

Minister visits dates processing centre



MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Tuesday went on a tour of Nakheel Oman Development Company’s Operations Centre in the Wilayat of Barka where he had a close look at the latest dates processing and packaging operations. The Centre has an annual capacity of 6,000 tonnes. Besides commercial production, the Centre is used for manpower training, equipment testing and modelling operations conducted prior to the actual

stage of processing and packaging at the Dates Processing Complex in the Wilayat of Nizwa. Construction work is still going on at the Centre, which is expected to be completed by harvest season in 2021. Nakheel Oman Development Company was founded in partnership with the Diwan of Royal Court, represented by the Directorate-General of the One-Million-Palms Project, and Tanmia (Oman National Investments Company SAOG). — ONA

Meeting to discuss labour accommodation

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The General Federation of Oman Workers (GFWO) will hold a meeting on Wednesday with various stakeholders to discuss issues related to labour housing. The meeting will include representatives from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Ministry of Labour, Muscat Municipality, Public Authority for Economic Zones and Free Zones and Majlis Ash’Shura. The meeting will discuss issues such as identifying the basic requirements for labour housing, regulations to organise and implement the new labour housing strategies. The symposium will address the basic requirements that must be met in labour housing, the role of the Ministry of Labour in monitoring workers’ camps during the pandemic period,

including mechanisms to deal with violations related to labour housing. Muscat Municipality will discuss the issue of having the expatriate workforce amidst residential neighbourhoods and measures taken to resolve the matter. The meeting that will address the negative impact of having a large number of workers in one place in the wake of Covid pandemic, including that of following the model of Renaissance village for workers in Duqm. For creating a city for workers close to their worksites, Muscat Municipality has been coordinating with the Ministry of Housing and Urban planning to build a Labour City in an area of 250,000 sqm for which the private sector will be invited to bid for the construction and management.

SQU Hospital coronary peel surgery saves mother’s life

MUSCAT: A medical team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Hospital conducted a coronary peel surgery that saved the life of a young mother who suffered peeling of the left coronary artery and capillaries veins feeding the heart. The surgery was conducted using advanced techniques reflecting the team’s expertise, which resulted in the replacement of three damaged arteries and arterioles. The operation is being documented and published as a scholarly bid to be reported

in an international scientific journal to benefit specialists in heart surgery around the world. The team that conducted the operation was headed by senior consultant cardiovascular surgeon Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Executive President of Oman Medical Specialty Board. The team comprised Dr Adil bin Hashim al Kindi, senior consultant cardiovascular surgeon, Dr Dafron Maqudov, senior cardiovascular surgeon, and other physicians and technicians. — ONA



Believers welcome mosque opening

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Believers in the country have expressed their joy over the Supreme Committee announcement to reopen mosques from November 15 with strict COVID-19 protocol. “This is a great day, great news, indeed...all praises to the Lord,” cried Noorul Ameen, a retired private sector employee. “All the prayers for the country, the ruler and the authorities who have made us safe.” Oman decided to close masjids, churches, temples and Gurudwaras in the wake of the COVID-19 impact mid-March this year. “We missed 35 Friday Juma prayers due to the pandemic and this has not been the case in my 44 years of life,” said Shahad Hussain

FROM PAGE 1

Follow COVID protocol: SC

Worshippers have to sanitise their hands before coming to the mosque and before leaving it. Worshippers have to wear face masks all the time when they are inside the mosque. Worshippers have to observe a distance of not less than 1.5 metres. People responsible for mosque management have to see to it that all worshippers’ adhere to the measures mentioned above and other precautionary measures listed in the “Instructional Guide and Procedures for Mosque Preparation and Equipment” issued by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, without prejudice to the above-mentioned procedures. The Supreme Committee prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect all people against all harm. — ONA

al Lawati, an entrepreneur in the textiles industry. “I stopped counting the number of daily mass prayers that we lost since March but it’s a great relief that we are slowly getting back to normal,” he added. Moosa al Balushi, a septuagenarian from Muttrah souq expressed his concern over the people’s careflessness in following the COVID-19 protocol. He reminded all that a small lapse from a believer can make things bad and we should strictly be adhering to the safety precautions. “We all need to strictly follow the Supreme Committee guidelines for the functioning of mosques in line with the precautionary measures for COVID-19. Remember, we are not fully free from the virus,” Al Balushi said.



Shura economic panel discusses 10th five-year plan

MUSCAT: The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash’Shura held a meeting on Tuesday to discuss the tenth five-year development plan (2021-2025) through focus on its objectives pillars. In its meeting, the panel hosted Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy and Abdullah bin Salem al Harthy, Undersecretary of Ministry of Finance, in the presence of Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’Shura. The meeting discussed the methodology for the preparation of the tenth five-year development plan and the executive situation of the ninth five-year plan (2016-2020) as well as the financial and economic framework, and follow-

up and evaluation framework of the tenth five-year development plan. Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy explained that the tenth five-year development plan has a great significance at this historical stage being the first executive plan of the Oman Vision 2040. He affirmed that the focus will be given to the most important strategic goals of the Omani Vision 2040 by identifying the programmes that will contribute to achieving its national priorities during the next five years. The tenth five-year development plan is also considered the first plan to reflect the Royal orientations of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stated in the historic address delivered by His

Majesty on February 22, 2020, in which he stressed the most significant axes of national action during the upcoming period which include restructuring the state administrative apparatus, listening to the youth, empowering women in nation-building and the importance of realising the Oman Vision 2040. In his address, His Majesty emphasised the importance of developing the laws and legislations in line with the requirements of the current and future stages, Al Maawali said. Al Maawali touched on a number of local challenges that have been taken into account by the plan including the drop in global oil demand, the economic recession, the build-up in the public debt to GDP.

FROM PAGE 1

50 days on foot for 50 years

Accompanying Anisa on the venture is Major Natalie Taylor from the UK, who is currently in Oman in quarantine, and is excited that she could be in Oman on time to start on November 18.

“The message we want to share is strength, resilience and perseverance. We are partnering with young Omanis as much as we can with SMEs. We also want to inspire other women to collaborate with us. We will also be doing some research along the way. Dr Geoffrey Rose has taught us how to recognise archeological sites as we will be going through unexplored areas. Natalie being a researcher and medic will be doing a body composition and study the effect of the climatic conditions during this expedition on both of us as she is genetically not from this part of the world. I want to challenge not just the youth who come to us at Outward Bound Oman, but challenge myself and be an inspiration to myself to anyone who is keen to listen to my story.” She wants people to come out of their comfort zone. But the most important message is this, “for 50 years we are receiving and it is time to give back to the country. What can we do as the youth for the country? What can we do together to achieve the goals of Vision-2040? This is where we need you. This journey is about you being inspired.” During their trek they will walk through Al Buraimi Governorate, Rub al Khali dunes, move past Haima and to Demeet, Wadi Arra and all the way to Jabal Samhan to the tip of Mirbat and from there go down to hit the ocean.



46,577 SMEs registered by Sept end

MUSCAT: The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) as at the end of September 2020 was 46,577 which is an increase by 12.9 per cent compared to the same period of 2019, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Among the governorates,

Muscat topped the list with 33 per cent SMEs registered till the end of September 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 16 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah with 13 per cent and Dhofar with 8 per cent, and the rest of governorates with 30 per cent.

The Governorate of Muscat had 15,591 SMEs registered as at the end of September 2020, followed by North Al Batinah with 7,357, Al Dakhiliyah with 5,896, Dhofar with 3,882, South

Al Batinah with 3,477, and North Al Sharqiyah with 3,142 SMEs registered.

This was followed by Al Dhahirah with 2,740 SMEs, South Al Sharqiyah with 2,718 SMEs and Al Buraimi with 996 SMEs registered. Al Wusta had 600 SMEs registered and Musandam had 178 SMEs registered, which was the lowest among governorates registered as at the end of September 2020.

— ONA

New travel rules come into force today

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Travellers must undergo a PCR test for COVID-19 within 96 hours before arriving in the country and a second test upon arrival at the airport from Wednesday.

A citizen who tests positive after recovering from COVID-19 is allowed to travel to Oman, after providing proof that he has completed the prescribed quarantine period before taking the COVID-19 PCR test prior to departure for Oman.

The quarantine period is seven days from the date of arrival in Oman if the passenger has negative results of a COVID-19 PCR test conducted on arrival

and another PCR test conducted on the eighth day.

If the passenger does not wish to undertake a PCR test on the eight-day, the quarantine will continue for 14 days from the date of arrival.

Children of age fifteen years and below are exempted from the COVID-19 PCR tests and from the tracking wristband.

Diplomats working at foreign embassies accredited to Oman and diplomats visiting Oman are exempted from the COVID-19 requirements for passengers to and from Oman.

Before booking a flight, passengers must consider the following requirements.

Omani citizens and residents

can travel abroad without pre-approval. Consider online check-in, where possible, prior to arrival at the airport to avoid face-to-face contact at the airport.

Travellers need to be at the airport at least 3 hours before the official time of departure or 4 hours at most.

Omani citizens must obtain health insurance that covers COVID-19 treatment at the country of arrival.

Passengers should avoid travel if they display COVID-19 symptoms.

If you have a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher after thermal check at the airport, you will be asked to undertake a PCR test.

Make world a better place: Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate urged the world to help people live with dignity, basic rights and safety.

In its project titled "Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values", the nation urged three basic principles to be implemented in the world to make the world a better place to live in.

