Top-quality 4K selfie videos

Thanks to advanced camera technology, wannabe lensmen can create striking, personalized 4K resolution videos with Eye Autofocus. 4K means the video encompasses four times the number of pixels as regular Full HD footage, ensuring vivid, high definition content.

Portrait stability

Through Steadiface Selfie Video, portrait stability is enhanced with image cropping to produce more stable footage when recording a video. Combined with the physical gyroscope, this feature helps counteract any shake on the handheld camera and keeps the frame steady and clear.

Double your creativity

Through Dual-View Video, consumers can now record videos using their front and rear cameras simultaneously. The V20 boasts modes to view these creations - the dual-view/picture-in-picture modes are not only fun to use but also enhance vlogs and multi-person interactions.

Never miss a moment

What's more - the V20 allows users to control the flow of time with their fingertips through its Slo-Mo Selfie Video feature. Videographers can switch between fast and slow motion while enjoying the smoothness of 240FPS - up to eight times slower than recorded speed.

NVIDIA posts 37% spike in revenue

During its fiscal year's third quarter, NVIDIA posted a commendable performance driven in part by its gaming segment. According to the research data analysed and published by Stock Apps, its overall revenue totaled US\$4.73bn, its highest quarterly revenue ever. Its gaming segment accounted for nearly half the amount, at US\$2.27bn. The segment grew by 37 per cent YoY.

Moreover, In September 2020, NVIDIA announced its intention to acquire chip maker ARM for US\$40bn. The acquisition would bring its Total Addressable Market (TAM) to US\$250bn by 2023. Its mobile and PC segments, which include gaming, would contribute US\$95bn to this total.

NVIDIA launched GeForce Now, its cloud gaming platform, on February 4, 2020. According to a company blog post, the service attracted over 1mn users by February 20. As of August 2020, the number had risen to 4mn and it was streaming over 15mn hours of content monthly.

By November 2020, it had more than 5mn registered users. During that month, NVIDIA launched an iOS version of GeForce Now in beta form. With the service running on Safari browsers, users will now have access to Fortnite, which was banned on the App store.

On the other hand, Microsoft is planning to launch its cloud platform, xCloud, on iOS in 2021. Google is also planning to test an iOS version of Stadia in the near future. According to Newzoo, the cloud gaming market is expected to generate US\$585mn in 2020. The figure is more than three times the US\$170mn it generated in 2019. By 2023, it is expected to be worth US\$4.8bn.

The cloud gaming industry is expected to grow at a stunning 47.9 per cent CAGR between 2020 and 2027.

Hollywood blockbusters on OSN

With the New Year finally in sight, OSN is excited to announce its latest line-up of movies premiering on OSN Movies First and the OSN streaming app this January. From hilarious comedies and inspiring dramas, to the reimagined adaptation of *Dr Dolittle*, OSN guarantees to get 2021 off to the perfect start!

For those looking for family-friendly content next month, look no further than *Dolittle*, starring Hollywood favourite, Robert Downey Jr alongside Oscar winners, Rami Malek and Emma Thompson, to BAFTA winners, Tom Holland and Ralph Fiennes. Premiering on Friday, January 22 at 10pm UAE, the movie follows Dr John Dolittle who lives in solitude behind the high walls of his lush manor in 19th-century England.

His only companionship comes from an array of exotic animals that he speaks to on a daily basis. But when young Queen Victoria becomes gravely ill, the eccentric doctor



and his furry friends embark on an epic adventure to a mythical island to find the cure. Having generated over US\$249mn in the box office worldwide, this film should be on everyone's must-watch list.

Next month also sees OSN introduce *Pain & Gain* to its lineup on Sunday, January 3 at 10pm UAE.

The story sees a trio of bodybuilders in Florida who get caught up in an extortion ring and a kidnapping scheme that goes terribly wrong. Starring Mark Wahlberg, Dwayne Johnson and Anthony Mackie, the

movie will keep everyone glued to their screen.

Whilst those looking for inspiring content to watch, critically acclaimed *Joy* starring Bradley Cooper and Oscar winners, Jennifer Lawrence and Robert DeNiro will not disappoint. Premiering on Sunday, January 10 at 10pm UAE, *Joy* is the story of a self-made millionaire who created her own business empire.

The film follows her journey, covering betrayal, the loss of innocence and the scars of love in this intense emotional and human comedy about becoming

ing a true leader of family and enterprise, facing an unforgiving world of business.

Next up is the ultimate bromance comedy movie, *The Change-Up* set to air on Sunday, January 17 at 10pm. The story follows Dave a married man with a loving family and Mitch a single man at the prime of his dating life. One fateful night, lightning strikes and they switch bodies. Starring Jason Bateman and Ryan Reynolds, this film promises hours of non-stop laughter.

And for those looking for more hilarity, *Bridesmaids* is the perfect chick flick. Following rivalry between the maid of honour and a bridesmaid, over who is the bride's best friend, the bride must make an important decision. Airing on Sunday, January 24 at 10pm UAE, *Bridesmaids* stars Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph and Rose Byrne.

To close off the month, *Sisters* will be hitting TV screens on Sunday, January 31 at 10pm UAE.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi to take off from January 15

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the newest national airline of the United Arab Emirates, confirmed that Athens will be its inaugural destination, with flights from Abu Dhabi International Airport starting on January 15, 2021. Fares start as low as AED 129, with tickets already on sale on wizzair.com (which also has an Arabic booking website) and the airline's mobile app.

The airline is also to start flights from Abu Dhabi to Thessaloniki, starting on February 4 with fares starting at AED 149.

Kees Van Schaick, managing director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, said, "The waiting is almost over for Abu Dhabi fans of our ultra-low fare airline. From January 15, 2021, a new model of air travel comes to Abu Dhabi, offering new choices and new competition, demonstrating that things are looking up for next year.



"Our network from Abu Dhabi will expand rapidly as destinations on our planned network are added to the 'green countries' list. Thanks to the support of the government and

our local business partners in Abu Dhabi, we are fully prepared. We have the aircraft, we have the crew, we have the partners, and we are ready to fly. We look forward to building

a new travel segment in this important market."

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi is a joint venture established between ADQ and Wizz Air Holdings PLC.

It initially announced a route network that also includes Alexandria, Kutaisi, Larnaca, Odesa and Yerevan. Flights to these cities will launch as each destination joins the 'green countries' list.

Further destinations will be launched as the airline adds to its Abu Dhabi-based fleet over the coming months.

With a fleet composed of brand new Airbus A321neo aircraft, the airline will have the lowest environmental footprint among its competitors in the region.

Wizz Air introduced a new era of sanitised travel across its network this year, with enhanced hygiene measures to ensure the health and safety of passengers and crew.

Throughout flights, both cabin crew and passengers are required to wear facemasks, with cabin crew also required to

wear gloves.

Wizz Air's aircraft are regularly put through an industry-leading disinfection process with an antiviral solution and, following Wizz's stringent daily cleaning schedule, all of the airline's aircraft are further disinfected overnight with the same antiviral solution.

Sanitising wipes are handed to each passenger upon entering the aircraft, onboard magazines have been removed from the aircraft, and any onboard purchases are encouraged to be made by contactless payment.

Passengers are also requested to follow physical distancing measures introduced by the local health authorities and are encouraged to make all purchases prior to the flight online (e.g. checked in luggage, Wizz Priority, fast security track), to minimise any possible physical contact at the airport.

OAB launches eco-friendly 2021 calendar with 12 talented Omani photographers

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) launched its first eco-friendly desk calendar for 2021. Developed with 12 talented Omani photographers, the new calendar features a stunning photograph for each month of the year and is made entirely from recycled paper and vegetable-based inks.

Commenting on this initiative, Feras al Farsi, sustainability and CSR specialist at OAB, said, "This calendar is aligned with our sustainability strategy to establish partnerships within our communities, as well as preserving the environment. With the help of these amazing local talents, we were able to produce one of our most beautiful calendars to date. I encourage all our customers and partners to show their support for these exceptionally talented photographers by following their accounts on social media, which are also featured in the new calendar."

The calendar includes 12 photos, covering everything from natural landscapes to wildlife and traditional scenes within dif-



ferent wilayats of the sultanate. Each photo has the name of the photographer, their account on social media and the wilayat in which the photo was taken.

"In 2019, Oman Arab Bank launched its new sustainability strategy, which is centred around three main pillars: community partnerships, financial inclusion and environmental responsibility. This strategy has reinforced the bank's commitment to social responsibility and environmental preservation. Through this initiative, the bank will focus on limiting the use of environmentally harmful products while also showcasing the exceptional local talents we have in the sultanate," Farsi added.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate. Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 55 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services.

Sohar International launches card

Expanding its card portfolio to offer convenient payment solutions, Sohar International launched its new prepaid card in a bid to engage with a wider customer base.

The bank's newest proposition offers individuals everyday convenience, whether or not they are an account holder with the bank. Easily applied for through the bank's widespread branch network across Oman, the new prepaid card offers customers the flexibility to manage spends and make payments easily and securely, using its contactless tap and go feature.

The prepaid cards have been designed to encourage online transactions, including those for booking cinema tickets, gaming, shopping and much more. The cards can be topped up simply by using the bank's ATMs, or by transferring from a Sohar International account.

Sharing his views on the new



card, Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer, Sohar International, said, "Sohar International is constantly striving to develop innovative solutions to suit the evolving needs of our customers. The new contactless prepaid card is an important milestone in Sohar International's digital transformation journey.

"It not only provides customers a sense of safety and security due to their pre-loaded limit feature, but also allows

them to control spends online by controlling funds available in the prepaid card. This falls in line with our principles to provide more value, more velocity, and more vision to our clients and the society at large."

Furthermore, the bank's prepaid card can be used for cash withdrawals at local ATMs/CDMs whilst managing the credentials of the card is easily done through any of the widespread Sohar International

ATM/CDMs. The state-of-the-art mobile banking services can be utilised to top up the newly launched prepaid card, transfer balance from main account to the prepaid card, or transfer between own prepaid cards, or transfer to other Sohar International prepaid cards as well.

"Sohar International is uniquely positioned to effectively cater to all customer segments within the sultanate, with differentiating factors that accommodate individual needs and enable them to win. Being a service-oriented organisation, we cater to the smallest of financial requirements of the consumer, thereby encouraging them to plan ahead and adopt prudent financial practices," added Hedaifi.

Sohar International is committed to providing new products, services, features and promotions that delight and simplify customer's banking experience.

Chat to Ooredoo's 'Saeed' and 'Saeeda' on WhatsApp

Got questions and need immediate answers? Look no further than Ooredoo's artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, who are on hand to help. Social media-savvy Saeed and Saeeda are available on WhatsApp and ready to chat at the click of a button. With a growing number of services and 24/7 accessibility, the multilingual chatbots make it simpler and faster for Ooredoo users to get stuff done.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "As the first-of-their-kind in the sultanate, our AI chatbots, Saeed and Saeeda, are one of many ways our customers can connect with us and manage their communications needs, without having to step foot outside of their homes. At the same time, they also make it easier for



future users to get all the information they need to migrate to our network. Its all part of our efforts to use the latest technologies in a useful and engaging way, while ensuring our customers enjoy the best digital experience possible."

Saeed, who was introduced by Ooredoo in 2018, and Saeeda, who was introduced earlier this

year, are designed to simulate human behaviour and conversation, responding instantly to written enquiries such as requesting a new SIM card, ordering 5G and 4G, and even reactivating an old SIM.

Available through the Ooredoo App, on the website, and most recently, on WhatsApp, they can provide a range of information and links to Ooredoo's services and products, including Shababiah, Shahry, roaming plans, Home Internet, and the eShop, as well as exclusive offers and promotions.

Users can connect with Saeed and Saeeda 24/7 by messaging 95009500 on WhatsApp, visiting www.ooredoo.om/WhatsApp or via the award-winning app, which can be downloaded free from the App Store or Google Play.

Saudi Military Industries acquires advanced electronics company

Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI), a wholly owned subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), announced that it has acquired Advanced Electronics Company (AEC) as part of the largest military industries deal ever concluded in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The purchase is expected to complete in the first quarter of 2021 following regulatory approvals. As a result, AEC will become a 100 per cent Saudi-owned company.

The acquisition was announced during a ceremony organised by SAMI in the presence of the members of SAMI's and AEC's Board of Directors, and senior officials from the Ministry of Defence, General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI), PIF, Saudi Arabian Airlines (SAUDIA), BAE Systems Saudi Arabia, and other stakeholders.

Commenting on the deal, Ahmed al Khateeb, chairman of SAMI, said, "This deal strengthens SAMI's presence in the strategically important defense industries market and supports its plans to transfer and localise the military industries. The acquisition will also enhance AEC's opportunities to expand and compete in its field."



Khateeb affirmed the support of the Minister of Defence for the transfer and localisation of military industries as a key part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. "This achievement also supports PIF's efforts through SAMI in localizing cutting-edge technology and knowledge, as well as building strategic economic partnerships."