Oman's efforts in promoting a culture of peace, understanding, respect for and appreciation of life, help people preserve their identities and private lives, and consolidating the values of community partnership and social values are truly reflected in the draft Declaration.

"International relations and the relations with each other is crucial in maintaining a peaceful world and the Sultanate has always stood by this," said Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Information. The initiative also aims at providing

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ALI BIN KHALFAN AL JABRI

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Information

the necessary practical framework for international cooperation, empowering human beings and societies, and raising living standards to achieve their goals and aspirations.

"This declaration is an important initial step towards defining shared beliefs and bridging cultural gaps, as an essential element to peace, security and development," said Mohammed bin Said al Mamari,

Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The second dimension is based on adopting a global ethical order that pushes people forward to uniting their obligations and efforts, protecting mankind and earth, and achieving peace, coexistence and understanding.

"Religious, cultural and ideological differences do not prevent, and are not an obstacle, to believing in our existence within common ground and united values, whether they stem from religious or non-religious foundations. The third dimension is about nurturing the spiritual values of human beings through reason, logic, philosophy and theology."

Oman will observe the International Day for Tolerance (United Human Values) on November 16. Various ministries, including the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health are joining together to observe the ITD.



Attention

Majan Electricity Company announces Extension of the Period Buying in the following tender below:

Tender NO	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
86/2020	Electricity Bills collection consumption Contract for Two years	Specialized	12/11/2020	17/11/2020	1,032/=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Sohar, before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website. The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted.

For more information please contact Tel no.: 24051501- 26944266
For any technical assistance please contact
Helpdesk: +968-24166670
E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
"WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION"



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Member of Nama Group

Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.C
P.O Box 286, Sohar
PC 311, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2694 4444 | Fax: +968 2694 4222
Information@majanco.nama.om | www.majanco.co.om

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Please Contact our Team

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari

99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Sohar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



Barren rock desert and scenic beaches

Al Jazir



Another beautiful wilayat located in the Governorate of Al Wusta is the Wilayat of Al Jazir known for its scenic beaches.

The Wilayat of Al Jazir occupies a distinct position on the coastal strip of Al Wusta Governorate. Located on the south coast of Al Wusta, in the north is the Wilayat of Duqm, while in the south is the Wilayat of Shalim, which is part of the Governorate of Dhofar, in the

west being Wilayat of Haima and to the east is the Arabian Sea. There are about 12 villages in the wilayat with over 5,832 inhabitants.

Until 1970 AD, the inhabitants of Al Jazir built dark caves where they lived.

They were built from stones without adhesives due to climatic changes and storms.

When the blessed Renaissance emerged under the wise

leadership of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, modern houses are common in the wilayat and dark caves abandoned giving rise to warehouses which are used to store wastes.

There is also an administrative and commercial complex consisting of a group of shops that provide for the needs of the wilayat.

There are also schools that are specialised in all primary,

preparatory and secondary levels.

The inhabitants practise a range of crafts and industries including manufacture of paddles, fishing nets and animal skins.

Though barren rock deserts dominate the governorate in which the wilayat is situated, Al Jazir is characterised by its charming nature.

It is a coastal area with many beaches. The wilayat is alike other coastal wilayats of Al Wusta-

Al Duqm and Mahout with a number of beaches.

The most important of which is Al Lokbi. The distance between Al Lokbi and Al Kahl is about 40 kilometres.

It encompasses spectacular places including Rima, Wadi Runeb and Al Khadra. Beaches of the wilayat are reputed for pure water such as the Madher beach.

These beaches have many necessary services and residential

units with modern equipment.

The beaches stretch for vast distances along the Arabian Sea and are famous for their cleanliness and purity.

This resulted in increase of marine plants which give the water its green colour. Many birds fly past the area during migration.

The moderate climate, influenced by the annual autumn season in Dhofar, aids growth of a variety of plants.

Omantel a key partner with NBC in the “Ideation Program”

The program seeks to invest in youth ideas

Muscat, Nov 10, 2020 – Omantel, the leading national provider of integrated telecommunications services in Oman, has announced its key contribution to the “Innovation Idea” program in a bid to enable youth to invest and discuss their ideas for the second successive year. The program is implemented in partnership with the National Business Centre (NBC), which is under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn, and Global Retail Company (GRC) as part of OM.HUB entrepreneurship platform. A large number of youngsters are taking part in the program in order to crystallize their ideas and turn them into organized business projects that are viable.

This year’s outcome is three youth projects, the first titled Musleh owned by Hamad bin Ali Al-Mahrouqi, a smart application to provide home maintenance services in plumbing, electrical failures, and maintenance of air conditioners by experienced and highly skilled Omani technicians. Yasmine Bint Hamdan Al Shaqsi came second with an innovative drive-through shopping project that allows shopping comfortably and efficiently through the car without the need to stepping off. In the third place, the announced winner is Imanbint Mohammed Al Hashimi for the idea of establishing a recruitment platform offering part-time necessary domestic and cleaning services and answering various requests to contribute to the provision of job opportunities for job seekers.

“At Omantel, we believe in the youth to do their role and bear their responsibilities in this society” said Laila Al Wahaibi, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility at Omantel. “Omantel, as part of its CSR program, always invest in the youth and help them enhance their capabilities to maximize their contribution to the welfare of their society. The ‘Ideation Program’ in partnership with the National Business Centre (NBC), which is affiliated



to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn and Global Retail Company (GRC) as part of OM.HUB entrepreneurship platform seeks to provide young entrepreneurs with a healthy business environment that can promote and enhance their creativity. This will provide many business opportunities and open new horizons, which will generate many knowledge-based ideas. It will also help in promoting digitalization and knowledge-based society.”

She also added “We also believe that when these ideas are provided with a conducive environment, they can be easily turned into viable projects that can be later developed and nurtured. We are delighted with the ideas we received in the

program this year and those evaluated and well coached. Three best ideas are chosen to work on and support to be transformed into real projects. Our support to the program is part of Omantel’s strategy to supporting Omani youth to reach new levels, and provide them with the healthy milieu that can promote their talents and maximize their contribution to our society.”

Rashid bin Hamad Al Alawi, Director of Business Development Department and National Business Center, stressed the importance of the program in promoting youth capabilities by hosting new creative ideas to prepare a business plan that helped ideas’ owners to implement their projects. “This will be done through several of e-training

workshops using the available technology” he said. “The ‘Ideation Program’ aspires to support these creative ideas and help to shape business plans that allow the participants to establish their projects. The program comprises intensive remote training workshops to stimulate creativity and innovation, focusing on the significance of planning and preparing market research, highlighting how to attract new investments, and conducting individual remote mentoring sessions for each participant to develop their ideas through effective methods. Therefore, our partnership with Omantel was inevitable due to the company’s role in leading the digital transformation in Oman.”

The “Ideation Program” comes in a bid to activate the entrepreneurship platform OM.HUB and open new visions and opportunities to start their ventures. The program also seeks to help the government in its initiatives to promote the entrepreneurship sector, which is one of the

promising sectors in the Sultanate. The program also endeavors to generate knowledge, innovation and, Fourth Industrial Revolution-based ideas to help our society keep pace with modern technologies and development.

Commenting on the ideas generated by the program, Hamad bin Ali bin Hamad Al-Mahrouqi, winner of the first place, said: “Believing young entrepreneurs ideas’ and organizing such special programs that take care of them is the most significant catalyst to take advantage of the potential of young entrepreneurs and motivate them to employ them realistically and contribute to the opening of broad horizons refined from our experiences at an early age, and the most significant incentive is the support of large national companies and institutions such as Omantel, Madan and the National Business Center, and we should take advantage of these opportunities and get off the go”.

Imanbint Mohammed Al Hashimi, winner of the third place on the idea of establishing a partial employment platform to provide necessary domestic services, said: “This initiative is a step in the early stages to motivate the owners of ideas to submit their projects and present them for evaluation and discussion along with a wide range of different ideas besides the accompanying discussions and training programs that enhance the idea, and I am grateful to be one of the dozens of young people who managed to pass the first stage, a phase that has reduced a lot of effort to the next work to implement the project.”

It’s worth mentioning, OMHUB platform is a center that contains all the needs to organize and launch entrepreneur’s support programs at various stages of start-ups, from developing ideas to leading projects to accelerating the growth of existing companies.



Jordanians vote to elect new parliament

AMMAN: Jordanians went to the polls on Tuesday to vote for a new parliament, even as the kingdom struggles to contain an outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

More than 4.6 million people are registered to elect the 130-member House of Representatives.

Voter Rehab Mostafa, 60, said she is worried about the surge in daily infections in recent weeks, but was encouraged by rules imposed by the authorities.

“I am worried, but everything is organized here”, the mother of 10 told dpa after casting her ballot in eastern Amman.

The Independent Election Commission has introduced precautions to ensure social-distancing and prevent overcrowding.

Face masks are required for voters if they want to enter polling stations. Each person is to be given gloves and a pen.

Voters’ identifications are being scanned electronically. Individuals no longer dip their fingers in ink, the usual measure to prevent people from casting multiple

ballots. Instead, officials mark voters’ fingers using a dropper.

“It is going smoothly, everybody is wearing face masks and officials are ensuring physical distancing inside”, Bashir Nabil, a 26-year-old engineer, said.

Observers expected turnout to be low amid widespread criticism of the government’s handling of the pandemic and apathy to the political process.

Some are angry that the polls were not postponed, given the kingdom has imposed frequent weekend lockdowns, extended a night-time curfew and closed schools and some business activities. Nabil said he hopes the lawmakers in the new parliament will work to eradicate corruption in particular.

“I hope they at least try to implement parts of their electoral programmes, because the problem is that many only repeat slogans, so I hope the ones I voted for are responsible”, Nabil added.

Prime Minister Bisher al Khasawneh praised “the smooth process” after casting his ballot in the city of Aydayn.



A woman gets her finger stained after casting her vote in Amman. – AFP

“The pandemic is an additional challenge to the election commission’s work organising and supervising impartial, transparent

and free elections”, Al Khasawneh told reporters.

“We hope this experience produces a parliament that can

meet the aspirations of the people and the country’s leader”, he added, referring to King Abdullah.

The next parliament is

expected to face public anger related to several issues, including the economic repercussion of the coronavirus, evidenced by a soaring unemployment rate that stood at 23 per cent in the second quarter. Jordan’s economy is expected to contract by 3.7 per cent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund.

It will also be expected to respond to the regional changes expected after the US-brokered normalisation deals between Israel and Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Jordan hosts 2.3 million Palestinian refugees.

There are 294 lists this year, which include more than 1,600 candidates vying for seats in 23 electoral districts.

A four-day lockdown will begin later on Tuesday, after which people will not be allowed to leave their houses, to prevent large gatherings and celebrations by the winning candidates.

Jordan has recorded more than 110,000 coronavirus infections and 1,295 people have died of the virus, 98 per cent of them during the past two months. — AFP



The Palestinian national flag flies at half mast in the centre of the West Bank city of Hebron on Tuesday. – AFP

Palestinians mourn Erekat

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas declared a three-day mourning period following the death of top official Saeb Erekat, 65, on Tuesday.

Erekat died following complications related to COVID-19, after contracting the virus last month.

He had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and a lung transplant in the US in 2017.

Erekat was one of the most visible Palestinian officials on the world stage and a top aide to

President Mahmud Abbas. He served as the secretary general of the executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

As his condition deteriorated, Erekat was transferred from his West Bank home town of Jericho to Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem in mid-October.

The Jerusalem hospital said in a statement that Erekat had died in the intensive care unit.

Palestinian flags will be flown at half-mast in honour of Erekat, Abbas said.

“The departure of our

brother and friend, the great fighter, Doctor Saeb Erekat, represents a great loss for Palestine and our people, and we feel deeply saddened by his loss, especially in light of these difficult circumstances facing the Palestinian cause”, said the president.

Abbas remembered Erekat as a “patriotic leader and the great fighter who played a big role in raising the banner of Palestine high and defending the rights of our people and their national constants in all international forums.” — dpa

Lebanon back in lockdown over coronavirus uptick

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s caretaker prime minister on Tuesday announced a fresh two-week lockdown to stem the spread of coronavirus despite a grinding economic crisis that has already battered businesses.

“We’ve reached a stage of critical danger as private and public hospitals don’t have the capacity to receive severe cases”, Hassan Diab said in a televised address.

He said the lockdown, with limited exemptions, would go into force from Saturday until November 30.

The outgoing premier, who stepped down in the wake of a devastating August 4 explosion at Beirut’s port, said some industries will be excluded from restrictions.

The health sector and other vital industries would also be allowed to operate, he said, without providing details.

The airport too will remain open, Lebanese media cited the Higher Defence Council as saying.

Lebanon, a country of six million people has recorded



Lebanon will impose a nationwide lockdown between November 14 and 30 due to an alarming surge in the number of COVID-19 infections. – AFP

more than 95,000 COVID-19 cases, including 732 deaths since February.

The number of new cases soared last week with the daily virus tally hitting unprecedented highs several days in a row.

A first country-wide lockdown imposed in March was effective in stemming the spread of the virus, and restrictions were gradually lifted as summer beckoned people outdoors.

But Diab on Tuesday said the blast at Beirut’s port had led Lebanon to “lose control” over its COVID-19 outbreak.

The explosion killed more than 200 people, wounded at least 6,500 others and overwhelmed hospitals in Beirut.

The World Health Organization said at the end of October that 88 per cent of Lebanon’s 306 intensive care beds were occupied. — AFP

ANKARA

New finance chief vows ‘market-friendly’ course

Turkey’s new Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan pledged on Tuesday to pursue “market-friendly” policies and rein in inflation after taking over from President Recept Tayyip Erdogan’s son-in-law.

Elvan’s comments came less than a day after Erdogan stunned the markets and some top officials by accepting the resignation of Berat Albayrak — the husband of the president’s elder daughter Esra — and replacing the beleaguered head of the central



bank.

The unexpected shakeup helped the Turkish lira on Monday gain more than five percent against the dollar after losing nearly a third of its value since the start of the year.

DAMASCUS

EU shuns Russian-backed refugee talks

The European Union will not take part in a Russian-backed conference organised by Syria’s President Bashar al Assad to promote the return of refugees, the EU’s top diplomat said on Tuesday.

More than half of Syria’s population have fled their homes since civil war erupted in 2011, and some 5.5 million are sheltering abroad, mainly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

But Assad’s forces now hold 70 per cent of the country and



he wants to hold a two-day conference in Damascus from Wednesday on bringing Syrians home. Russia’s President Vladimir Putin has backed the idea.

TEHRAN

100,000 coronavirus tests per day

Iran plans to more than double the number of coronavirus tests it carries out daily to 100,000, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said on Tuesday, as the total number of detected cases surpassed 700,000 in the Middle East’s worst-affected country.

Both the daily death toll and the number of new cases were near record highs. Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV that 453 people had died from COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, pushing the death toll to



39,202. She said 10,339 new cases were detected, lifting the total tally to 703,288. “Tests have now increased from 25,000 to 40,000 per day and will soon increase to 100,000 with... rapid tests”, said Namaki, quoted by the state news agency IRNA.

In brief

■ HANOI

VIRTUAL PREP
MEETINGS FOR ASEAN
SUMMIT OPEN

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh on Tuesday chaired informal ASEAN ministerial meetings to prepare for the 37th ASEAN Summit and related meetings, scheduled to take place online from Thursday to Sunday.

The leaders from 10 member states, the ASEAN secretary-general, the United Nations secretary-general and the managing director of the International Monetary Fund will attend the virtual summit. Initially Vietnam had tried to convince leaders to meet in person in Da nang, but a virtual format was eventually agreed on.

■ BANGKOK

PANDEMIC RESULTS IN
MILLIONS OF NEW WEB

Coronavirus-related curbs have led to a spike in first-time Internet users across six South-East Asian countries, according to a Google report published on Tuesday.

Forty million people went online for the first time in 2020, according to the report, which covered Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

This year's net novices made up almost one-third of the region's 140 million new users since 2015 and amounted to four times as many as in 2019. The report, co-authored by Temasek and Bain and Company, said that the novel coronavirus pandemic resulted in "big shifts" in Internet use "across the region."

■ NEW DELHI

AIR QUALITY PLUNGES
TO WORST LEVEL

Air quality in India's capital deteriorated to its worst this year on Tuesday prompting a social media barrage of residents complaining about stinging eyes, sore throat and breathlessness in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic.

Delhi's overall air quality index, which measures pollutants including PM2.5 particles, rose to 488, its highest level in a year, according to government data.

That was up from 477 on a scale of 500 on Monday. The data showed the deadly particulate matter PM2.5, which can cause cardiovascular and respiratory diseases such as lung cancer, also reached its highest levels since November 2019 and stood 30 times over the World Health Organization's safe limit.

China's remote glaciers
melting at 'shocking' pace

QILIAN MOUNTAINS: Glaciers in China's bleak Qilian mountains are disappearing at a shocking rate as global warming brings unpredictable change and raises the prospect of crippling, long-term water shortages, scientists say.

The largest glacier in the 800-km mountain chain on the arid northeastern edge of the Tibetan plateau has retreated about 450 metres since the 1950s, when researchers set up China's first monitoring station to study it.

The 20-square kilometre glacier, known as Laohugou No 12, is criss-crossed by rivulets of water down its craggy, grit-blown surface. It has shrunk by about 7 per cent since measurements began, with melting accelerating in recent years, scientists say.

Equally alarming is the loss of thickness, with about 13 metres of ice disappearing as temperatures have risen, said Qin Xiang, the director at the monitoring station.

"The speed that this glacier has been shrinking is really shocking," Qin said on a recent visit to the spartan station in a frozen, treeless world, where he and a small team of researchers track the changes.

The Tibetan plateau is known as the world's Third Pole for the amount of ice long locked in the high-altitude wilderness. But since the 1950s, average temperatures in the area have



Meltwater flows over the Laohugou No 12 glacier in the Qilian mountains. — Reuters

risen about 1.5 degrees Celsius, Qin said, and with no sign of an end to warming, the outlook is grim for the 2,684 glaciers in the Qilian range.

Across the mountains, glacier retreat was 50 per cent faster in 1990-2010 than it was from 1956 to 1990, data from the China Academy of Sciences shows.

"When I first came here in 2005, the glacier was around that point there where the river bends," Qin said, pointing to where the rock-strewn slopes of

the Laohugou valley channel the winding river to lower ground.

The flow of water in a stream near the terminus of the Laohugou No 12 runoff is about double what it was 60 years ago, Qin said. Further downstream, near Dunhuang, once a major junction on the ancient Silk Road, water flowing out of the mountains has formed a lake in the desert for the first time in 300 years, state media reported.