Khateeb added, "Considered the 'crown jewel' of Saudi Arabia's military industries and a proud accomplishment for its

citizens, AEC will bring about transformative change in the Kingdom's defense sector by enhancing the industry's competencies and advancing innovation. With state-of-the-art products, innovative technologies, several decades of experience, and the collective efforts of both SAMI and AEC, the acquisition will shape the future of the domestic defense ecosystem and make long-lasting contributions to the national economy for the upcoming years, through

skills development, employment generation, and exports."

Eng Walid Abukhaled, CEO of SAMI, thanked the Public Investment Fund (PIF) for its unlimited support and efforts that contributed to the success of the acquisition. He asserted that the deal would serve to enhance the local defense sector, and support and realize the localisation rates required by the local content of the military industries.

AEC is considered a major facilitator of Saudi Arabia's Vision

2030 thanks to its 32-year experience in the military industries market and the leading role it plays in Defense and Aerospace and the development of security local systems. In addition to facilitating the transfer of technology and enhancing local production, the acquisition will enable SAMI to consolidate its defense electronics sector.

SAMI's acquisition of AEC will support its strategic plan, which aims to expand its business and enter the progressive Defence

Electronics sector. The acquisition will also contribute to the implementation of SAMI's plans to transfer technologies and localize domestic military industries, as well as to strengthen the Saudi defense ecosystem, in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 programmes.

Abdulaziz al Duailej, CEO of AEC, said, "SAMI's acquisition of AEC stock will help us reach our goals and strategic plans for the next five years. It also places us under the umbrella of the Public

Investment Fund (PIF), the KSA's sovereign wealth fund, which constitutes a milestone for the company and fills us with pride as directors and employees."

Duailej added, "This achievement was realised thanks to the commitment, experience and concerted efforts of all the employees in both companies. The deal will provide AEC with the opportunity to further strengthen its position in the military industries market and explore new horizons in advanced technologies in the Kingdom and beyond, as well as support the continuous development of the capacities of national cadres."

Since 1988, AEC has played a pioneering role in the fields of modern electronics, manufacturing, system integration, and repair and maintenance services, thereby becoming a major regional player renowned for innovation. Around 85 per cent of the company's employees are Saudi nationals, including more than 300 of its male and female engineers. AEC also has over 100 strategic partners and has successfully completed more than 1,000 projects. Furthermore, the company has witnessed steady growth in sales in recent years.

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Oman Club players celebrate after their win over Muscat in the third round of the 2020-21 Omantel League on Monday



Seeb's Khalid al Breiki celebrates after scoring against Nizwa at the Seeb Sports Stadium on Sunday

Omantel League: Seeb remain on top, wins for Suwaiq, Oman

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

OMANTEL LEAGUE

Defending champions Seeb were on top of the standings after the third round of the 2020-21 Omantel League following an impressive 3-0 win over promoted Nizwa at the Seeb Sports Complex on Sunday night. Seeb, who were held to a goal-less draw by another promoted team, Al Ittihad, in the previous round, bounced back to pick up three points and total seven points to be on the top. Seeb began their campaign

with a 4-0 win over Al Mussanah on December 17 and are enjoying their attacking style of play as they hit three past Nizwa. Also on seven points is Al Suwaiq, who posted a 1-0 win over Al Nahda on Monday night. The former champions trail leaders Seeb on goal-difference, after notching up their second win. In another match, Oman emerged a 2-0 winner over Muscat for their second successive win to be at third place with six points. Mussanah was the third round's biggest winner, recording a 5-1 win over Saham on Sunday. The victory puts

Mussanah at par on points with Oman. Eleven-time champions Dhofar have been the most successful team in the opening three rounds, having won all the three matches. However, they remain seventh on the table as the Salalah giants were docked six points along with Al Nahda and Saham ahead of the new season. Al Nasr were held to a goalless draw by Bahla on Monday but the point helped Salalah powerhouse to be at fifth place with five points. Also on Monday, Sohar drew with Al

Ittihad 1-1 at home to bounce back from their loss to Dhofar in the second round. The league will now take a break for the first round of His Majesty's Cup, which will be held from January 1-3, 2021. The fourth round of Omantel League will resume on January 7. **Standings after three rounds:** 1 Seeb (7 points), 2 Al Suwaiq (7), 3 Oman (6), 4 Mussanah (6), 5 Al Nasr (5), 6 Sohar (4), 7 Dhofar (3; -6), 8 Rustaq (3), 9 Nizwa (3), 10, Bahla (2), 11 Al Ittihad (2), 12 Muscat (1), 13 Al Nahda (-3; -6), 14 Saham (-6).

@ashokmuscat



Action from the match between Al Suwaiq and Al Nahda on Monday

QUICK RUN

Australian Hall of Fame inducts first Aboriginal cricketer

Johnny Mullagh, one of the stars of Australia's pioneering all-Aboriginal team that toured England in 1868, has become the first Aboriginal player inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame. Mullagh, also known by the traditional name Unaarimin, was a Jardwadjali man from what is now the state of Victoria and learned to play cricket on a nearby farm. He is considered one of the best players of his era, appearing in 45 of 47 matches during the first Australian cricket tour of England. He scored 1698 runs at an average of 23.65 and took 245 wickets. Mullagh also played in the third cricket match ever scheduled at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day in 1866 for the Aboriginal and TW Wills XI against the Melbourne Cricket Club.

Former NZ batsman Reid dies aged 64

John Reid, the former New Zealand batsman, has died aged 64. The left-hand batsman played 19 Tests and 25 ODIs from 1979 to 1986, scoring 1296 and 633 runs in them respectively. His Test runs came at an average of 46.28, with six centuries and two half-centuries. The highlight of Reid's international career was his 108 against Australia, which set up New Zealand's innings victory at the Gabba in 1985. He added 224 for the third wicket with Martin Crowe, a New Zealand Test record for the third wicket then.

Diego Costa quits Atletico Madrid

Former Spain and Chelsea striker Diego Costa's contract with Atletico Madrid was terminated on Tuesday, six months before it was scheduled to end. The 32 year old Brazilian-born , who has been capped 24 times by Spain after twice appearing in friendlies for the country of his birth, had asked to leave the club for 'personal reasons'. Costa arrived at Atletico in 2006 at the age of 17, going on to play 215 matches over two spells (2010-14 and then 2018-20) either side of three seasons at Chelsea, scoring 83 goals and providing 36 assists. During his time at Atletico, Costa was part of a squad that won one La Liga title in the 2013-14 season, one Copa del Rey (2013), one Europa League (2018) and two UEFA Super Cups (2010 and 2018).

Solskjaer keen to extend Cavani's time at Man Utd

Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer believes Edinson Cavani still has years left as a top striker and is keen to extend the Uruguayan's contract at Old Trafford. The 33 year old Uruguayan signed a one-year deal in September after months without a club since leaving Paris Saint-Germain (PSG). United have the option to extend Cavani's contract for another season and Solskjaer suggested he expects the club to do so. "At the moment he looks like he has a few years left in him so I wouldn't say anything else," said Solskjaer when asked if Cavani will remain for another season. Agencies

S Africa seal innings victory

SOUTH AFRICA VS SRI LANKA FIRST TEST: DAY FOUR

Centurion, South Africa - South Africa wrapped up victory by an innings and 45 runs shortly after lunch on the fourth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Tuesday. Sri Lanka, needing 225 runs to avoid an innings defeat, were bowled out for 180. Kusal Perera hit a spirited 64 off 87 balls for the tourists and debutant Wanindu Hasaranga slammed 59 off 53 balls, taking advantage as South Africa seemingly tried to lift their over-rate by rushing through six overs of slow bowling after lunch. Sri Lanka resumed at 65 for two on Tuesday but never recovered after allrounder Wiaan Mulder dismissed overnight batsman Dinesh Chandimal and Niroshan Dickwella in quick succession. Batsman Dhananjanaya de Silva, who retired hurt after making 79 in the first innings, did not bat for Sri Lanka. He was ruled out of the rest of the tour with a torn thigh muscle. Sri Lanka suffered a spate of injuries during the match but bowlers Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara hobbled to the crease to delay the inevitable. Both suffered groin injuries while bowling.



South Africa players celebrate their win over Sri Lanka in the first Test

South Africa's Faf du Plessis who hit 199 was named man of the match. It was South Africa's second win in eight matches in the World Test Championship. They have suffered six defeats. Sri Lanka have won one, lost three and drawn one of their five matches. Chandimal, who appeared to suffer a groin injury towards the end of Monday's play, resumed his innings on Tuesday and survived for 40 minutes before being bowled for 25 by a ball from the medium-paced Mulder which cut back off the pitch. Mulder, 22, followed up by having Niroshan Dickwella caught behind. Fast bowler Anrich Nortje had the left-handed Perera caught behind off a faint edge, with South Africa successfully reviewing what was originally a not-out decision.

Debutant Lutho Sipamla and Nortje both finished with two wickets, while Vishwa Fernando was run out without scoring. AFP

SCOREBOARD		
Sri Lanka 1st Innings: 396		
South Africa 1st Innings: 621		
SRI LANKA 2ND INNINGS		
D Karunaratne	b Ngidi	6
K Perera	c de Kock b Nortje	64
K Mendis	c van der Dussen	6
	b Ngidi	0
D Chandimal	b Mulder	25
N Dickwella	c de Kock b Mulder	10
D Shanaka	c de Kock b Sipamla	6
W Hasaranga	c Bavuma b Sipamla	59
V Fernando	run out	0
K Rajitha	c Maharaj b Nortje	0
L Kumara	not out	0
D de Silva	absent hurt	-
Extras:	(b 4, lb 2, nb 4)	10
TOTAL: 180 in 46.1 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-22, 3-85, 4-99, 5-114, 6-142, 7-148, 8-179, 9-180		
Bowling: L Ngidi 10-2-38-2, A Nortje 10-1-47-2, W Mulder 12-1-39-2, I Sipamla 5-0-24-2, K Maharaj 6-3-20-0, A Markram 3-2-6-0		

Southree leads NZ charge, Pakistan face uphill task

NEW ZEALAND VS PAKISTAN FIRST TEST: DAY FOUR

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - Swing king Tim Southree celebrated his milestone 300th wicket as New Zealand sensed victory over Pakistan at stumps on day four of the first Test in Mount Maunganui on Tuesday. New Zealand declared their second innings at 180 for five and Pakistan, set an unlikely target of 373, will go into the final day at 71 for three. Azhar Ali will resume on 34 with Fawad Alam on 21. The Black Caps need to sweep the two-Test series if they are to be in contention to make the World Test Championship final at Lords in June. Pakistan's second innings began on disastrous note as Abid Ali fended a rising Boulton delivery was caught behind, while Shan Masood was caught at first slip off Southree and Pakistan were two down for no runs after 14 balls. Azhar Ali and Haris Sohail provided some resistance for 15 overs and 37 runs before Sohail chipped Southree to Mitchell Santner at short cover - making Southree only the third New

Zealand, after Richard Hadlee and Daniel Vettori, to take 300 Test wickets. But Southree said the landmark delivery was not the one he was looking for. "I would have loved one to pitch off and nip away and get caught behind," he said. Southree has two for 15, and Boulton one for 24. Neil Wagner, who was thought to have broken one toe while batting on Sunday, but has now been diagnosed with a second broken toe, sent down six overs to have none for four. New Zealand began their second innings at the start of the day with Tom Latham and Tom Blundell putting on 98 in the first session. Blundell was bowled for 64 when trying to slog Mohammad Abbas over midwicket and New Zealand were 111 for one. Eleven overs later they were five for 170 as Pakistan bought wickets with a short-ball approach. Latham was dismissed soon after for 53 when he mistimed a pull shot and was caught in the deep. Kane Williamson's attempted pull shot was top edged to wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan and he was gone for 21, while Henry Nicholls went for 11

SCOREBOARD		
New Zealand 1st Innings: 431		
Pakistan 1st Innings: 239		
NEW ZEALAND 2ND INNINGS		
T Latham	c Abid b Naseem	53
T Blundell	b Abbas	64
K Williamson	c Rizwan b Naseem	21
R Taylor	not out	12
H Nicholls	c Abbas b Naseem	11
BJ Watling	run out	5
M Santner	not out	6
Extras:	(lb 2, nb 5, w 1)	8
TOTAL: 180 for five decl in 45.3 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-111, 2-139, 3-147, 4-165, 5-170		
Bowling: S Afridi 11-0-47-0, M Abbas 11-2-33-1, Naseem Shah 12-3-1-55-3, F Ashraf 4-1-18-0, Yasir Shah 6-0-21-0, S Masood 1-0-4-0		
PAKISTAN 2ND INNINGS		
S Masood	c Taylor b Southree	0
Abid Ali	c Watling b Boulton	0
Azhar Ali	not out	34
H Sohail	c Santner b Southree	9
F Alam	not out	21
Extras:	(b 4, lb 2, w 1)	7
TOTAL: 71 for three in 38 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-0, 3-37		
Bowling: T Southree 9-5-15-2, T Boulton 10-4-24-1, K Jamieson 7-6-3-0, N Wagner 6-3-4-0, M Santner 6-1-19-0		

when his pull shot was caught by Abbas at fine leg. For Pakistan, Naseem Shah was the most effective bowler with three for 55. Separately, New Zealand quick Kyle Jamieson was fined 25 per cent of his match fee for a dangerous throw towards batsman Faheem Ashraf on Monday. AFP

MCCC teams register impressive victories in U19 and U16 leagues

LOCAL CRICKET

Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) teams recorded victories in the Oman Cricket U19 and U16 league matches over the weekend. In the U19 games, MCCC defeated ISWK by four wickets and MCCC Blue beat Boshers Sports Centre-B.