Global warming is also blamed for changes in the weather that

have brought other unpredictable conditions. Snowfall and rain has at times been much less than normal, so even though the melting glaciers have brought more runoff, farmers downstream can still face water shortages for their crops of onions and corn and for their animals.

Large sections of the Shule river, on the outskirts of Dunhuang, were either dry or reduced to murky patches of pool, isolated in desert scrub when Reuters visited in September. — Reuters

■ INDIA FACTORY FIRES



Firefighters try to control a blaze caught in a chemical factory in Kolkata on Tuesday. A massive fire was also reported earlier in the day at a chemical factory near Bangalore. — AFP

Woman cop blinded for getting a job

KABUL: The last thing 33-year-old Khatera saw were the three men on a motorcycle who attacked her just after she left her job at a police station in Afghanistan's central Ghazni province, shooting at her and stabbing her with a knife in the eyes.

Waking up in hospital, everything was dark. "I asked the doctors, why I can't see anything? They told me that my eyes are still bandaged because of the wounds. But at that moment, I knew my eyes had been taken from me," she said.

She and local authorities blame the attack on Taliban militants — who deny involvement — and say the assailants acted on a tip-off from her father who vehemently opposed her working outside the



home.

For Khatera, the attack caused not just the loss of her sight but the loss of a dream she had battled to achieve — to have an independent career.

She joined the Ghazni police as an officer in its crime branch a few months ago. "I wish I had served in police at least a year.

If this had happened to me after that, it would have been less painful. It happened too soon... I only got to work and live my dream for three months," she said.

The attack on Khatera, who only uses one name, is indicative of a growing trend, human rights activists say, of an intense and often violent backlash against women taking jobs, especially in public roles. In Khatera's case, being a police officer could have also angered the Taliban.

The rights activists believe a mix of Afghanistan's conservative social norms and an emboldened Taliban gaining influence while the United States withdraws its troops from the country is driving the escalation. — Reuters



Demonstrators march in Bangkok. — Reuters

Thai PM
urges calm

BANGKOK: Thai Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha urged calm from all sides on Tuesday as tensions rise between groups of protesters calling for reforms.

The kingdom has for months seen massive demonstrations led by student leaders calling for democratic reforms, with some bolder figures issuing challenges to the government.

Prayut — whose removal from office is one of the movement's key demands — said on Tuesday all sides are entitled to "express their opinions" — as long as it is within the law.

"A confrontation is not the way to solve a problem," he said after a cabinet meeting.

"I urge all sides to refrain from clashing and from breaking the law so excessively whereby the authorities would have to use every measure to enforce the law."

Prayut's call comes two days after police deployed water cannon as a "warning" against protesters attempting to deliver letters to King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

It was only the second time such tactics were used.

— AFP

Trump mounts legal assault as Barr OKs vote fraud probes

WASHINGTON/WILMINGTON: President Donald Trump will push ahead on Tuesday with longshot legal challenges to his loss to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden in last week's election, as Republican officials at the state and federal level lined up behind him.

Pennsylvania Republican state lawmakers plan to call for an audit of the results in the state that gave Biden enough electoral votes to win, the day after US Attorney General William Barr told federal prosecutors to look into "substantial" allegations of irregularities.

Trump for months before the election made repeated claims without providing evidence that results would be marred by fraud and has kept up those unfounded allegations over the past week. Judges have tossed out lawsuits in Michigan and Georgia, and experts say Trump's legal efforts have little chance of changing the election result.

But Congress's top Republican, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, lined up behind Trump, saying that he was "100 per cent within his rights to look into allegations of irregularities," without citing any evidence.

The dispute is slowing Biden's work in preparing for the work of governing, as a Trump appointee who heads the office charged with recognising election results has not yet done so. Biden on Saturday secured the more than the 270 votes in the Electoral College needed to win the presidency.

He also led Trump in the popular vote by 4.6 million votes on Tuesday as states continued to count the remaining ballots.



Supporters of US President Donald Trump gather at a 'Stop the Steal' protest in Phoenix. – Reuters

As Biden begins work on his transition, his team is considering legal action over a federal agency's delay in recognising his victory over Trump. The General Services Administration normally recognises a presidential candidate when it becomes clear who has won so a transition of power can begin. But that has not yet happened and the law does not spell out when the GSA must act. GSA Administrator Emily Murphy, appointed by Trump in 2017, has not yet determined that "a winner is clear," a spokeswoman said.

BARR MOVE PROMPTS RESIGNATION

Barr's directive to prosecutors prompted the top lawyer overseeing voter fraud investigations to resign in protest. Barr told prose-

cutors that "fanciful or far-fetched claims" should not be a basis for investigation and his letter did not indicate the Justice Department had uncovered voting irregularities affecting the outcome of the election.

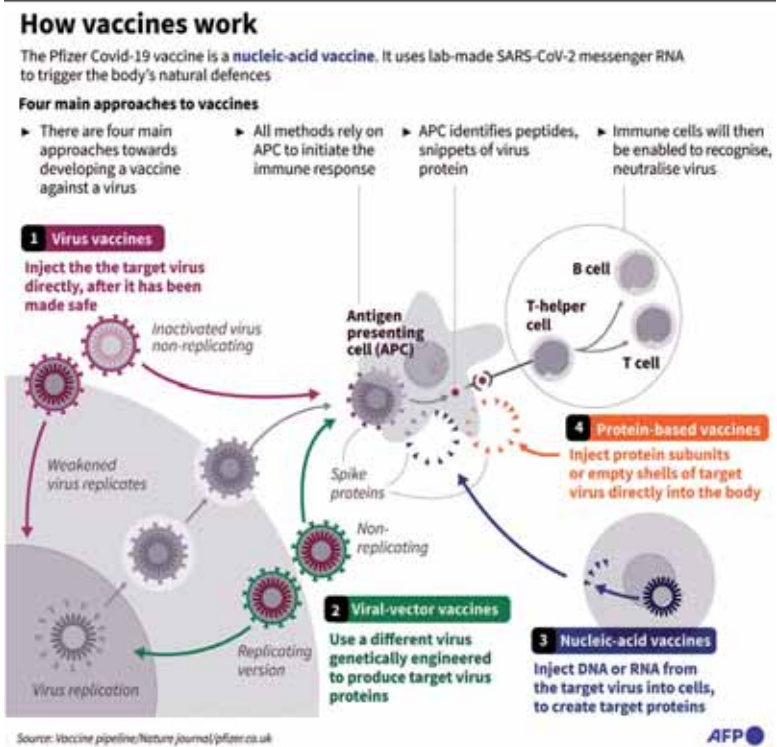
But he did say he was authorising prosecutors to "pursue substantial allegations" of irregularities of voting and the counting of ballots. Richard Pilger, who for years has served as director of the Election Crimes Branch, said in an internal email he was resigning from his post after he read "the new policy and its ramifications".

The previous Justice Department policy, designed to avoid interjecting the federal government into election campaigns, had discouraged overt investigations

"until the election in question has been concluded, its results certified, and all recounts and election contests concluded."

Biden's campaign said Barr was fueling Trump's far-fetched allegations of fraud. "Those are the very kind of claims that the president and his lawyers are making unsuccessfully everyday, as their lawsuits are laughed out of one court after another," said Bob Bauer, a senior adviser to Biden.

One of Barr's predecessors as attorney general, Republican Alberto Gonzales, told CNN on Tuesday the timing of Barr's memo was "very, very unfortunate" because it contributes to the perception that the Justice Department was being used for political purposes. — Reuters



Expert sees multiple virus vaccines early next year

LONDON: A leading scientific adviser to the British government said on Tuesday he expects several coronavirus vaccines to have been approved by early 2021, allowing life to begin to return to normal.

John Bell, professor of medicine at Oxford University, told lawmakers that Monday's announcement by US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer that its vaccine candidate was effective in treating patients was likely just the start.

Bell, a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) said the news signalled other leading potential vaccines in late-stage trials could prove similarly effective.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we hit the new year with two or three vaccines all of which could be distributed," he told a parliamentary hearing.

"I'm quite optimistic of getting enough vaccinations done in the first quarter of next year that by spring things will start to look much more normal than they do now."

Bell added he believed there was a 70 to 80 per cent chance of that scenario unfolding.

Pfizer said tests of its vaccine developed with German partner BioNTech involving more than 40,000 people had been 90 per cent effective and was a "critical milestone" in the bid to counter the virus.

It is one of 10 in late-stage trials around the world, which have so far shown promising results.

The British government has

Pfizer said tests of its vaccine developed with German partner BioNTech involving more than 40,000 people had been 90 per cent effective

reserved 40 million doses of the drug, which Bell expects could receive regulatory approval within three weeks.

"We're talking about mid-December I think we should be ready to administer this vaccine," he added.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave the news a cautious welcome on Monday, noting it was still "very, very early days" and vaccinating swathes of the UK population was "still some way off".

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said on Tuesday that Britain's state-run National Health Service (NHS) was up to the challenge of delivering any vaccine that gets approved with the help of the armed forces.

"The NHS is absolutely ready to do this," he told the BBC, adding that officials had been told to prepare to start administering the vaccine from early December.

The government plans to prioritise access to the drug, starting with the "most vulnerable, people living in care homes and of course the staff looking after them, NHS and social care staff and then coming down through the age ranges," he added. — AFP

Hurricane season breaks named storm record

PARIS: This year's hurricane season has seen a record 29 named tropical storms wreak havoc across the southeastern United States, the Caribbean and Central America, experts said on Tuesday.