BRIEF SCORES

U19 (50 over a side): ISWK 89

all out in 30 overs (Adeel Abbas 3-13, Nihaal Poojari 2-22, Jeel Tanna 2-23) lost to MCCC 92-6 in 17.5 overs (Adeel Abbas 39; Siddh Hemal Mehta 2-18, Amanpreet Singh Sirah 2-30).

U19: MCCC Blue 154 all out in 40.2 overs (Habib 52, Zakariya 20; Narayana Satish 3-38, Arafat Islam 2-17) beat Boshers Sports Centre-B 152 all out in 44.3 overs

(Mohsin Varya 43, Bilal 3-27, Uday 3-28, Mohammad Abubakar 2-33). **U16 (30 over a side):** ISWK 128 all out in 23.4 overs (Abhas Ajay Jaltare 38, Parikshit Gupta 30; Glenalxei Menezes 5-32) lost to ISM 129-2 in 19.2 overs (Gurumukhi Aditya 53, Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja 38).

U16: Boshers Sports Centre 183



Prathiesh Ramesh



Varshieth Dinesh



Nihal Poojari



Adeel Abbas



Jeel Tanna

all out in 29.5 overs (Sohan Khandekar 40, Siddarth Shankar

35; Prathiesh Ramesh 3-38) lost to MCCC Blue 185-2 in 19.2

overs (Varshieth Dinesh 97, Prathiesh Ramesh 61).

SWEET REVENGE AT MCG

• Rahane’s India wrap up famous Boxing Day victory • Debutants Siraj and Gill provide the finishing touches

**AUSTRALIA VS INDIA
SECOND TEST: DAY FOUR**

Melbourne, Australia - Bowled out for 36. Virat Kohli goes home. Mohammed Shami out of the tour. Umesh Yadav limps from the attack. India had to overcome so much that their victory at the MCG on Tuesday, achieved midway through the fourth day by eight wickets, will forever have a part in their cricket folklore.

Whether it is part of something even greater will depend on the next three weeks, but for now they can reflect on one of the great bounceback victories.

The early loss of two wickets will have left India grateful - and Australia rueful - that the target wasn't in three-figures, but it never threatened to become nervy and fittingly it was Ajinkya Rahane who secured the winning run. It is three wins in three Tests as captain for him and rarely can a team have gone from such a low to such a high in such a short period time.

Australia's lower order made them work for the final four wickets during the morning session but they could never break free of the stranglehold on their scoring, so by the time R Ashwin wrapped up the innings on the stroke of a delayed lunch the lead stood at only 69.

The final tally of 200 in 103.1 overs was their slowest Test innings on home soil since 1986 and they managed just ten boundaries and this was the first home Test since 1988, against West Indies also at the MCG, where they did not manage an individual half-century.

The ghosts of 36 were just



India captain Ajinkya Rahane (third from left) gives a hug to teammate Shubman Gill after hitting the winning runs in the second Test against Australia in Melbourne on Tuesday

about looming, but it would have needed a miracle.

Still, when the struggling Mayank Agarwal edged a big drive off Mitchell Starc and Cheteshwar Pujara got a flat-foot outside edge to gully it momentarily lifted the occasion. While not having a bearing on this match, it was the third time in four innings that Pat Cummins had removed Pujara.

A brace of boundaries by

Shubman Gill, who played another attractive innings, chipped into the target and there was a dismissiveness in the on-the-up drive played by Rahane, the prime architect of India's victory, against Josh Hazlewood as the target grew near followed by a pull from Gill off the same bowler.

Australia had resumed just two runs ahead and while Cummins and Cameron Green

survived until the second new ball the scoreboard went nowhere - 16 runs in the 14 overs. The harder ball then provided the breakthrough when Jasprit Bumrah bounced out Cummins although the fact India did not race through the rest of the batting went on to highlight Australia's problems higher up the order.

Green played very well, looking as assured as any of the top order had in the innings, de-

fending with a solid front foot stride and occasionally showing his strokeplay.

A first Test fifty was looming when he was cramped for room by a short delivery from Mohammed Siraj, splicing a pull to midwicket, which removed the last realistic chance of Australia setting a target to really challenge India.

Starc thought he was caught at slip on nine, so much so that

he was two thirds of way to the rope having forlornly reviewed when the DRS showed he had hit his boot as the ball ballooned off the pad, but Nathan Lyon gloved down the leg side a few moments later to leave Australia nine down. Lunch was delayed as the final pair clung on before Hazlewood was finally befuddled by Ashwin when he left a delivery that clipped off stump.

Cricinfo

Australia fined, docked WTC points

Australia have been fined 40 per cent of their match fee and docked four World Test Championship (WTC) points for maintaining a slow over-rate against India in the Boxing Day Test at MCG. David Boon, the match referee, imposed the sanction after Australia were ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st Innings: 195
India 1st Innings: 326

AUSTRALIA 2ND INNINGS

M Wade	lbw b Jadeja	40
J Burns	c Pant b Yadav	4
M Labuschagne	c Rahane b Ashwin	28
S Smith	b Bumrah	8
T Head	c Agarwal b Siraj	17
C Green	c Jadeja b Siraj	45
T Paine	c Pant b Jadeja	1
P Cummins	c Agarwal b Bumrah	22
M Starc	not out	14
N Lyon	c Pant b Siraj	3
J Hazlewood	b Ashwin	10
Extras	(lb 5, nb 3)	8

TOTAL: 200 in 103.1 overs

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-42, 3-71, 4-98, 5-98, 6-99, 7-156, 8-177, 9-185, 10-200

Bowling: J Bumrah 27-6-54-2, U Yadav 33-0-5-1, M Siraj 21-3-4-37-3, R Ashwin 37-1-6-71, R Jadeja 14-5-28-2

INDIA 2ND INNINGS

M Agarwal	c Paine b Starc	5
S Gill	not out	35
C Pujara	c Green b Cummins	3
A Rahane	not out	27
Extras	(b 12, lb 6, nb 2, w 2)	22

TOTAL: 70 for two in 15.5 overs

Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-19

Bowling: M Starc 4-0-20-1, P Cummins 5-0-22-1, J Hazlewood 3-1-14-0, N Lyon 2.5-0-5-0, M Labuschagne 1-0-9-0

One of the great comebacks in Test history, says Shastri

Melbourne, Australia - Bowled out for 36. Missing three, arguably four, first-choice players. Losing another mid-Test. Spending months on the road and in mentally challenging bubbles. Losing the toss. Becoming only the third team to come back from a 0-1 deficit in the last 50 years in Australia. You might have accused India coach Ravi Shastri of hyperbole in the past, but you probably wouldn't argue against his assessment that India's win in Melbourne after all that is one of the great comebacks in Test history, not just Indian cricket.

"I think this will go down in the annals of Indian cricket - no, world cricket - as one of the great comebacks in the history of the game," Shastri said. "You know to be rolled over for 36 and then three days later to get up and be ready to punch was outstanding. The boys deserve all the credit for the character they have shown. Real character."

The key to this comeback, Shastri said, was to accept the result in Adelaide and move on. He was asked what the chat was in the dressing room in Adelaide and then in Melbourne when they rocked up.

"No chat," he said of Adelaide. "And when we arrived in Melbourne, it was the things we have got to do to get up and fight."

"We had a lot of positives in Adelaide but at the end of the day it is the result that counts. We were blown away in the second innings in one hour. So when you are blown away, you are blown away. There is nothing you can do about it than to get up and fight, which we did in this

Test match. To beat a team like Australia, especially in Australia, there is no point having one good day or two good days, you have got to have five good days if you have to beat them. As simple as that."

Shastri was glowing in the praise of the stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane, especially his batting. "The discipline," said



You know to be rolled over for 36 and then three days later to get up and be ready to punch was outstanding. The boys deserve all credit for the character they have shown. Real character

RAVI SHASTRI, INDIA COACH

calmness of Rahane played a part on the field. "He is a very shrewd leader, he has a good understanding for the game. A good reader of the game. And I thought his calm composure out there in the middle helped the debutants as well, helped the bowlers as well. There was a calming influence out there. In spite of losing Umesh [Yadav],

Siraj's effort was outstanding actually. He might not have the numbers to show for it but the discipline and the ability to bowl long spells, the maturity he showed for someone playing his first Test, doing the job he had to do once we lost Umesh, was outstanding.

"Then Shubman going and playing with that kind of flair later on was great to see. Great character. More than anything else, great character. He looked very very mature for someone playing his first Test match. He looked very calm and composed. Wasn't afraid to play his shots, which was great to see. Even in the second innings, it was very easy to get into a shell but he went out there and played his natural game, which was great from the team point of view."

Shastri credited the IPL for giving India international-cricket-ready debutants. "A lot has to do with the IPL," he said. "The fact that they share the dressing room with international players, they rub shoulders with the best, it is that complex factor disappears very quickly. And you see what you see now."

While Shastri gave all the credit to the players, the team management made a bold move of playing a fifth bowler, Ravindra Jadeja, who proved his worth in all three disciplines. "He is a genuine allrounder," Shastri said of Jadeja. "That is why he bats where he is. He can bat at No 6, he can bat at No 5 if need be on a given occasion. But he is a genuine genuine allrounder. That's why he lends a lot of balance to the side."

Cricinfo

Paine: We played poor, sloppy cricket for the majority of the match

Melbourne, Australia - Australia captain Tim Paine lamented his side's ongoing batting woes after they sank to an eight-wicket defeat at the MCG against India, which put the series on an even footing at 1-1 with two Tests to go.

"We are very disappointed, we played pretty poor cricket, pretty sloppy cricket, for the majority of the match," Paine told after the match.

"That's to take nothing away from India; they put us under pressure and forced us into making a number of mistakes, especially with the bat, and in the field, and when you do that against good side it makes it very hard to win."

"You've got to give the Indian attack credit, they've bowled beautifully to us, there's no doubt about that. We haven't adapted as well as we would have liked. As a batting group, there's no doubt



Aussie skipper Tim Paine (right) congratulates his Indian counterpart

we are very disappointed with what we've put up in the first two Test matches, but there's still two to go so we'll work hard and try to rectify it for the next Test."

Australia would be desperate for the return of David Warner, who has spent time netting at the MCG during this match while he awaits his

return to the bio-secure Test bubble, as he continues his recovery from the groin strain suffered in the ODI series. During the Test, Australia coach Justin Langer said Warner was not certain for the third match but the continued batting problems of the incumbents may force the selectors' hands. Cricinfo

Sydney confirmed to host third India Test

Melbourne, Australia - The third Test between Australia and India will remain in Sydney, cricket chiefs said on Tuesday despite a coronavirus outbreak in the city, with Brisbane holding the final clash as scheduled.

A COVID-19 cluster emerged in Sydney earlier this month, with parts of the city in lockdown and restrictions placed on travel to other states. But Cricket Australia interim chief Nick Hockley said the match starting on January 7 would stay in Sydney after health advice from the New South Wales govern-

ment. Complicating matters had been a closure of the Queensland border to anyone coming from Sydney, but that issue has also been resolved with players and support staff expected to enter some sort of quarantine in Brisbane. "Despite the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, I am delighted to say Cricket Australia remains on track to deliver the men's international series as scheduled," he said in a statement.

The final Brisbane Test starts on January 15.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Tuchel axed, Pochettino likely to succeed at PSG

FRENCH LEAGUE

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on Tuesday confirmed the sacking of coach Thomas Tuchel, who had been at the club since July 2018, but did not name his successor.

"After an in-depth analysis of its sporting situation, Paris Saint-Germain decided to terminate Thomas Tuchel's contract," the French giants announced in a statement.

Argentinian Mauricio Pochettino, the ex-Tottenham coach and a former PSG player, is widely reported to be the favourite to take over.

Tuchel, whose axing was widely reported but unconfirmed last week, managed PSG 127 times in all competitions, with 95 wins, 12 draws and 20 defeats.

His trophy haul featured two Ligue 1 titles (2019, 2020) as well as the French Cup and French League Cup in 2020.

The 47 year old German also led the Parisian club to their first ever Champions League final last August, which they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich.

Despite appearing to be adept at man-managing PSG's squad of superstar players such as Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, Tuchel reportedly upset the Qatari-backed club after complaining about an apparent lack of recognition at leading PSG to the Champions League final.

"I would like to thank Thomas Tuchel and his staff for all they



A file photo of German Thomas Tuchel who was dismissed as PSG coach on Tuesday

I would like to thank Thomas Tuchel and his staff for all they have contributed to the club. Thomas has put a lot of energy and passion into the job, and we will of course remember the good moments

NASSER AL KHELAIFI, PSG CHAIRMAN

have contributed to the club," said PSG chairman Nasser al Khelaifi. "Thomas has put a lot of energy and passion into the job,

and we will of course remember the good moments we shared together. I wish him all the best for the future."

Less than three months on from the final defeat to Bayern Munich in Lisbon, Tuchel has become the first PSG coach to leave mid-season since Antoine Kombouare was replaced by Carlo Ancelotti in December 2011.

Tuchel departs the Parc des Princes having secured a last-16 Champions League clash with Barcelona and PSG sitting third in Ligue 1 - a point shy of leaders Lyon - despite being plagued by



Mauricio Pochettino

injuries, suspensions and coronavirus infections.

Should Pochettino take over, his opening match in charge will be January 6's trip to Saint-Etienne on French League's resumption after the winter break.

Then, on February 16, the Argentinian could face his first massive test against his compatriot Lionel Messi's Barcelona, with the return leg on March 6.

Pochettino was let go after five and a half years at Tottenham in the aftermath of leading the north London side to their first ever appearance in a Champions League final against Liverpool in 2019.

Although he has yet to win any silverware the former PSG defender's stock is high in managerial circles.

AFP



Aston Villa's Anwar El Ghazi (right) celebrates after scoring against Chelsea

Aston Villa rally to hold Chelsea

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Chelsea failed to ease the mounting pressure on manager Frank Lampard as Aston Villa came from behind to earn a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge in an English Premier League (EPL) game on Monday.

Lampard's men have now won just one of their last five league games to fall six points behind leaders Liverpool in sixth and having played a game more than the champions.

Chelsea also trail Villa on goal difference, despite Dean Smith's men having two games in hand, and the visitors were well worthy of a point.

"Now it's a tough moment and you have to fight through it," said Lampard.

"Nobody let me down tonight, everyone worked, we just didn't quite get the rub of the green."

Lampard was able to make six changes from the side beaten

at Arsenal 48 hours ago.

Olivier Giroud was one of those drafted into the side and the French international proved his worth with a precise near post header from Ben Chilwell's cross to open the scoring with his ninth of the season.

By contrast, Smith made just one enforced change from the team that played for 45 minutes with ten men in Saturday's 3-0 win over Crystal Palace.

But Villa showed no signs of fatigue in the second-half and levelled when Anwar El Ghazi turned home his fifth goal in as many games from Matty Cash's cross five minutes into the second-half.

"I'm still yet to see a player carried off the pitch with exhaustion," said Smith. "I'm a big believer in you want to play every game and if they are doing well keep playing them."

AFP

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FIAT TO MAKE EVS IN POLAND

Fiat Chrysler (FCA) Group said on Tuesday it would upgrade its plant in southern Poland to start producing electric cars by mid-2022. 'The preparations have already started,' it said

BUSINESS

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MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,642.12
BSE Sensex	47,613.08

FOREX RATES

(ROI equals)	
Indian Rs	190.88
Pakistani Rs	417.39
Bangladeshi Taka	220.50
Philippine Peso	124.97
Sri Lankan Rs	488.94

*Rates as on December 29
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's central bank vows to keep monetary policy consistent

China will implement a prudent monetary policy that is flexible, precise, reasonable and moderate, and keep it consistent, stable and sustainable, the central bank said.

In a statement released after a quarterly meeting of its monetary policy committee, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), said that it will pay attention to the ideal timing, extent and impact of policies and maintain the necessary support for economic recovery.

The PBOC will use a variety of monetary tools to ensure liquidity at a reasonable and ample level and keep the growth of money supply and social financing basically in line with nominal economic growth and maintain a basically stable macro leverage ratio.

Dhofar Poultry targets speedy growth, higher revenues from 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Poultry Company, Oman's oldest and fastest growing brand in the fresh and frozen chicken segment, is betting big on the Oman market through its innovative product portfolio and understanding of the changing consumer profile.

With its state-of-the-art processing facility and farms in Salalah, Dhofar Poultry is a leading supplier of superior quality natural chicken in Oman, and other GCC countries.

By the end of 2021, the company aims to touch RO12mn-plus in revenue, up from RO10mn in 2019, with increase in production from nearly 8,000 tonnes in 2019 to 10,000 tonnes in 2021.

'This growth will be driven by diversified product offerings and an aggressive marketing-led strategy to drive enhanced distribution and supply-chain network within and outside of Oman. The brand is also all set to foray into newer business segments in the



Salim bin Taman al Maashani

upcoming fiscal,' Dhofar Poultry said in a press statement issued on Tuesday.

According to statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the sultanate's production of broiler chickens in 2018 was estimated at 129,000 tonnes, of which 54 per cent were locally consumed. Oman's home-grown chicken brand has successfully established its presence in the

organised market in this sector with over 100 products across various segments.

Commenting on the company's business plans, Salim bin Taman al Maashani, CEO of Dhofar Poultry, said, "With evolving consumer palettes, and growing awareness on consuming fresh food, we believe it is our duty to educate the consumer and satisfy their need for supe-

rior quality, fresh chicken. Concerted efforts are being put in this direction and we believe that we have tasted success to a great extent. Our natural farms for bird raising have high restrictions of health conditions, and biosecurity standards, as we use feeds made from natural grains that are free from any animal additives, to ensure the provision of high-quality products."

Riding on the success, Dhofar Poultry has great ambitions for its business operations in Oman and remains committed to invest and grow in the sultanate through a well-established product portfolio.

"In order to maximise growth opportunities, we are continuously analysing our range and sharpening our focus to accelerate investments on the best performing categories and products. This will be further done with the implementation of the company's third expansion phase, after which the total production volume will reach 100mn birds per year," Maashani said.

CMA suspends 36 insurance agents

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has suspended the operations of as many as 36 insurance agents in the sultanate due to their failure to adjust with the provisions related to Omanisation.

'The Capital Market Authority has issued a decision to suspend 36 insurance agents for violating Article 4 Clause 9/a of the regulation for licensing insurance agents for failure to adjust their situations in accordance with the provisions related to Omanisation of insurance agents' business,' the CMA said in a statement issued on Tuesday.

As per the statement, the suspended insurance agents failed to implement 100 per cent Omanisation as stated in the regulation after the lapse of the grace period granted by the CMA and despite the extension of the period for the adjustment.

'The move comes as part of the Tamkeen initiative adopted by the CMA to enhance the ability of the insurance sector to accommodate national cadres based on training and qualification plan to gradually achieve the targeted Omanisation ratios,' the CMA said.

In April 2016, the CMA had is-



sued the regulation for licensing insurance agents including meeting specific Omanisation ratios. At that time the licensed entities were granted a three year grace period to Omanise the insurance agent's business.

The Tamkeen initiative aims to facilitate the insurance sector to accommodate the national cadres to add value to the industry due to the competitive edge and opportunities to prepare entrepreneurs specialised in marketing insurance products.

'It is noteworthy that CMA endeavors to achieve qualitative Omanisation ratios focusing on various employment levels at specific percentages concurrently with the progress of the industry in the sultanate, its expansion and increased awareness and turnout for insurance products,' the sultanate's capital market and insurance sector regulator said.

CBO issues RO119mn worth of treasury bills

Muscat - A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 108) was announced this week by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO119mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from December 30, 2020 until January 27, 2021.

The average accepted price reached RO99.950 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.950. The average discount rate and the average yield

reached 0.6517 per cent and 0.6521 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the CBO is 1 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. These financial instruments provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

ONA

CBO board discusses economic developments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Monday convened the fourth meeting of its board of governors for 2020 under the chairmanship of H H Sayyid Taimur bin Asa'ad bin Tariq al Said, chairman of CBO's board of governors. The meeting was held at CBO's head office in Muscat.

Beginning the meeting deliberations, the board of governors took stock of the recent economic developments in the sultanate in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CBO board noted



(Muscat Daily)

that the banking sector in Oman was comfortably placed to ensure its continued support to the Omani economy.

The board also reviewed a report submitted by the executive management on the prospects and challenges facing the econ-

omy. It also examined a banking surveillance report indicating the financial stability data and performance indicators of the banking sector.

Accordingly, the board approved a recommendation to amend some of the provisions with regard to granting of loans against shares. The amendment is expected to provide greater flexibility and enhanced opportunities to banks in financing investments in shares or against the security of shares.

The CBO board also reviewed the progress made with regard to the implementation of the

central bank's strategic plan and took stock of the measures planned for the upcoming period.

The board discussed the annual budgets for the year 2021 for CBO and its subsidiary institutions and schemes that are under its supervision, including for Oman Credit and Financial Information Center (Mala'a) and Banking Deposits Insurance Scheme (BDIS).

The board of governors also reviewed several other topics listed as part of its meeting agenda and took appropriate decisions accordingly.

Oil market may recover to pre-crisis levels in 2021, says Alexander Novak

Moscow, Russia - The emergence of coronavirus vaccines on the global market is helping to restore oil demand, and the market may return to pre-crisis parameters during 2021, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in an interview with Rossiya 24 TV channel.

"Before the end of 2020, we have already seen a recovery in demand, but, nevertheless, we did not reach the parameters that we had before the crisis. We hope that throughout 2021 we will, however, reach pre-pandemic figures," he said.

Novak added that global demand for oil in 2021, according to optimistic forecasts, may grow by 5-6mn barrels per day.

"Today, demand has not yet recovered by about 7-8mn barrels per day compared to the pre-crisis period. Although, in general, I have already said that, the decline was much bigger, and this year most of it (demand) has already recovered. Next year, we



Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak (TASS)

expect additional growth in demand of about 5-6mn barrels per day. This is an optimistic fore-

cast," he said.

At the same time, according to him, construction of the Nord

Stream 2 gas pipeline is 'at a high degree of readiness', it will be completed, as the European partners are interested in it. "Nord Stream 2, is at a high degree of readiness. This is a commercial project our foreign partners, European partners, are primarily interested in, namely - in the delivery of a highly environmentally friendly energy source. I am confident that Nord Stream 2 will be completed, all the more, measures are already being taken to complete it," he said.

Novak noted that the sanctions against this project that are being discussed now are negative for commercial projects.

"It will be necessary to somehow adjust, if such measures are taken by countries that are trying to stop the implementation of such projects. There are such measures indeed. We will continue to work, as we worked in these conditions," he added.

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MSM continues its upward trend

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) rose 0.49 per cent to close at 3,642.12 points on Tuesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover rose by 35.18 per cent to RO1.41mn and volumes increased 75.34 per cent to 10.58mn shares.

The gains in the main index were supported by all the subindices. Financial index rose 0.31 per cent, Industrial index climbed 0.68 per cent and Services index rose 0.67 per cent. The MSM Shariah Index closed up by 0.62 per cent at 520.16 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 20 companies closed up, while five companies closed down. The rest 16 traded



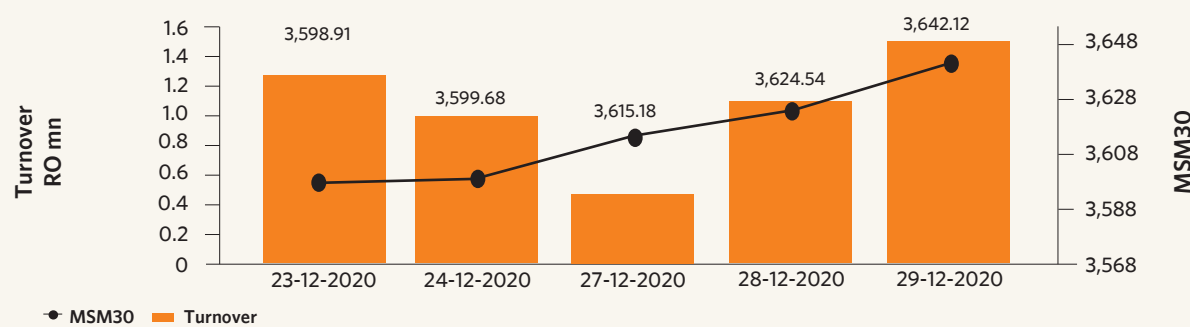
stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Gulf Investment Services (6.59 per cent), Galfar Engineering & Contracting (5 per cent), Oman Investment and Finance (4.55 per cent)

and Sembcorp Salalah (4.08 per cent).

Top losers were Dhofar Cattle Feed (-9.48 per cent), Al Anwar Holding (-1.61 per cent), Oman Chlorine (-1.45 per cent) and Renaissance Services (-1.19 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



UK and Turkey sign £18bn post-Brexit trade agreement

London, UK - Britain on Tuesday announced it had signed an £18.6bn trade deal with Turkey that 'lays the groundwork' for a more comprehensive post-Brexit agreement in the future.

Ahead of the signing, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said it would be 'our most important agreement since the customs union deal' which Turkey struck with the European Union in 1995.

Given Turkey's status in the EU customs union, Britain had to wait until it finally agreed a trade deal with Brussels last week before it could finalise the terms of the agreement with Ankara.

The British government called the deal with Turkey, which largely replicates the current trading relationship, a 'major win for UK automotive, manufacturing and steel industries'.

The agreement 'paves the way for a new, more ambitious deal with Turkey in the near future, and is part of our plan to put the UK at the centre of a network of modern agreements with dynamic economies', said trade minister Liz Truss.

Preferential tariffs will be maintained for the 7,600 UK businesses that export goods to Turkey, protecting supply chains for automotive manufacturers based in Britain.