The cyclonic storms, which are given named status in the Atlantic when their wind speeds exceed 62 kilometres per hour, have already displaced thousands and caused close to \$20 billion of damage.

The US National Hurricane Center tweeted that tropical storm Theta had become the 29th event to be named this season,



A man walks along a street after the passage of hurricane Eta. – AFP

beating the previous record of 28 in 2005 — the year Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.

The NHC was even forced to switch to the Greek alphabet after 2020's storms exhausted its list of Latin names.

Experts said climate change was helping to increase ocean temperatures, rendering the cyclones more powerful.

They said 2020's increase in named storms could also be connected to a regional reduction in air pollution over the central Atlantic since the 1980s, as well as the La Nina weather cycle.

— AFP

COPENHAGEN

Legal bungle behind mink virus cull

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen apologised on Tuesday and admitted there was no legal basis for a mass mink cull after a mutated version of the coronavirus was found in the animals.

Some farmers with healthy mink stocks had protested against the ordered nationwide slaughter, saying there was no legal foundation for them to kill the carnivorous mammals.

Denmark was the world's biggest exporter of mink fur,



with an estimated 15-17 million minks.

"Even if we were in a rush, it should have been completely clear to us that new legislation was required, and it was not. I apologise for that," Frederiksen told parliament.

LONDON

Belarus diplomats expelled in retaliatory move

The UK on Tuesday expelled two Belarusian diplomats "in response to the unjustified expulsion" of its two diplomats by Minsk on Monday, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced.

"We have sent a clear message today to Lukashenko's regime that their unjustified expulsion of British diplomats has consequences," he said in a statement.

"The UK will continue to hold the Belarusian authorities to account for the rigged election in August and their ongoing use of violence to suppress the Belarusian people."

Belarus declared two senior British diplomats "persona non grata," a foreign ministry spokesman said on television on Monday, citing the "destructive nature" of their activities.

Shortly after the move, Britain labelled the expulsions "totally unjustified" and accused de facto President Alexander Lukashenko of bullying those contesting his controversial re-election.

ABIDJAN

8,000 flee abroad over troubled elections

More than 8,000 Ivorians have fled to neighbouring countries, fearing violence linked to the October 31 presidential election, the UN refugee agency said on Tuesday.

The tally a week earlier was just 3,200 refugees, it said, adding that more than half of the arrivals are children, some of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

Older people and pregnant women are also among the exodus, "most carrying just a few



belongings and little to no food or money," it said in a statement.

As of Monday, more than 7,500 of the total had arrived in Liberia, the agency, known as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said.

No complacency, abide the law

Even as the number of COVID-19 cases started plummeting and signs of a vaccine to fight the pandemic are progressing, we have to grapple with the fact that whether life will be the same as it was before the pandemic or not. Unfortunately, many of us do not have a clear answer to this yet.

While life has already changed for millions, others are still finding to garner enough strength to recover from the shock of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus that has shattered their lives. Some of them are optimistic, some not. And thousands are still falling prey to the microbe even though the enormity of the cases has mellowed down.

Unlike in the past, when the world had been a witness to a number of health crises like Spanish Flu or any other calamities, this time it is different. COVID-19 has, undoubtedly, caused a massive shake-up of our daily lives from battles on the frontlines to social distancing from our kith and kin.

Millions have lost their jobs



Samuel Kutty
samkuttyobserver@gmail.com

COVID-19 HAS,
UNDOUBTEDLY,
CAUSED A
MASSIVE SHAKE-
UP OF OUR DAILY
LIVES

worldwide. Robust economies of a few months ago have hurtled towards a crash. Salary cuts have become the new norm. The poor have become poorer. Few are reporting on the misery of the middle class, whose financial struggles are frequently hidden behind gaudy lifestyles.

We are now living under a new health protocol, in addition to the new normal of work from home and remote education to our children. At the same time, we have developed a number of positive attitudes in our habits and behaviours that we have been forced to learn because of the pandemic.

Awareness on personal and public hygiene measures have witnessed a surge thanks to the contagion. Social distancing measures are in place. People are getting used to wearing face masks when going out of their homes.

People are progressively becoming less important to businesses than machines and the electronic protocol. Apps and their killer applications of every kind apart, digital and zero-touch have already become the new

mantra for the new world ahead of us.

In the pre-pandemic globalised world, we enjoyed a certain level of trust we mostly took for granted. We could travel almost without limitations, meet people without restrictions and order products worldwide.

Now our airports, airlines, hotels, restaurants and the retail trade of every kind have already adopted the new protocols.

Most businesses that were manned by smiling faces and handshakes in the past are now zero-touch and non-human. All the more, we will have to reorient our jobs, career, domain and the like.

The current saga of sufferings will come to an end without doubt. We will get back to our lives and visit the great outdoors. The situation is a challenge to our lives.

But at the same time we should not leave any room for complacency, and that's why we should all continue to abide by the rules and why we will consider very carefully whether we need to take any further steps.

EARLY BATTLE

Will enough people take COVID-19 vaccine?

JOHN MILLER & KATE KELLAND

With COVID-19 vaccine trial results looking positive, governments and pharmaceutical firms face their next daunting challenge: Convincing the world to get inoculated. Public resistance to vaccines has been much discussed this year, but the issue became very real on Monday when Pfizer and BioNTech announced their candidate was more than 90 per cent effective in large trials — hoisting an actual shot onto the horizon.

Numerous opinion polls carried out before and during the pandemic showed confidence is volatile, and that political polarization and online misinformation threatens uptake. Many people have concerns about the accelerated speed of COVID-19 vaccine development.

The World Health Organization estimates about 70 per cent of people must be inoculated to break transmission of the virus. Since it is unlikely a vaccine, once approved, will be immediately available for the masses, experts said getting medical workers on board will be critical.

“We should have really targeted discussions and engagement with healthcare providers”, Heidi

Larson, Director of the global Vaccine Confidence Project, said. “Not only are they going to be the first ones expected to get a vaccine — if not required to — they’re also going to be the ones on the frontlines facing the onslaught of questions from the public.”

While about 200 COVID-19 vaccine candidates are in development globally, with dozens in human clinical trials, no shot has actually crossed the finish line and been approved, though the one from Pfizer-BioNTech appears to be on track.

The high rate of efficacy in the

“We should have really targeted discussions and engagement with healthcare providers. Not only are they going to be the first ones expected to get a vaccine — they’re also going to be the ones on the frontlines facing the onslaught of questions from the public”

HEIDI LARSON
Director, Vaccine Confidence Project

Pfizer-BioNTech interim results could help boost confidence, Cornell University government Professors Douglas Kriner and Sarah Kreps said. Their recently published research showed that if an initial COVID-19 vaccine was about as effective as a flu shot, uptake by the American public may fall far short of the 70 per cent level needed to achieve “herd immunity”.

“However, if the vaccine was 90 per cent effective it would significantly increase Americans’ willingness to vaccinate by more than 10 per cent, critical to ensuring enough public acceptance to help the US eventually get closer to herd immunity”, said Kreps.

Experts are also cautioning any conversation over a vaccine’s risks and rewards must be frank. A return to normal life will still take time, with no one shot likely to be a silver bullet. And many questions are likely to remain, including how long a vaccine will provide protection.

The Reagan-Udall Foundation for the FDA, a non-profit that supports the US Food and Drug Administration, has been holding focus groups to gauge the public mood and is now crafting campaign messages to help tackle concerns.

— Reuters

KEY INTERLOCUTOR

Saeb Erekat: Eloquent tactician and a champion of Palestinian cause

JAN-UWE RONNEBURGER

Hardly any other Palestinian leader had more experience with Middle Eastern peace talks than Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s secretary general, who died on Tuesday at the age of 65.

Described by those close to him as intelligent and effective in his approach, the studied political scientist Erekat was in charge of the peace negotiations with Israel in the early 1990s. The Palestinian’s lead negotiator was born in 1955 in Abu Dis, a suburb of East Jerusalem, to a large upper class Palestinian family. He spent most of his later life living in the autonomous Palestinian desert city of Jericho.

While Erekat could not speak Hebrew, he was fluent in English, allowing him to pointedly articulate the Palestinian position in interviews with Western broadcasters. He studied in San Francisco in the United States and in the northern English city of Bradford, where he earned a doctorate in peace and conflict studies. He later said it first became clear to him during his time in Britain that the Middle East conflict could not be solved with violence.

Returning to the Palestinian Territories, he became a political science professor at the University of Nablus. Erekat first joined the peace process as deputy head of the Palestinian delegation during the 1991 Madrid talks with Israel. Though he was not involved in the secret US-brokered talks that led to the 1993 Oslo interim peace accords, he was brought back on board shortly afterwards by late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Erekat then served as the chief



This file picture shows Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and Saeb Erakat (R) after a meeting in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el Sheikh. — AFP

EREKAT WAS
INVOLVED IN THE
MIDDLE EAST PEACE
PROCESS PERHAPS
LONGER THAN
ANYONE ELSE

negotiator for talks with Israel from 1995, with only a few short disruptions. A moderate and fervent supporter of diplomacy, Erekat was considered a tough negotiating partner who remained loyal to the guidelines set out for him by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Political observers in Ramallah say Erekat had no decision-making power of his own, but he had considerable influence on President Mahmud

Abbas. Erekat was a close follower of Abbas’ predecessor, PLO Chairman Arafat, who died in 2004.