US auto giant Ford welcomed the announcement, with European president Stuart Rowley



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

The British government called the deal with Turkey, a 'major win for UK automotive, manufacturing and steel industries'

calling it 'extremely significant'.

Ford's Dagenham factory in London exports much of its diesel engine production to the Ford Otosan joint venture in Turkey, where the engines are fitted into Ford Transit vehicles.

"Given that Ford and Ford

Otosan business constitutes more than 10 per cent of the total trade volume between the UK and Turkey, this trade agreement is extremely significant for us and will help to secure jobs in both countries," Rowley said.

Britain has now signed trade agreements with 62 nations following its 2016 decision to leave the EU.

Andy Burwell, director at business lobby group CBI, said Turkey's deep trading relationship with the EU meant an agreement was 'complicated'.

But the 'pace at which the deal has been finalised... shows the strength and depth of the relationship', he said.

AFP

Bahrain's Tatweer aims to attract oil firms' investments in marine blocks

Manama, Bahrain - Bahrain's Tatweer Petroleum Company has carried out a series of advanced geological and geophysical surveys, and drilled a number of experimental wells, as part of its intensified efforts in the fields of oil and gas exploration and drilling.

The company has recently conducted an advanced aerial geological survey of large areas in the kingdom, in addition to an advanced, high-resolution geophysical survey that covered most marine areas.

The company's exploration team analysed the results of these surveys, the information about exploration wells, as well as the approved and published regional information and scientific papers, in cooperation with major international consulting



companies, and detected some marine areas with potential quantities of oil and gas.

Based on its findings, Tatweer Petroleum completed all the technical and logistical preparations and procedures to pave the way for international companies' investment in the marine blocks

at the beginning of next year, 2021, through signing exploration and production sharing agreements with them.

It is worth noting that Bahrain had signed an exploration and production sharing agreement for Block 1 with the Italian company, Eni. Under the agreement,

Eni will pursue exploration activities in the offshore area located in the northern territorial waters of the kingdom of Bahrain.

It will begin digging the first experimental well in Bahrain's offshore Block 1 in the first half of 2021.

BNA

Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission to resume work after six years

Baghdad, Iraq - Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said in Baghdad on Tuesday that after a six-year halt Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission is to be reactivated in Tehran in a few weeks.

Speaking to the reporters, Ardakanian said Iraqi specialised delegations will participate in the Tehran meeting and Iranian private and public sectors will hold constructive consultations for

developing bilateral relations.

He added that the trip was made for expanding ties with Iraq in various fields.

Trade Minister of Iraq Alla Ahmed Hassan expressed happiness over the Iranian delegation's trip to Iraq and added that the trip is aimed at paving the way for holding the Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission as successfully as possible.

Iranian Energy Minister Ardakanian arrived in Baghdad on Tuesday and was welcomed by Iraqi Electricity Minister Majid Mahdi Hantoush.

Arrangements for the upcoming Tehran-Baghdad Joint Economic Commission and regulating the payment of Iraqi debt to Iran are on the agenda of Ardakanian's visit to Baghdad.

IRNA

Export credit agencies of UAE, India join hands to enhance economic cooperation

Dubai, UAE - Etihad Credit Insurance (ECI), the UAE Federal export credit company, has partnered with ECGC Limited (ECGC), the export credit agency of India, to explore and bolster the trade and economic cooperation between the UAE and India.

In a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by Massimo Falcioni, CEO of ECI and M Senthilnathan, chairman-cum-managing director of ECGC, the two agencies are set to collaborate and create prospects for mutual strategic projects, as well as offer a platform to identify new business opportunities and develop new partnerships in the UAE and India.

With accessibility to a range of export credit, financing and investment insurance products, businesses and exporters in both countries stand to gain from this partnership.

As part of the MoU, both institutions will work towards boosting their cooperation and communication in the following fields: Enhancement of trade and business relations between the two countries; exploration of mutual opportunities for insur-



ance, reinsurance, co-insurance services for export of goods in a third country, investments and services to assist and support insured exporters; facilitation of access for SMEs; mutual exchange of good practices; organisation of joint events; and identification of specific solutions in the export insurance field, among others.

Highlighting the importance of this strategic alliance, Falcioni said, "The UAE and India have always had strong economic relations, with trade ties seeing major leaps over the past years. Signing this agreement with

ECGC further reflects our shared goal of propelling businesses in our respective countries to greater heights. This MoU will bring about an important mutual exchange of export credit solutions and financing that will benefit the export community in both countries."

Meanwhile, Senthilnathan stated, "We are delighted to ink this strategic partnership with ECI, which will further strengthen the economic ties between India and the UAE. Indeed, it is our pleasure to work closely with ECI in leading the way for an efficient exchange of

export credit solutions and financing. This will enhance our participation in joint projects thereby giving businesses access to a wide range of export credit solutions offered by ECI and ECGC."

The UAE and India have always had a strong non-oil foreign trade relation in the past decade. Data released by the UAE Ministry of Economy in May 2020 states the non-oil exports and re-exports between the two nations in 2019 have reached over AED24bn, and nearly AED30bn, respectively.

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EU clears way for China investment pact

Brussels, Belgium - EU member states gave political backing to Brussels' planned investment pact with China on Monday, clearing the way for a deal between the world's biggest economic blocs.

At a meeting of ambassadors, the German EU presidency noted that no member had 'raised a stop sign and the way for a political endorsement was thus cleared', a diplomat said.

The diplomats noted 'recent positive developments' in negotiations, with China reportedly addressing concerns over the alleged use of forced labour on its farms.

This came after the Chinese Foreign Ministry said last week that 'negotiations have entered the final stretch' - and a second EU diplomat said an agreement could now be formally announced this week.

"We have to be careful, but as long as China is in agreement, there could be an official announcement from Brussels and Beijing by the end of the week," the senior envoy told AFP.

No member state intervened at the meeting to block the accord, but afterwards Poland's



A file photo shows the view of buildings in the financial district of Lujiazui in Shanghai, China (AFP)

ambassador Andrzej Sados said he had 'expressed our doubts' after Germany added it to the agenda.

The deal would be a major boost for both sides and

strengthen economic ties between the giants before the arrival of US president-elect Joe Biden in the White House in January.

Outgoing US leader Donald

Trump has engaged in a trade war with China but his successor has also expressed concern about the EU outreach, with his team urging Brussels to consult with Washington.

"The new administration in the US is starting work in three weeks... and an agreement with China should take into account the EU's relations with the US," Sados told the Polish PAP news

agency.

"We also said that we shouldn't act too hastily after seven years of tough negotiations. Meanwhile, such an item is suddenly added to the EU ambassadors' meeting agenda in Brussels. This is unheard of."

"In the last days of the German presidency we are dealing with a sudden and unjustified acceleration regarding a very important issue, which concerns international relations."

The bloc's leading economic power Germany, which holds the rotating EU presidency until the end of the year, has made securing the deal a priority of its time at the helm.

The European Commission, the EU executive, had said before Christmas that the draft of the 'political agreement' was '95 per cent ready' and just needed the capitals' green light.

China's commitment to labour rights had remained a hurdle, but Europe has long sought greater access to the huge Chinese market for its companies.

The head of the EU chamber of commerce in Beijing Joerg Wuttke told AFP this month that

negotiators had 'apparently made great strides on market access'.

As part of the accord the EU has also been pushing Beijing to reinforce respect for intellectual property, end obligations to transfer technology, reduce subsidies for public enterprises and improve on climate commitments.

While Trump's administration has engaged in a war of words with Beijing, Brussels has taken a balanced approach.

The EU states treat China as a 'systemic rival' and have expressed concerns over China's rights record, especially its clampdown in Hong Kong and treatment of the Uighurs.

Berlin wanted to get the agreement signed off at a joint EU-China summit in September, but the coronavirus pushed the event online and no deal was signed.

China pushed past the United States in the third quarter of this year to become the EU's top trade partner, as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the US economy while Chinese activity rebounded.

AFP

Trump administration appeals court ruling blocking TikTok ban

Washington, US - The Trump administration on Monday appealed a federal court ruling which allows TikTok to keep operating in the United States despite a move to block the popular social media application on national security grounds.

The Justice Department filed the appeal seeking to enforce a ban on TikTok by President Donald Trump, who has argued that the app's Chinese parent company may use TikTok for espionage and to spread disinformation.

The filing did not include arguments for enforcing the ban, which had been rejected earlier this month by US District Judge Carl Nichols and in a parallel case filed in Pennsylvania.

Nichols said TikTok's lawyers had demonstrated that the Commerce Department likely overstepped its authority by seeking to ban the popular social media app and 'acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner by failing to



consider obvious alternatives'.

The White House claims TikTok is a national security risk because of potential links to the Beijing government through its Chinese owner ByteDance.

Trump's order said the action was necessary to 'protect our national security' and claimed the personal data of TikTok users could be used by Beijing.

TikTok has repeatedly defended itself against allegations of data transfers to the Chinese government.

AFP

London stocks soar on Brexit deal

London, UK - London stocks surged on Tuesday with investors relieved over Britain's long-awaited Brexit deal with the EU, while eurozone equities also rose on US stimulus news with Frankfurt extending its record-breaking run.

The British capital's benchmark FTSE 100 index jumped 2.2 per cent in late morning deals, having last traded on Christmas Eve before the announcement of a long-awaited post-Brexit trade deal.

Britain and the European Union finally struck a trade deal Thursday to cushion the economic blow of Brexit, in a major boost to Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The pound climbed against the dollar but steadied versus the euro, as dealers continued to digest the 1,246-page agreement document.

"The Brexit deal is really a blessing... for the UK and for the FTSE 100 index. There is no doubt that the FTSE 100 has been a laggard index and now is its time to shine," AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam told AFP.



He added, "European stocks are still very much in Santa rally mode and traders only want to push stocks higher because they know that there is enough tailwind for the stock market in 2021."

The EU gave the green light to the deal on Monday, paving the way for it to come into effect in the New Year. Britain's parliament will seek to ratify it this week.

"Markets seem to be welcom-

ing the Brexit deal," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

"However, the agreement struck between London and Brussels is yet to win universal acclaim - even if that is the inevitable result of the compromises that the Prime Minister had to make to get the deal over the line."

Elsewhere, Asian markets mostly rose on Tuesday following a record-breaking lead from Wall Street, as investors cheered

the passage of a huge US stimulus bill which has helped temper fears about surging coronavirus infections.

Investor sentiment was given another shot in the arm after US President Donald Trump signed a US\$900bn COVID-19 economic stimulus bill late on Sunday.

"The hunt for records continues," said Comdirect analyst Andreas Lipkow.

Frankfurt's DAX index also

powered its way on Tuesday to new heights, extending its record-breaking run as the market ends a turbulent year on a strong note.

Asia also scored new pinnacles, with Tokyo soaring 2.7 per cent to end at a 30-year high.

European nations meanwhile continue to ramp up vaccinations, adding to optimism of a route out of the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet governments around the world have been forced to impose lockdowns and other strict, economically painful measures to contain surging COVID-19 cases.

Trump had meanwhile held off signing the US virus stimulus package for almost a week, saying it did not provide enough cash to Americans and calling for handouts to be jacked up to US\$2,000 from the US\$600 offered in the initial bill.

Democrats agreed more was needed and on Monday the House of Representatives approved a motion to increase the payments.

AFP

Jobless Americans may have to wait for desperately needed help

Washington, US - The United States government has agreed to another massive stimulus package to keep its listing economy afloat as the coronavirus pandemic rages on, but help for the unemployed people most in need may not come right away.

Congress's decision to wait until the last minute to pass the US\$900bn measure, followed by President Donald Trump's day-long hesitation to sign the bill into law, means two programmes supporting millions of unemployed Americans briefly expired, and experts warn states may take weeks to restart payments.

"Everything about unemployment insurance and having 53 different systems is difficult, and it does mean some states may drop the ball," said Michele Evermore, senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project.

The new stimulus measure follows up on the CARES Act passed in March, a massive bill that expanded benefits to free-

lance workers and allowed unemployed people to receive aid for an extended period of time.

But those programmes expired on December 26, a victim of both the months Congress took to reach its agreement last week and the President's refusal to sign it before finally capitulating on Sunday.

The hold-up may have cost unemployed people a week of benefits, and could lead to a gap stretching as long as three weeks in which the jobless won't get paid, experts say - the last thing Americans who have been out of work for months need.

"I've been running with zero income for the past couple of weeks. Anytime that you don't have income hurts," said Carson Noel, an Arizona resident who hasn't been able to work in the live events industry since the pandemic struck and used up all of his benefits in October.

Economic damage

The world's largest economy ground to a sudden halt in March



A banner against renters eviction reading 'No job, No rent' is displayed on a controlled rent building in Washington, DC (AFP)

when states ordered businesses shut to stop the transmission of COVID-19 - efforts that did grievous economic damage and didn't prevent the country's outbreak from becoming the largest

on the planet.

Costing US\$2.2tn, the CARES Act has been credited with keeping the US from an even worse downturn, in part by supporting consumption through the ex-

panded unemployment programs.

The new package 'providing coronavirus emergency response and relief' is part of a larger spending bill and gives job-

less people an extra US\$300 in weekly payments.

Americans will also get stimulus checks totaling as much as US\$600 per person, though Trump has called for them to be raised to US\$2,000.

It also extends until March 14 programmes created under the CARES Act for the long-term unemployed and gig workers like 51 year old Noel, who was evicted from his apartment after using up all of his benefits in October.

Now living with a family member, he relies on his dwindling savings to get by, and though the restoration of the unemployment payments is a relief, he'd rather be working.

"I don't want to sit at home," he said.

Unemployment aid in the US is administered by individual states and territories, and many systems are overwhelmed and reliant on badly outdated technology that few believe can easily reactivate a benefit programme that had just been deac-

tivated.

"The fact that they have to roll everybody off and they have to roll everybody back on, it's not going to go smoothly in any circumstances," said Andrew Stettner of progressive thinktank The Century Foundation, which estimated 12mn people were depending on these programmes that would have lapsed had the new stimulus bill not been passed.

Trump's delay in approving the spending package caused further problems: Because the President only signed the bill on Sunday evening, many states had already determined their unemployment payments for the week.

Depending on the state, Evermore said, some jobless people may not get paid for this week at all and may face another wait for states to restart their payments.

"Having to go even two or three weeks without pay, in that situation, that uncertainty is awful," she added.

AFP

Russia and Turkey to develop military ties despite sanctions

Moscow, Russia - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday that Moscow and Ankara's military cooperation would not be deterred by US sanctions on Turkey for acquiring a Russian missile defence system.

Washington earlier this month punished Turkey for buying Russia's S-400 air defence system, imposing rare sanctions against a NATO ally.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the time assured Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that the American sanctions were intended to prevent Russia from receiving substantial revenues from the sale.

On Tuesday Cavusoglu visited Moscow for talks with his counterpart Lavrov, who told reporters that, 'we have confirmed our mutual intention to develop military ties with Turkey'.

He added that President Vladimir Putin appreciated Turkey's determination to 'continue cooperation in this area despite continuing illegitimate pressure from Washington'.

Russia last year delivered the



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (left) welcomes his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu before their meeting in Sochi, a summer beach resort on the Black Sea on Tuesday (AFP)

S-400 system to Ankara ignoring warnings that it is not compatible with Turkey's membership in the NATO alliance.

Although Russia and Turkey

are rivals in several conflicts including Libya and Syria, Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan maintain good relations.

The two countries are jointly monitoring a Russian-mediated truce over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region after a six-week war between Armenia

On Tuesday Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visited Moscow for talks with his counterpart Sergey Lavrov, who told reporters that, 'we have confirmed our mutual intention to develop military ties with Turkey'

and Azerbaijan that claimed more than 6,000 lives.

But tensions between the two had risen over Nagorno-Karabakh while the fighting was ongoing, with Russia accusing Turkey of deploying Syrian fighters to combat Armenian forces in the contested region.

Earlier this month Turkish police briefly arrested two Russian journalists in Istanbul for allegedly filming a drone production unit without permission.

AFP



This file photo shows an image of Osman Kavala on a screen at a press conference by his lawyers, in Istanbul on October 31, 2018 (AFP)

Turkish court rules jailing of activist lawful

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey's Constitutional Court on Tuesday rejected leading rights defender Osman Kavala's appeal for an immediate release, ruling that his detention for over three years without a conviction was lawful.

A respected figure in international circles, the 63 year old's case is seen as a bellwether on the state of political freedoms under Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's rule, which has seen many of his opponents jailed on terror-related and other charges.

Kavala has remained in prison despite being acquitted in February in connection with 2013 anti-government protests.

He was immediately re-arrested and jailed in February on fresh charges of espionage and involvement in a failed 2016 coup against Erdogan.

The next hearing is scheduled for February 5 of next year.

The Constitutional Court's general assembly ruled by an 8-7 margin that Kavala's detention did not violate his rights to liberty and security, a court spokesman told AFP.

The formal reasoning for the ruling is expected to be published in one to two months.

The Parisian-born businessman was a founding member of philanthropist George Soros' Open Society Foundation in Turkey and headed Anadolu Kultur - a group that promoted cross-cultural ties through the arts at

the time of his arrest.

In a court appearance this month, Kavala rejected the charges, telling the presiding judge, "I have opposed military coups my entire life and have criticised the army's interference in politics."

Erdogan anger

Kavala would be sentenced to life in prison if convicted of trying to overthrow the constitutional order. The espionage charge carries an additional 20 years in jail.

The European Court of Human Rights first called for Kavala's 'immediate release' in December 2019.

Erdogan branded Kavala the 'red Soros of Turkey' a few days after he was first detained upon landing in an Istanbul airport from Gaziantep in the southeast in October 2017.

In a bid to repair Turkey's global international image in the middle of a deep economic downturn, Erdogan last month pledged to push through judicial reforms that secured broader independence of the courts. But he also took personal aim at Kavala, saying he was responsible for the 2013 protests - even after being cleared of involvement in court.

"We can never be with financiers of Gezi events," Erdogan said, referring to demonstrations against plans to demolish a park in the heart of Istanbul that snowballed into nationwide protests.

AFP

Gaza forces fire rockets to mark conflict anniversary

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Palestinian armed groups staged military exercises in Gaza on Tuesday, including firing rockets into the sea, to mark the anniversary of the start of the 2008 conflict with Israel.

The demonstrations were scheduled to last several hours and involve about ten groups in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, said a spokesman for the Al-Quds Brigade forces, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad.

The goal of the exercise, the first of its kind, is to 'strengthen the skills of combatants' and demonstrate the 'unity' of armed groups in Gaza, added the spokesman, whose face was almost entirely covered by a traditional headscarf.

Hamas, the Islamist group that has controlled Gaza since 2007, was also taking part.



People watch as rockets are fired during a military drill by the Palestinian movement Hamas and other armed factions in Gaza City on Tuesday (AFP)

Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV showed rockets being fired from the strip on Tuesday into the Mediterranean Sea.

Israel's army said a projectile device was launched from Gaza overnight Monday to Tuesday, but that it did not cross into Is-

raeli territory.

Israel did not immediately retaliate to that launch with airstrikes, as it typically does

when rockets fired from Gaza enter Israel.

The drills also come days after Hamas accused Israel of launching strikes that damaged a children's hospital. Israel, which said it carried out the weekend airstrikes in response to rocket fire from Gaza, denied that its missiles hit the hospital.

In December 2008, Israel launched 'Operation Cast Lead' to stop Palestinian rocket fire into Israel.

It ended with a ceasefire in January 2009, after 1,440 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed. Hamas and Israel fought two further conflicts, in 2012 and 2014.

A fragile truce has broadly held in recent months, despite rocket fire from Gaza which is generally followed by retaliatory Israeli airstrikes.

AFP

Egypt sentences man to 3 years in jail for harassment

Cairo, Egypt - An Egyptian court on Tuesday sentenced a former student to three years in prison for sexually harassing two young women, in a case that sparked outrage on social media under the #MeToo hashtag.

The economic court, which tries cyber crimes, sentenced Ahmed Bassem Zaki 'to three years in prison, finding him guilty of sexually harassing two girls over the phone, sending sexual photos to one of them and repeatedly contacting the other without her consent', a judicial source told AFP.

Zaki, who is in his 20s, can appeal the verdict, the source added.

Claims against Zaki emerged online in July in the form of testimonies - many from classmates - published by the Instagram account 'Assault Police', including an alleged rape and dozens of instances of assault against girls and women, some involving blackmail.

Some alleged incidents involved girls as young as 14.

Zaki, a former student of some of Egypt's most elite schools and the American University in Cairo, was arrested on July 4 and confessed to assaulting and blackmailing six complainants, one of whom was a minor. He will be tried by a criminal court on January 9 on charges of sexually assaulting three underage girls and attempting to blackmail them.

The case kickstarted a #MeToo campaign in Egypt, where women complain of rampant sexual harassment, a criminal offence since 2014.

United Nations surveys say most women in the conservative country have been subject to harassment ranging from catcalling, pinching, groping or worse.

Women are often reluctant to speak out fearing public shame and being blamed for dressing or acting 'provocatively'.

Egypt's parliament in August approved amendments to the criminal code granting victims of sexual assault the right to anonymity.

AFP

Algeria seizes \$100,000 militants' ransom cash

Algiers, Algeria - Algeria's army has retrieved a 'slice of the ransom' cash paid out to free hostages held by 'terrorist groups' in the troubled Sahel region, the Defence Ministry has said.

Soldiers 'recovered the sum of €80,000' (US\$97,900 approx) during an operation in Algeria's northeastern Jijel province, a statement issued late on Monday said.

Algerian authorities use the term 'terrorist' to describe armed extremists who have been active in the country since the early 1990s, including members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The Defence Ministry said the cash was an 'instalment of the ransom' paid out in a controversial October agreement, where neighbouring Mali released some 200 prisoners including militant leaders to secure the release of four hostages, including French aid worker Sophie Petronin.

Algeria condemned the deal, and Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerdad said the payment of ransoms 'undermines our counter-terrorism efforts'.

Algiers said it had subsequently arrested several extrem-



This file photo shows French President Emmanuel Macron (right) next to Sophie Petronin (centre) upon her arrival after being released from captivity in Mali, at the Villacoublay military airport near Paris on October 9 this year. The Algeria Defence Ministry said €80,000 in cash that was recovered from the militants was an 'instalment of the ransom' paid out to secure the release of four hostages, including Petronin (AFP)

ist fighters who had fled across the porous desert border from Mali.

Earlier this month, in the same Jijel province, three extremists fighters and an Algerian soldier were killed in clashes, while on December 16, troops arrested a man they described as 'danger-

ous terrorist', named Rezkane Ahcene.

One of the men later arrested in Algeria alleged that a ransom was paid totalling 'millions' of euros.

Rumours of ransoms paid for the release of western hostages in the Sahel region are common

but rarely confirmed, and France has denied any involvement in negotiations for the release of the hostages.

France has deployed over 5,000 troops across the arid Sahel region of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as part of its Operation Barkane

mission fighting extremist groups.

Three French soldiers were killed on Monday in Mali when their armoured vehicle struck an explosive device, taking the total deaths to 47 since Paris first intervened militarily in 2013.

AFP

Bangladesh moves biggest group of Rohingya to isolated island

Bhashan Char, Bangladesh - Four Bangladesh Navy ships on Tuesday took the second and biggest group of Rohingya Muslims yet from crowded refugee camps to an uncertain future on a bleak island three hours from the mainland.

The government insisted that the 1,800 refugees, who have been in camps since fleeing a Myanmar military clampdown, want to start new lives on Bhashan Char, where 1,600 others arrived earlier this month.

But rights activists expressed new doubts about the transfers. They said some Rohingya had their shanty homes in the camps on the Myanmar border padlocked so they had no choice.

The Bangladesh government eventually wants to rehouse 100,000 of the camps' approximately one million Rohingya on the island, which takes the full force of cyclones that roar across the Bay of Bengal each year.

The Rohingya carried bags of belongings, toys and chickens and took selfies with each other as they sat on wooden benches during the three hour trip from Chittagong to Bhashan Char.

Housing blocks have been set up for the new arrivals on the island that foreign minister A K Abdul Momen has called a 'beautiful resort'.

More than 700,000 Rohingya joined 300,000 already in camps in Bangladesh in 2017 after a deadly purge on their villages in Myanmar that the United Nations has said could be genocide.



Bangladesh Navy ship shifts Rohingya refugees to the controversial flood-prone island Bhashan Char in the Bay of Bengal, on Tuesday (AFP)

With Bangladesh now struggling to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya exodus, government refugee officials said there were better living facilities and better security for the Rohingya in Bhashan Char. "They are very eager to go to

Bhashan Char because they have heard from their relatives, those who have gone to Bhashan Char, that it is an excellent place," Momen told AFP. Some Rohingya in the latest group said they were going willingly.

"The camp is a difficult and overcrowded place to live and move around," Shafi Alam told AFP on the navy ship. Grandmother Morium Khatun (55) said she was making the change to escape drug-related crime in the camps that has seen

dozens killed in recent years. "I am looking for peace of mind. The refugee camp is not a place for that," she said. But an international rights worker who interviewed some Rohingya said they had no choice about the move.

"The homes of some of the refugees were padlocked by volunteers working for the Bangladesh camp authorities to force them to agree to the relocation," the worker said on condition of anonymity. AFP

Moscow expands list of German officials banned from Russia

Moscow, Russia - Moscow on Tuesday expanded a list of German officials who are banned from entering Russia in response to EU sanctions that the bloc imposed over Russian cyber attacks on the German parliament. The Russian Foreign Ministry said that in response to 'destructive' EU sanctions in October, 'Moscow made a decision to expand the reciprocal list of German citizens who are prohibited from entering Russia'.

The European Union and Britain in October hit senior Russian intelligence officers with the penalties for their alleged role in hacking the German parliament's computer network in 2015.

A cyber attack in April and May 2015 completely paralysed the IT infrastructure of the Bundestag and the entire parliament had to be taken offline for days while it was fixed.