After Abbas made Erekat secretary general of the PLO’s executive committee in 2015, many predicted he could become a successor to Abbas himself.

In recent years, Erekat was suffering from poor health, travelling to the US for a lung transplant following lung disease in October 2017.

— dpa

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Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,
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Mumbai romp to fifth IPL crown

CAPTAIN ROHIT HITS 68 TO STEER MI TO 5-WICKET WIN; BOULT RESTRICTS DELHI

DUBAI: Brilliant hostile bowling led by Kiwi Trent Boult took Mumbai Indians to an emphatic five-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals and a fifth Indian Premier League title on Tuesday.

Boult struck twice in his first two overs as Mumbai kept Delhi to 156-7 and the reigning champions raced to the target in 18.4 overs with skipper Rohit Sharma hitting 68.

Sharma, 33, led the chase in his 200th IPL appearance to inspire the most successful team in the Twenty20 tournament to add to triumphs in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.

Boult took opener Marcus Stoinis with the first ball of the final in Dubai, giving the upstart Delhi side a grim warning of the tough night ahead in the empty stadium.

Ajinkya Rahane was caught behind for two in Boult's next over. Jasprit Bumrah's fiery

pace also kept Delhi in check.

Mumbai brought in off-spinner Jayant Yadav to bowl the fourth over and he immediately bowled in-form opener, Shikhar Dhawan, for 15.

SHREYAS HITS FIFTY

Delhi skipper Shreyas Iyer, who made an unbeaten 65, and Rishabh Pant rebuilt the innings with a partnership of 96.

But Australian paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile took Pant's wicket for 56 — his first fifty of a disappointing season.

Boult got Shimron Hetmyer for five with a slower short ball and he returned figures of 3-30 from four overs of devastating left-arm pace.

Iyer went past 500 runs in a season for the first time but Delhi managed just 38 runs in the last five overs, with the loss of three wickets, and Mumbai

SCOREBOARD	
DELHI CAPITALS	
M Stoinis c Q de Kock b T Boult.....	0
S Dhawan b J Yadav.....	15
A Rahane c Q de Kock b T Boult.....	2
S Iyer not out.....	65
R Pant c H Pandya b Coulter-Nile.....	56
S Hetmyer c Coulter-Nile b T Boult.....	5
A Patel c (sub) b Coulter-Nile.....	9
EXTRAS (1lb, 3w).....	4
TOTAL (20 overs).....	156-7
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-0, 2-16, 3-22, 4-118, 5-137, 6-149, 7-156	
BOWLING: Trent Boult 4-0-30-3, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-28-0, Jayant Yadav 4-0-25-1, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-29-2, Krunal Pandya 3-0-30-0, Kieron Pollard 1-0-13-0	
MUMBAI INDIANS	
Rohit Sharma c (sub) b A Nortje.....	68
Q de Kock c R Pant b M Stoinis.....	20
S Yadav run out (P Dubey).....	19
I Kishan not out.....	33
K Pollard b K Rabada.....	9
H Pandya c A Rahane b A Nortje.....	3
K Pandya not out.....	1
EXTRAS (4lb).....	4
TOTAL (18.4 overs).....	157-5
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-45, 2-90, 3-137, 4-147, 5-156	
BOWLING: Ravichandran Ashwin 4-0-28-0, Kagiso Rabada 3-0-32-1, Anrich Nortje 2-4-0-25-2, Marcus Stoinis 2-0-23-1, Axar Patel 4-0-16-0, Praveen Dubey 3-0-29-0	

quickly took control of the run chase.

Sharma and Quinton de Kock set a blistering pace with 45 runs in the first 25 balls before De Kock was caught behind off Stoinis for 20. Later Suryakumar Yadav was run out for 19 in a mix-up with Sharma.

Sharma hit four sixes and five fours in his 51-ball innings and nearly finished the game off with Ishan Kishan but fell to South African quick Anrich Nortje just before the end.

Kishan stood firm with his unbeaten 33 as Mumbai got the better of Delhi for the fourth time this year, including a drubbing in the first semi-final qualifier.

Delhi fast bowler Kagiso Rabada took the wicket of Kieron Pollard, for nine, to lead this season's bowling rankings with 30 scalps over Mumbai's Bumrah on 27.





Garcia out of Masters after positive COVID-19 test

Former champion Sergio Garcia pulled out of this week's Masters tournament on Monday after testing positive for COVID-19. Garcia said he began experiencing a sore throat and a cough on Saturday while he was driving back from the Houston Open, where he missed the cut, and got tested on Sunday.



Rashid Khan set for T20 spell with Sussex

English county side Sussex have re-signed the world's number one Twenty20 bowler Rashid Khan for next year's T20 Blast. The Afghanistan leg-spinner played for the county in 2018 and 2019, but did not return this year due to calendar clashes related to the coronavirus pandemic. "I am really happy to be heading back to Sussex for the 2021 Blast," he said.

OOC BOARD MEETING



OOC reviews preparation of OCA meeting

MUSCAT: Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) Board of Directors held the sixth meeting this year under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed Al Busaidy, OOC Chairman, where many important issues were discussed, including the approval of holding the Ordinary General Assembly for this year next December.

The Board discussed the ongoing preparations for holding a meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia in Muscat next December. The committee will be represented in the meeting by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, and Shaikh Badr bin Ali al Rawas, board member.

As for foreign participation, the council has assigned the work

team formed by the Planning and Following-up Committee to follow up on the sports federations and committees that have expressed their desire to participate in the regional, continental and international competitions for the next year, and to contribute to preparing the teams by developing plans and programmes for each federation and committee and standing on their preparations and the extent of their readiness.

The schedule includes the 32nd Olympic Games (Tokyo 2021), the Asian Beach Games (Sanya, China), the third GCC sports games (Kuwait), the fifth Islamic Solidarity Games (Turkey), the indoor Asian Games (Thailand) and the Asian Youth Games (China).

LTAD COACHING PROGRAMME

Shihab El Din attends Canada coaches programme

MUSCAT: National lecturer and coach Shihab al Din Ahmed al Riyami, nominated by Oman Volleyball Federation, finished the first stage of International Olympic Solidarity Programme (the Canadian Coaches Programme LTAD), from September 21 to November 5, "remotely", with a total of 100 credit hours.

Fourteen coaches from five continents participated

in the programme, and the second stage will begin in mid-November and will include 100 credit hours "remotely". As for the final stage, it will be in Montreal, Canada, and it includes 150 credit hours. It needs 350 hours for all stages of the programme to obtain the International Training Diploma in the Canadian programme for coaches, which is one of the top programmes in the world.



Steve Waugh disappointed over Kohli missing Tests in Australia

Kohli and his wife Anushka are expecting a child in January, and the Indian captain has been given permission by the BCCI to return home after the first Test in Adelaide

SYDNEY: Australian great Steve Waugh said on Tuesday he was surprised and disappointed that India captain Virat Kohli will miss three Tests to be at the birth of his first child, with his absence detracting from the blockbuster series.

The 32-year-old and his Bollywood star wife Anushka Sharma are expecting a child in January, and Kohli has been given permission by the Indian cricket board to return home after the first Test in Adelaide, which begins on December 17.

While the absence of the superstar batsman could improve Australia's chances of regaining the Border-Gavaskar trophy, it is a blow to broadcasters and cricket chiefs already feeling the effects of a pandemic-affected year.

"I'm a little bit disappointed he's not going to be there — and a bit surprised," former skipper Waugh, who played 168 Tests, said.

"This was really shaping up as one of the key series of his whole career after he's achieved just about everything. But obviously family comes first."

India are due leave this week for Australia, where they will spend two weeks in quarantine in Sydney before the first one-day international on November 27. Kohli will lead India in three ODIs, three Twenty20 internationals and the first Test — a day-night match in Adelaide — before heading



home. The second Test starts in Melbourne on December 26 followed by matches in Sydney on January 7 and Brisbane on January 15, all played under strict bio-security protocols.

Waugh said Kohli's absence "does take away from the series", but Australia would much rather he played.

"It's a bit like a couple of years ago when India won without (David) Warner or (Steve) Smith in the side," he said.

"You really want to win against the best possible opposition, particularly when this is like the heavyweight title fight."

BRAVE FACE

Cricket Australia interim chief executive Nick Hockley put a brave face on Kohli's decision, telling Sydney radio station SEN "it was always on the cards".



This was really shaping up as one of the key series of his whole career after he's achieved just about everything. But obviously family comes first

STEVE WAUGH,
Former Australian captain

"We're thrilled Virat is coming out for three ODIs, three T20s, the first-ever day-night Test against India, and we have to respect the fact he wants to be there for the birth of his first child," he said, while also admitting it was a huge disappointment.

While Kohli will miss part of the series, another key batsman, Rohit Sharma, has been added to the Test squad after being initially left out because of injury worries.

Waugh said the Indian side remained a top-quality outfit.

"They're a dangerous opponent even without Kohli and I think it's going to be a tightly contested series," he said, pinpointing Jasprit Bumrah, KL Rahul and Ajinkya Rahane as dangermen.

"I don't think there will be much between the sides."

— AFP

Winning weekend for Ideal Tech, Aflag, Ghantoot and Sam Royals

MUSCAT: Sooraj Raj's match-winning unbeaten knock helped Ideal technology to a thrilling 5-wicket win over Al Rehwan in the final over of a Division T20 game at Muscat Municipality ground 3 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Al Rehwan posted a robust 171 for 6 in 20 overs thanks to major contributions from Ayyita Valappil (62) and Mohammed Nihal (31). Sundar Biji and Umesh Karakoickal bagged two wickets each while Sooraj claimed one.