The head of the GRU military intelligence agency, Igor Kostyukov, and intelligence officer Dmitri Badin were banned from EU soil and are subject to an asset freeze.

Russia on Tuesday did not specify which German officials were being handed entry bans. AFP

Indian star Rajinikanth ends political bid over health fears

Chennai, India - Indian movie superstar Rajinikanth on Tuesday cancelled his plans to enter politics, saying a health scare had been 'a warning from god'.

The announcement came a day after the 70 year old Tamil action hero left hospital where he was treated for high blood pressure.

Rajinikanth, one of Asia's best paid actors, set off celebrations by his fans when he announced early in December that he would be launching a political party in a bid to bring 'corruption free' government to his home state of Tamil Nadu.

But the bus conductor-turned-actor said he could not go ahead in a long letter released on his Twitter account.

Rajinikanth, who has had several health scares, said his recent worries had been a 'warning from god'.

'I am sorry to let you know that I am not going to launch a political party.'

'I will serve the people in whatever ways I can, without en-



Media representatives gather outside the residence of Indian actor Rajinikanth after he cancelled his plans to enter politics in the southern Indian city of Chennai on Tuesday (AFP)

tering electoral politics,' he wrote in the Tamil-language letter.

Rajinikanth said he did not want to start such a major campaign and then leave it half finished.

Rajinikanth said in 2017 that he wanted to enter politics but

then left his fans waiting until this month when he said his party would bring 'honest, transparent' politics to Tamil Nadu.

The actor proved his political muscle in 1996 when he called on fans to oppose the Tamil Nadu government, which was

then voted out of power.

Rajinikanth has carried on with his film career despite his health concerns and had been shooting his latest movie in Hyderabad when he was taken ill last week.

AFP

Hong Kong teen activist jailed for 'insulting' Chinese flag

Hong Kong, China - A Hong Kong teenager was ordered to spend four months in prison on Tuesday for insulting China's national flag and unlawful assembly as Beijing increasingly targets prominent activists from the financial hub.

Tony Chung, a 19 year old who led a now-disbanded pro-democracy group, was convicted earlier this month for throwing the Chinese flag to the ground during scuffles outside Hong Kong's legislature in May 2019.

While serving his sentence, Chung will be waiting for trial over a charge of 'secession', which could land him life imprisonment according to the draconian national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong on 30 June.

Chung is the first public political figure prosecuted under the new security law, which Beijing described as a 'sword' to return 'order and stability' to the financial hub after seven months of massive, often violent pro-democracy protests last year.

He was sentenced to three months each for insulting the na-



Teenage activist Tony Chung poses near the water in Hong Kong (AFP)

tional flag and unlawful assembly, and told to serve four months behind bars.

The teen is also facing separate charges of money laundering and conspiring to publish seditious content.

Chung was arrested by plainclothes police opposite the US consulate in late October and had been remanded in custody since. Speculation has swirled that

the authorities moved on Chung because he was hoping to ask for asylum at the US consulate in Hong Kong.

An increasing number of pro-democracy activists across the political spectrum have fled Hong Kong since Beijing stepped up its crackdown on the city's protests against China's authoritarian rule.

AFP

50 journalists, majority in countries not at war killed in 2020: RSF

Paris, France - Fifty journalists and media workers were killed in connection with their work in 2020, the majority in countries that are not at war, Reporters Without Borders or Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) said on Tuesday.

The figure shows an increase in the targeting of reporters investigating organised crime, corruption or environmental issues, the watchdog said.

Eighty-four per cent of those

killed this year were 'deliberately targeted' for their work, RSF said in its annual report, compared to 63 per cent in 2019.

"For several years now, Reporters Without Borders has noted that investigative journalists are really in the crosshairs of states, or cartels," said Pauline Ades-Mével, RSF editor-in-chief.

Mexico was the deadliest country, with eight killed. 'Links between drug traffickers and politicians remain, and journal-

ists who dare to cover these or related issues continue to be the targets of barbaric murders,' said the report.

None of the Mexico killings had yet been punished, added RSF, which has compiled annual data on violence against journalists around the globe since 1995.

Five journalists were killed in war-torn Afghanistan, it said, noting an increase in targeted attacks on media workers in recent months even as peace talks be-



Journalists pay tribute to colleague Felipe Guevara, who died two days after being shot, in the Colombian city of Cali on December 23 (AFP)

tween the government and Taliban are ongoing.

RSF also highlighted the case of Iranian opposition figure Ruhollah Zam, who ran a popular social media channel that rallied regime opponents, and who was executed in December. His execution 'confirms Iran's record as a country that has officially put the most journalists to death in the past half-century,' it said.

Ades-Mével said RSF had also noted the 'developing' trend of

violence against media workers covering protests, notably in the United States following the killing of George Floyd, and in France against a controversial new security law.

The total number of journalists killed in 2020 was lower than the 53 reported in 2019, although RSF said fewer journalists worked in the field this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

South Africa imposes new regulations as WHO emergencies chief warns of worse

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa banned alcohol sales and made masks mandatory in public from Tuesday after a surge in coronavirus cases, as the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that pandemics far more deadly than COVID-19 may lie ahead.

Nations around the world are struggling with winter spikes in infections that have pushed the global caseload close to 81mn, even as the rollout of vaccines gathers pace in North America and Europe.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Monday announced a ban on selling alcohol and said face masks will be compulsory in public after his nation became the first in Africa to record one million cases.

"We have let down our guard, and unfortunately we are now paying the price," said Ramaphosa, blaming 'super-spreader' social events and an 'extreme lack of vigilance over the holiday period' for the spike.

Ramaphosa said data showed 'excessive alcohol consumption' leads to an increase in trauma cases reported at hospitals, causing an 'unnecessary'



City of Tshwane's Special Infection Unit staff conduct final checks on the isolation chamber equipped with a negative pressure filtration system that is used to transport positive COVID-19 patients, before starting their night shift at the Hatfield Emergency Station, in Pretoria on Monday (AFP)

strain on public health facilities.

Surging cases also forced authorities in Rio de Janeiro - one of Brazil's worst-hit cities - to announce on Monday that they will block access to beaches on December 31 to prevent crowds celebrating New Year's Eve.

And in Spain, where the

death toll has topped 50,000, the Health Minister said the government would set up a registry of people who refuse to be vaccinated, and share it with other European Union member states.

Vaccinations in Spain and other EU countries started over

the weekend, and authorities fear vaccine hesitancy and rejection could hamper those efforts - especially because of misinformation campaigns on social media.

That was not a concern with 75 year old Jacques Collineau, resident of an old people's home

in Joue-les-Tours, France.

"Fear? Fear of what? I've been vaccinated for the flu before, now it's the same thing," Collineau said as he got the shot on Monday.

"We don't make vaccines to kill people, we make vaccines to try to save them."

'This is not the big one'

The coronavirus has devastated lives and economies across the globe, but the WHO warned Monday that worse pandemics could lie ahead, urging the world to get serious about preparedness.

"This is a wake up call," WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan told reporters at a briefing marking a year since the UN agency first learned of the new virus spreading in China.

"This pandemic... has spread around the world extremely quickly and it has affected every corner of this planet, but this is not necessarily the big one," Ryan added.

"We need to get ready for something that may even be more severe in the future."

While huge scientific progress was made to study the virus and develop vaccines at record speed, WHO senior advisor Bruce Aylward cautioned that the world was far from ready for the next pandemic.

"We are into the second and third waves of this virus and we are still not prepared to deal with and manage those," he said.

"While we are better pre-

pared... we are not fully prepared for this one, let alone the next one."

Good riddance, 2020!

The warnings were backed up by the worrying figures and trends reported worldwide.

South Korea, one of the nations hailed for its success during the first months of the pandemic, on Tuesday logged its highest daily death toll since the beginning of the pandemic as it battled a third wave of infections.

India, with the second-biggest caseload in the world, reported the detection of the new coronavirus strain, but officials said the nation's pandemic guidelines have not changed because of it.

Highlighting the frustration and suffering caused by the crisis, submissions from around the world came in for a Good Riddance Day celebration in New York City. The submissions were printed and then shredded, while the host of the event pulverised a 2020 pinata.

Westbury, New York, resident Raul said, "I want to get rid of the coronavirus. That's it!"

AFF



This file photo shows paramedics preparing ambulances at The Royal London Hospital, in east London on April 20 this year (AFP)

More patients in England hospital than at April peak

London, UK - England is 'back in the eye' of the coronavirus storm, health chiefs warned on Tuesday, with as many patients in hospital as during the initial peak in April.

A new strain of the virus appears to be behind the recent upsurge in cases, heaping further pressure on the state-run National Health Service during its busiest winter period.

NHS England figures showed there were 20,426 COVID patients in the country's hospitals on Monday, compared to the 18,974 peak recorded during the first wave.

The number of positive tests recorded over a 24-hour period also hit a new high of 41,385 on Monday, according to government figures, although testing is now much more extensive.

However, case figures do not include Scotland and Northern Ireland, which did not report over the Christmas period.

"Many of us have lost family, friends, colleagues and - at a time of year when we would normally be celebrating - a lot of people are understandably feeling anxious, frustrated and tired," said NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens.

"And now again we are back in the eye of the storm with a second wave of coronavirus sweeping Europe and, indeed, this country."

Britain is pinning its hopes on

its mass vaccination programme, with the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab expected to receive approval shortly, according to reports.

"We think that by late spring with vaccine supplies continuing to come on stream we will have been able to offer all vulnerable people across this country COVID vaccination," said Stevens. "That perhaps provides the biggest chink of hope for the year ahead."

Health trusts have been told to begin planning for the use of Nightingale field hospitals, the temporary facilities created during the first wave that have largely gone unused.

London and southeast England are currently bearing the brunt of the outbreak, with paramedics in the capital saying they are receiving up to 8,000 emergency calls each day.

London Ambulance Service said December 26 was one of its 'busiest ever days'.

A further 357 people testing positive for the virus were announced on Monday to have died, bringing the UK total to 71,109, the second worst toll in Europe.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been under fire for his government's handling of the pandemic, and is now under pressure to introduce even more social restrictions.

AFF

UK strain has been in Germany since November: Health officials

Berlin, Germany - The new coronavirus strain sweeping Britain has been in Germany since November, health officials said on Tuesday, after detecting the variant in a patient who died in the north of the country.

Researchers were 'able to sequence the variant of the B.1.1.7 virus in a person infected in November this year', the Health Ministry of Lower Saxony said in a statement referring to the new strain.

This is the same strain 'responsible for a large proportion of the infections detected in the south of England', it said.

The variant was found in an elderly patient with underlying health conditions who has since died. His wife was also infected but survived.

The couple caught the virus



A graffiti by Emre Freethinker features a 'cancelled' stamp across a Merry Christmas sign, in Berlin on Sunday (AFP)

after their daughter returned from a trip to Britain in mid-November, where she 'in all likelihood' became infected with the new strain, the statement said.

Teams from the Hannover Medical School (MHH) were able to identify the new strain after sequencing the genome.

The results were then con-

firmed by a team at Berlin's Charite hospital, which included top German virologist Christian Drosten.

Germany had previously reported only one case of the new strain, in a woman who flew in from London on Thursday.

Britain sounded the alarm earlier this month over the variant, which authorities say is significantly more contagious.

Concerns over the strain have prompted many countries to suspend travel to and from Britain.

It has since been detected in several other nations, including Portugal, France, Jordan and South Korea.

Germany has banned arrivals from the UK by road, sea and air until January 6.

AFF

Philippines bans foreign arrivals

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines will shut its borders to foreigners arriving from 20 countries and territories in a bid to prevent a new strain of coronavirus entering the nation, officials said on Tuesday.

The ban on travellers from places including Australia, France, Japan and Hong Kong comes as the archipelago braces for a post-Christmas surge in the virus that has infected nearly half a million people.

Dozens of countries closed their borders to the Britain in recent weeks over rising cases of a variant that is believed to spread faster.

AFF

Mexico mourns maestro Armando Manzanero

Mexico City, Mexico - Mexican singer-songwriter Armando Manzanero died on Monday at the age of 86 after being hospitalised with the coronavirus, sparking an outpouring of tributes for one of the country's most-loved musicians.

The composer and crooner of romantic Latin ballads, who became the first Mexican to receive a Grammy lifetime achievement award in 2014, suffered a cardiac arrest, his publicist told AFP.

Manzanero's songs, which include *Adoro* (I Adore) and *Voy a apagar la luz* (I'm Going to Turn Off the Lights), are known across Latin America.

His lyrics, some of them translated into English, have also been sung by international stars including Frank Sinatra, Christina Aguilera, Andrea Bocelli and Elvis Presley.

The artist was admitted to hospital on December 17 and later intubated, although news



This file photo shows Armando Manzanero performing during his show in Cuba's capital Havana on July 15, 2018 (AFP)

from his entourage over the weekend that his health was improving had sparked hope that he would beat the virus.

A visibly moved President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador cut short his daily news conference on Monday after showing a video of Manzanero performing *Adoro*. He hailed the musi-

cian as 'a great composer, one of the best in the country'.

The Latin Recording Academy, which also presented Manzanero with a lifetime achievement award in 2010, described his death as an 'irreparable loss for the world of Latin music'.