The game was evenly poised when Ideal Technology reached

106 for 4 in the 13th over but Sooraj came on to forge a vital 57-run partnership with Kadave Nikhil who was dismissed for 29. However, Sooraj batted on to see his side home, striking 35 off only 21 balls as Ideal ended the game in the final over at 174 for 5. Waseem Abbas chipped in with a breezy 32 off 17

Brief scores: (D Division T20 League): Al Rehwan 171 for 6 in 20 overs (Ayyita Valappil 62 – 5x4, 3x6, Mohammed Nihal 31 – 2x4, Kannumpurath Jibin 28 – 4x4, 1x6. Sundar Biji 2-26, Umesh Karakoickal 2-32, Sooraj Raj 1-35)

BRIEF SCORES

E DIVISION T20 LEAGUE

Aflag Group 159 for 8 in 20 overs (Junaid Iqbal 51 – 8x4, 1x6, Imran Baggad 33 not out – 4x4, Syed Osama Afaq 26 – 1x4, 1x6. Yusuf Patanwala 3-26, Issam Othman 3-23, Khalid Manzoor 2-23) beat Sketch International 157 for 9 in 20 overs (Saifee Ali Asger 73 – 9x4, Shabeer Kumdackool 22 – 1x4, Abbas Shah 3-25, Junaid Iqbal 2-11) by 2 runs. MoM: Junaid Iqbal (Aflag Group).

Ghantoot Group 173-3 in 17 overs (Tandel Kirit 81 not out – 11x4, 1x6,

Arumugam Kuppan 31 – 3x4) bt Danmark 134-8 in 17 overs (Shankar Gayathri 61 – 9x4, Sajeev Kathiresan 22 – 2x4. Muhamed Rafeek 2-26, Saravanan Manickam 2-29, Mafas Sainulabdeen 2-30) by 39 runs.

Sam Royals 162-4 in 17 overs (Pramod Kumar 62 – 7x4, 1x6, Thankachan Sinu 41 – 5x4, Mohamed Shahas 39 – 3x4, 1x6. Mohammed Siyad 2-40) bt OCTAI Nahdha 125 for 4 in 17 overs (Mohammed Siyad 72 – 11x4, Mohammed Haneef 27 – 3x4. Shejeer Abdul Rahman 2-20) by 37 runs. MoM: Pramod Kumar (Sam Royals).

lost to Ideal Technology 174 for 5 in 19.1 overs (Sooraj Raj 35 not out – 6x4, Waseem Abbas 32 – 4x4, 2x6, Kadave Nikhil 29 – 3x4) by 5 wickets. MoM: Sooraj Raj (Ideal Technology).

JUNAID POWERS AFLAG TO VICTORY

Junaid Iqbal's superb half century and 2 for 11 were the highlights of Aflag Group's nail-biting 2-run win over Sketch International in an E Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 4 on Friday. Opener Junaid topscored

with a strokeful 51 off 31 as Aflag Group collected 159 for 8 in 20 overs. Imran Baggad (33 not out) and Syed Osama Afaq (26) were the other main scorers. Yusuf Patanwala and Issam Othman claimed three wickets each. Struggling at 54 for 5, Sketch International was lifted by Saifee Ali Asger's magnificent 73 off 45, taking the team's total to 129 in the 17th over without further loss. However, lack of support from the other end led to Saifee's fall and his team fell short by two runs. Abbas Shah and Junaid Iqbal took three and two wickets respectively.



F1 unveils 23-race calendar for 2021

PARIS: Formula One unveiled a 23-race calendar for 2021 on Tuesday, its biggest ever, but the Vietnamese Grand Prix has been dropped.

The season will start in Australia on March 21 and will include the first ever race in Saudi Arabia on November 28 before the season ends a week later in Abu Dhabi.

Vietnam was to hold a street race on April 25 but doubts about the event arose after Nguyen Duc Chung, who was Hanoi’s mayor and a major supporter of the event, was arrested on corruption charges in August. In the calendar unveiled on Tuesday, the race slot was left vacant.

F1’s 2020 season was heavily disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic but is eventually being run over 17 races, with reigning champion Lewis Hamilton on course to win the title for the seventh time.

Spectators have been barred from most races this year but organisers said they expect fans to return next year.

“The plans for 2021 have

2021 F1 CALENDAR		
DATE, GRAND PRIX, VENUE		
March 21, Australia, Melbourne	Aug 29, Belgium, Spa	
March 28, Bahrain, Sakhr	Sept 5, Netherlands, Zandvoort	
April 11, China, Shanghai	Sept 12, Italy, Monza	
April 25, TBC TBC	Sept 26, Russia, Sochi	
May 9, Spain, Barcelona*	Oct 3, Singapore, Singapore	
May 23 Monaco, Monaco	Oct 10, Japan, Suzuka	
June 6, Azerbaijan, Baku	Oct 24 United States, Austin	
June 13, Canada, Montreal	Oct 31 Mexico, Mexico City	
June 27, France, Le Castellet	Nov 14, Brazil Sao Paulo*	
July 4, Austria, Spielberg	Nov 28, Saudi Arabia, Jeddah	
July 18, UK, Silverstone	Dec 5, Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi	
Aug 1, Hungary, Budapest		

- SEASON TO START IN AUSTRALIA ON MARCH 21
- FIRST RACE IN SAUDI ARABIA ON NOV 28
- VIETNAMESE GP DROPPED

involved extensive dialogue with all promoters and their local and national authorities at a time of ongoing fluidity related to the global pandemic,” F1 said in a statement.

“As we have said before, we expect fans to return for the 2021 season and for the calendar to look similar to the originally

planned 2020 season.” Saudi Arabia said last week it was holding a race for the first time.

The Netherlands, home to the popular Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, gets a race a year earlier than originally planned with a September 5 slot in the coastal town of Zandvoort. It will be the first Dutch Grand

Prix since 1985.

Vietnam signed up for Formula One hoping the glamour of the sport could reflect the country’s economic lift-off and reshape Hanoi’s staid image, much as it has done for Singapore which will again host a race next year.

The communist nation inked a 10-year deal with Formula One in 2018 with state media saying hosting the race would cost the country \$60 million per year.

The fee has been picked up in full by the country’s largest private conglomerate, VinGroup, which had been hoping to dazzle with a night race.

But its 2020 race was cancelled due to concerns that teams and fans coming from overseas could spark a new outbreak of COVID-19 and the corruption scandal surrounding Nguyen Duc Chung now threatens the future of the event.

“Without Chung, the future of the race is gloomy. It might not happen,” a source close to the race said on condition of anonymity. — AFP

CONSISTENT CANADIAN

Shapovalov cements place in top 10

MUMBAI: Canadian Denis Shapovalov has slipped out of the men’s top 10 rankings with some recent early defeats, but the 21-year-old is about to finish the 2020 season confident that he belongs in the top echelon of the sport.

The left-hander reached the quarterfinals of the US Open, where he lost in five sets, and the following week he made the semifinals of the ATP Masters 1000 event in Rome, going down in a final-set tie-breaker. Those results lifted him into the top 10 for the first time in his career, before early defeats at the French Open and in Germany and Austria saw his ranking slip back to 12.

“I feel like I have been playing some really good tennis,” Shapovalov told reporters ahead of the Sofia Open, where he is the top seed.

“I think I played really well throughout the season, and I am really happy with where my game is. I feel like I have definitely improved and I feel like my level is with these (top) guys.”

“If I am not able to reach top 10 again this season, I will definitely try to go for it next season. The important thing is, I feel like my level is there with these guys and I am able to compete with anyone.”

After suffering his third

“I think I played really well throughout the season, and I am really happy with where my game is. I feel like I have definitely improved and I feel like my level is with these (top) guys

DENIS SHAPOVALOV
Canadian player

straight defeat in Vienna last month, Shapovalov decided to take a break and skipped the Paris Masters.

The Canadian said he was feeling fresh again. In the Bulgarian capital he will be joined by countryman and friend Felix Auger-Aliassime, who is seeded second. “It is definitely great for Canada and for tennis in Canada,” Shapovalov said of the 20-year-old Auger-Aliassime.

“It is amazing to see us both the top of the draw, and hopefully this continues, inspires a lot of Canadian kids and keeps advancing the sport in the country.” — Reuters



Qadir inspires Pakistan to whitewash Zimbabwe

RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN: Leg spinner Usman Qadir grabbed four wickets to guide Pakistan to a 3-0 whitewash of Zimbabwe with an eight-wicket victory in the third Twenty20 in Rawalpindi on Tuesday.

The 27-year-old Qadir — son of the late star spinner Abdul Qadir — finished with 4-13 from four mesmerising overs to restrict Zimbabwe to a paltry 129-9 in 20 overs.

That proved a walk in the park for the home team, which cruised to victory in 15.2 overs losing just two wickets.

Pakistan lost Fakhar Zaman (21) and Haider Ali (27) but

debutant Abdullah Shafique top-scored with 41 and saw Pakistan home with Khushdil Shah (36 not out).

Khushdil hit a six off Faraz Akram to bring up victory.

This was Pakistan’s 14th win in as many T20 internationals against Zimbabwe, and are now fourth in the international T20 rankings.

Zimbabwe allrounder Elton Chigumbura was accorded a warm farewell by his teammates, but he scored just two runs in his last international match.