Spanish singer Alejandro

Sanz said the Mexican maestro had 'taught us to adore in the most beautiful way'.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic that has hit Mexico particularly hard, no tributes were due to be held, so the Society of Authors and Composers, which Manzanero had presided over since 2010, asked that people sing from their balconies and windows at nightfall the song 'This afternoon I saw it rain'.

'Noble soul'

In different parts of Mexico City, that song and other melodies made famous by the late composer rang out at dusk.

"His songs reached to the bottom of our hearts, all of them, there is not one that does not reach the depths," Leticia Martínez, a 63 year old housewife, told AFP.

Argentine singer-songwriter Fito Paez said Manzanero 'was above all an example for future artists to follow. A noble soul

and a beautiful person'.

Manzanero was born in Merida in the southeastern state of Yucatan on December 7, 1934, although his birth was only registered a year later.

He recorded around 30 albums and some 400 songs over a career spanning six decades.

Music was in his blood - his father was also a singer, although Manzanero credited his grandmother for his romanticism. The songwriter was honored in person by the Yucatan authorities this month with the opening of a museum dedicated to his life and work.

"Gratitude is the memory of the heart, and music is the best memory you can carry in your pocket," said Manzanero, who developed a cough after his return to the capital.

The songwriter, who was proud of his indigenous Mayan roots, married five times and had seven children.

AFF

PARTY STARTERS

New Year's eve is round the corner and you've probably planned the menu for your dinner. But don't forget the most important part – starters! Here are a few easy-to-do starters which you can make in minutes, even while guests are arriving.



Slow cooked cocktail sausages

Ingredients

- 1½ cups ketchup
- ¼ cup brown sugar, packed
- 1tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1tbsp Sriracha, or more, to taste
- 1tsp Dijon mustard
- 600gm beef/chicken cocktail sausages, quartered
- 2tbsp chopped fresh parsley leaves

Method

In a large bowl, whisk together ketchup, brown sugar, Worcestershire, Sriracha, Dijon and 3tbsp water. Place chopped hot dogs in a pan. Stir in ketchup mixture and gently toss to combine. Cover and cook on low heat 10-15 minutes. Serve immediately, garnished with parsley.



Paneer tikka cubes

Ingredients

- 250g paneer (cottage cheese) cubes, 2 medium green capsicum - chopped, 2 medium tomatoes – chopped
- 1tsp ginger garlic paste, ¼tsp turmeric powder
- ½tsp red chilli powder , ½tsp tandoori masala
- 2 tsp lemon juice , 2tbsp thick curds
- Salt to taste, 2tbsp oil, 1tsp gram flour, 1tsp chaat masala

Method

Whip the curds and add all the spices (except chaat masala), gram flour, lemon juice, ginger garlic paste and salt. Add the paneer cube and mix lightly to coat all cubes well. Thread them onto bamboo skewers with alternate pieces of capsicum and tomato and place on a charcoal grill. Toast on both sides for 5-6 minutes, brushing with oil in between. You may also grill them in an oven or on a hotplate with a drizzle of oil. Garnish with chat powder and serve with mint chutney.



Zucchini crisps

Ingredients:

- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 zucchinis, thinly sliced
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 large eggs, beaten

Method

Heat vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. In a large bowl, combine breadcrumbs and Parmesan. Set aside. Working in batches, dredge zucchini rounds in flour, dip into the beaten eggs, then dredge in breadcrumb mixture, pressing to coat. Add zucchini rounds to the skillet, 5 or 6 at a time, and cook until evenly golden and crispy, about 1 minute on each side. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Serve immediately.



Spicy potatoes

Ingredients

- 600g potatoes boiled and chopped (or use baby potatoes)
- ½tsp turmeric
- ½ red chilli powder
- 2tsp oil, 2 sprigs curry leaves
- Juice of half lemon, 1 sprig of coriander leaves
- Salt to taste (½tsp)

Method

Heat oil and add the potatoes and stir. Add the turmeric and salt to taste. Cover and cook on slow flame for 5-6 minutes. Then add the curry leaves, sprinkle chilli powder and cook on slow fire, covered, for 10-12 minutes. Garnish with lemon juice and coriander leaves, toss, and serve hot. (Present with toothpicks for easy picking up.)



Thai shrimp appetisers

Ingredients

- 2tbsp canola oil
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 2tbsp rice vinegar
- 1tbsp minced fresh cilantro
- 1tbsp lime juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1tsp grated lime zest
- ½tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- ¼tsp salt
- ¼tsp pepper
- 600g medium shrimp - peeled, deveined, steamed for 5 minutes.

Method

In a large bowl, combine all the marinade ingredients. Add the shrimp and toss to coat well. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Drain and discard marinade. Arrange shrimp on a serving plate and serve with any dipping sauce.

WINTER SOUPS

During winter, some have a robust appetite, others prefer to just keep themselves warm with food that makes them feel comfortable. And soups score high on this count. Here are four great soup recipes, of celebrity British chef Jamie Oliver, very easy to try at home.



Red lentil and sweet potato soup

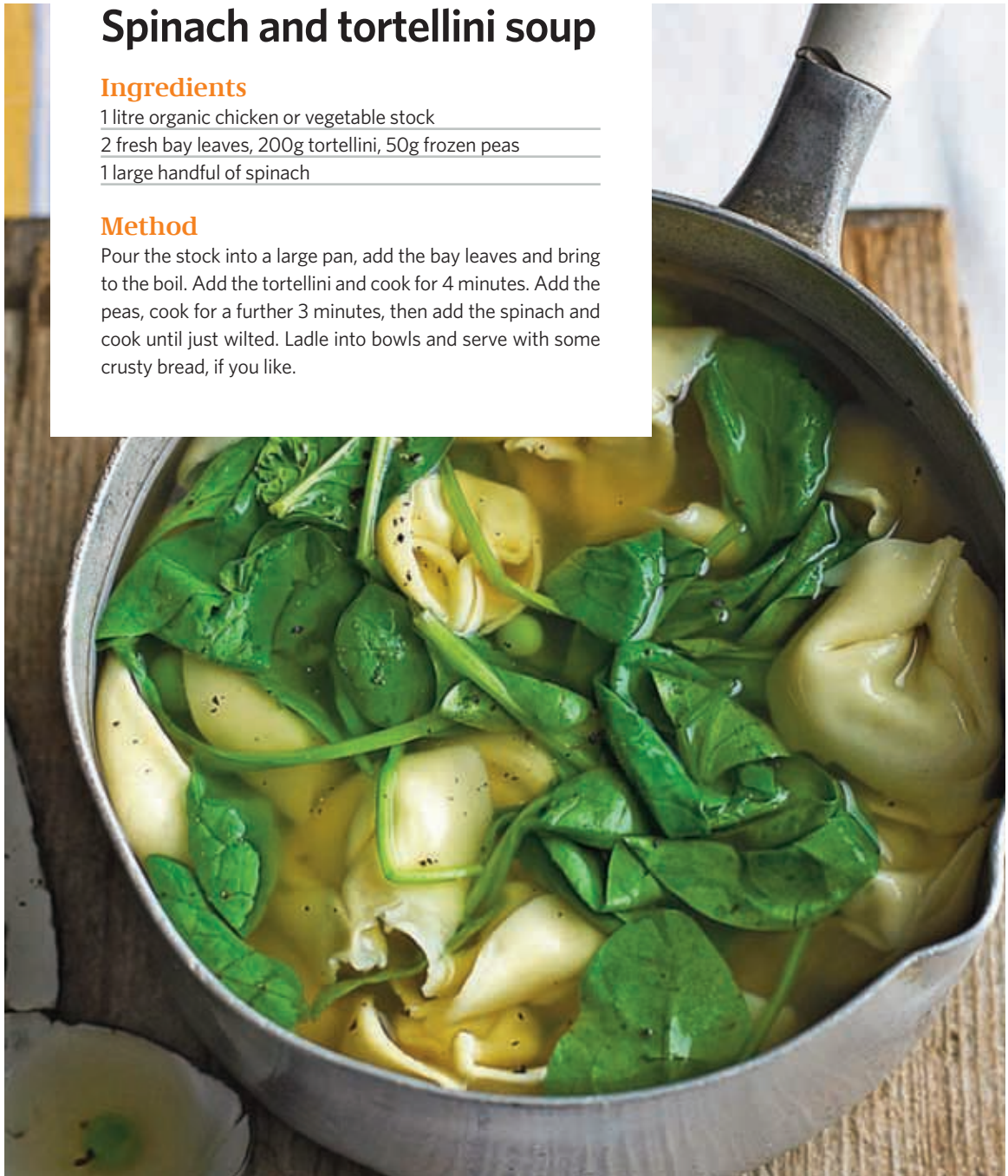
Ingredients

750g sweet potatoes, 2 red onions
½tbsp cumin seeds, 1tsp ground coriander
Olive oil, 4 cloves of garlic, 1 fresh red chilli
½ a bunch of fresh coriander, 125g red lentils
1 litre organic vegetable stock
400g tin of light coconut milk, 1 lemon

Method

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Peel and cut the sweet potatoes into 2cm chunks, then peel and cut the onions into 2cm-thick wedges. Place in a roasting tray in an even layer and sprinkle over the cumin seeds, ground coriander and a pinch of sea salt and black pepper. Drizzle with oil, then toss to coat. Pop in the oven for 40 to 45 minutes, or until cooked and golden. Peel and finely slice the garlic, then finely slice the chilli. Pick the coriander leaves and set aside, then finely slice the stalks. Place a large saucepan over a medium-low heat and pour in a lug of oil. Sauté the garlic, chilli and coriander stalks for a minute, until lightly golden. Add the red lentils to the pan. Stir to coat, then pour in the hot stock and coconut milk. Turn up the heat, gently bring it to the boil, then let it come to a simmer. Cook the lentils for 20 minutes, or until they are completely broken down.

When the veggies are ready, remove from the oven and carefully spoon into the pan. Add most of the coriander leaves, then blitz the soup with a stick blender until it's creamy but still has a little texture. Squeeze in some lemon juice to taste and adjust the seasoning if needed. Serve the hot soup topped with the remaining coriander leaves and toasted coconut shavings.



Spinach and tortellini soup

Ingredients

1 litre organic chicken or vegetable stock
2 fresh bay leaves, 200g tortellini, 50g frozen peas
1 large handful of spinach

Method

Pour the stock into a large pan, add the bay leaves and bring to the boil. Add the tortellini and cook for 4 minutes. Add the peas, cook for a further 3 minutes, then add the spinach and cook until just wilted. Ladle into bowls and serve with some crusty bread, if you like.



Minestrone soup

Ingredients

1 clove of garlic, 1 red onion, 2 carrots
2 sticks of celery, 1 courgette, 1 small leek
1 large potato, 400g tin of cannellini beans, olive oil
½tsp dried oregano, 1 fresh bay leaf
2 x 400g tins of plum tomatoes, 1 litre organic vegetable stock, 1 large handful of seasonal greens (savoy cabbage, curly kale, chard), 100g wholemeal pasta
½ a bunch of fresh basil, optional, Parmesan cheese

Method

Peel and finely chop the garlic and onion. Trim and roughly chop the carrots, celery and courgette, then add the vegetables to a large bowl. Cut the ends off the leek, quarter it lengthways, wash it under running water, then cut into 1cm slices. Add to the bowl. Scrub and dice the potato. Drain the cannellini beans, then set aside.

Heat 2tsp of oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the garlic, onion, carrots, celery, courgette, leek, oregano and bay and cook slowly for about 15 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened, stirring occasionally. Add the potato, cannellini beans and plum tomatoes, then pour in the vegetable stock. Stir well, breaking up the tomatoes with the back of a spoon. Cover with a lid and bring everything slowly to the boil, then simmer for about 30 minutes, or until the potato is cooked through.

Meanwhile, remove and discard any tough stalks bits from the greens, then roughly chop. Using a rolling pin, bash the pasta into pieces while it's still in the packet or wrap in a clean tea towel. To check the potato is cooked, pierce a chunk of it with a sharp knife – if it pierces easily, it's done. Add the greens and pasta to the pan, and cook for a further 10 minutes, or until the pasta is al dente. Add a splash more stock or water to loosen, if needed. Pick over the basil leaves (if using) and stir through.

Season to taste with sea salt and black pepper, then serve with a grating of Parmesan and a slice of wholemeal bread. You may also garnish with fried shreds of any favourite meat.



Pumpkin and ginger soup

Ingredients

1kg pumpkin, 2 shallots, 75g ginger
A few sprigs of fresh herbs, such as chives, mint
Extra virgin olive oil, 1 litre organic vegetable stock
125ml coconut milk, plus extra to serve
½ tablespoon chilli powder, 1 lime

Method

Deseed and roughly chop the pumpkin, peel and chop the shallots, then peel and finely grate the ginger. Pick and finely chop the herbs. Place the pumpkin, shallots, ginger and some oil in a large saucepan and sauté until soft. Add the stock, coconut milk and chilli powder. Season, then bring to the boil and simmer for 40 minutes. Blitz in a food processor then serve with the fresh herbs, lime juice and a splash of coconut milk.





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