An emotional Qadir acknowledged his father’s contribution in his career.



“It was quite emotional to remember my father,” he said of Abdul Qadir, who died in September last year.

“He played a key role in my career and I was remembering him with every wicket I got because they are all for him.”

Abdul Qadir took 236 Test and 132 one-day international wickets in a glorious career between 1977-93.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was all praise for Usman Qadir.

“We gave chances to a number of players in both the series,” said Azam, whose team won the preceding three-match one-day series 2-1.

“It’s good to see him taking wickets and he will bowl better in future. Every win gives confidence so that’s an important win for us.”

Zimbabwe skipper Chamu Chibhabha said the series defeat was disappointing.

“It’s not ideal to lose 3-0 and we are disappointed,” said Chibhabha. “Still, there are a few positives with some young players coming to the fore and with more exposure our team will get better.”

Earlier, the visitors, who won the toss and batted, were derailed by Qadir, who recorded the third-best figures by a Pakistani bowler against Zimbabwe in T20s.

— AFP

business

MUSCAT STOCK MARKET

3,576.76



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Light Crude \$ 40.67



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Raysut Cement breaks ground on \$30 million grinding unit in Duqm



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 10

Raysut Cement Company (RCC), Oman's largest cement manufacturer, held a ground breaking ceremony paving the way for the start of the construction of its new \$30 million grinding unit in Duqm on Tuesday.

The development of Duqm plant, a strategic expansion for the Muscat Stock Market (MSM)-listed RCC, will complement the company's leadership in cement manufacturing adding another 1 million tonnes to the overall

group output, taking the total to 7.4 million tonnes per annum.

"Today's groundbreaking is a milestone for RCC on two counts. It will contribute significantly to our ambitious capacity expansion targets of 10 million tonnes by 2022 which is expected to be further scaled up to 22 million tonnes in the near future.

"Second, it will help us generate more employment opportunities aiding our efforts to enhance social and economic progress in Oman," said Group CEO, Joey Ghose.

Oman's tourism economy grows to RO 1.3 billion in 2019

GROWTH SECTOR: Domestic tourism is a major contributor to the economy, generating RO 608m in revenues last year

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

The contribution of travel, hospitality and tourism to the Omani economy totalled around RO 1.293 billion in 2019, up from RO 1.233 billion a year earlier, entailing an increase of 4.9 per cent, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) said in a recent bulletin.

The industry, one of five pillars of the Omani government's strategy to fuel economic diversification, has been dealt a severe blow by the coronavirus pandemic since March this year. Nevertheless, it remains a promising sector in terms of its potential to, among other things, contribute to socioeconomic development in rural areas of the country as well as create job opportunities for local Omanis.

The value added of tourism



amounted to RO 717.9 million in 2019, accounting for 2.5 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – a contribution that needs to be significantly ramped up if the government's goal of achieving a 6-per cent GDP share by 2040 is to be met.

Still, direct value added from the sector has been growing incrementally over the past five years, rising 4.1 per cent from RO 689.5 million in 2018 to RO 717.9 million last year.

2017 represented a bumper year for the sector with direct value added reaching RO 738.4 million, up from RO 682.6 million in 2016. The uptick was attributed to an increase in the value added of some activities, such as restaurants and land transport.

Significantly, 47.1 per cent of the tourism sector's contribution (corresponding to RO 608.7 million in value) came from domestic tourism,

underscoring the importance of this segment of the industry to the tourism economy. Revenues accruing to hotels and lodgings totalled RO 146.1 per cent (24.0 per cent). Domestic tourists also spent around RO 83.2 million (13.7 per cent) on shopping and entertainment, travel and tourism services RO 82.1 million (13.5 per cent), air transport (12.4 per cent) and land transport (7.6 per cent).

TURN TO PAGE 15



Ministry of Finance
Sultanate of Oman

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Invest in Oman's future



Two-thirds of UK businesses at risk of insolvency

The effect of the pandemic is being gravely felt with two-thirds of all businesses across the UK currently trading having a “low to severe risk of insolvency”, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The latest Business Impact of Coronavirus Survey (BICS) from the ONS found that 64 per cent of businesses across all industries are at risk of insolvency, with 43 per cent of companies running on less than six months’ cash reserves. The figure comes on top of the 14 per cent of all UK businesses that had already paused trading under local lockdown restrictions.

Businesses in the hospitality industry are at the highest risk of entering administration, with 17 per cent of all accommodation and food companies currently

trading at “severe risk” of insolvency, according to the ONS. Seven per cent of all pubs, restaurants and hotels in the UK have zero cash reserves, latest data showed.

A spokesperson for trade body UK Hospitality said: “There can be no doubt of the devastating impact that the government’s restrictions are having on hospitality and pub businesses across the UK. “Without urgent sector-specific support for our industry, massive business failure is imminent and hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost from a sector that was in growth at the beginning of this year, as well as in the supply chain that supports them.”

It comes after more than two-thirds of businesses in the hospitality sector reported a slump in usual turnover for this



Andy Jalil
andyjalil@aol.com

BUSINESSES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY ARE AT THE HIGHEST RISK OF ENTERING ADMINISTRATION, WITH 17 PER CENT OF ALL ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD COMPANIES CURRENTLY TRADING AT “SEVERE RISK” OF INSOLVENCY

time of year.

Key figures in the hospitality sector have called for further financial support, warning that the 10 pm curfew that was imposed, social distancing measures and tier restrictions decimated the industry and caused wide-scale job losses.

Nine per cent of the entire UK workforce and more than a quarter of the nation’s hospitality industry were still on partial or full furlough last month, according to the ONS. The Trade Union Congress (TUC), which represents more than 5.5m workers across the UK, has warned the country will see a “tsunami” of job losses when the furlough scheme eventually winds down.

Figures up to last month from the ONS showed a slight increase in the number of UK businesses

resuming trading in October, with 86 per cent of businesses in the UK operating then — compared to just 66 per cent in June.

However, the latest figures are likely to be much lower, after large swathes of the North of England, Scotland and the whole of Wales had entered some form of local lockdown and currently in the UK a second lockdown is in place until 2nd December.

Businesses in the arts and entertainment industry have taken the biggest hit from the pandemic, with 30 per cent of companies in the sector currently shuttered.

But the pandemic continues to weigh on those businesses that reopened, with almost half of companies that resumed trading experiencing a decrease in turnover compared to normal

business at this time of year.

A government spokesperson said: “We understand the pressures businesses are currently under and have put in place one of the most comprehensive packages of business support in the world, worth more than £200bn.

We have also given businesses much-needed breathing space by extending measures put in place to protect them from insolvency.”

He added: “Our plan for jobs will support businesses in the months ahead, and businesses that were required to close due to local lockdowns at the time can claim £3,000 a month. On top of this firms can continue to access billions of loans and guarantees, cuts to VAT and business rate relief.”

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)



PDO secures double win at ADIPEC 2020 Awards

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 10

The Company won the Social Contribution & Local Content Project of the Year and the best Oil and Gas Inclusion and Diversity Company of the Year

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has won two awards at this year’s prestigious Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference (ADIPEC) Awards, which recognise excellence across the global oil and gas industry.

The Company won the Social Contribution & Local Content Project of the Year for ‘Boosting In-Country Value (ICV) through Local Manufacturing’ and the best Oil and Gas Inclusion and Diversity Company of the Year for sharing ‘PDO’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Journey’.

PDO External Affairs and Value Creation Director Abdul-Amir bin Abdul-Hussein al Ajmi who accepted the ICV award on behalf of PDO at the virtual ADIPEC event along with other members of the management said: “It is a huge honour to accept this prestigious ADIPEC 2020 award on behalf of everyone at PDO.

“ICV is a core value in all we do and an integral part of our contracting and procurement process. It all started with our vision and commitment to create value for Oman and all our stakeholders.”

PDO has worked to boost manufacturing as part of Oman’s economic diversification efforts and has expanded its efforts by collaborating with the

government to enhance ICV in other sectors beyond oil and gas. To date, 57 manufacturing opportunities have been realised, and the number is still growing. Its latest contribution was in combatting COVID-19 by introducing local manufacturing of hand sanitisers and facemasks.

At PDO, D&I is recognised as a business imperative and has been championed for many years. To support this focus, the comprehensive programme has broadened to include broader aspects in culture, behaviour and inclusive leadership which are key enablers as the Company continues building momentum in its D&I journey.

PDO People Development Director Faiza Rahmatullah, who accepted the D&I award on behalf of the Company, said: “It is a proud moment for us to receive this award as it reflects the importance PDO has placed on D&I in supporting our staff as well as generating business benefits. We have a long and proud D&I record and are moving the programme to a new level that will position us as a regional leader in this key area.

One MENA IPO listed in Q3 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 10

The MENA region witnessed one IPO valued at \$115.9m in Q3 2020, according to the EY MENA IPO Eye report.

The IPO of Amlak International for Real Estate Finance, headquartered in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), raised \$115.9m in Q3 2020 and was oversubscribed 26.9 times.

The deal comes after no listings were announced in Q2 2020, which marked the first time in more than 10 years that the MENA region had a quarter close without a listing. Prior to the pandemic, the year had initially begun promisingly with four deals – three of which took place in KSA, raising \$865m in total.

Matthew Benson, MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, EY, says: “The adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, as well as a number of macroeconomic and geopolitical factors, continues to be felt across the MENA region, resulting in relatively subdued IPO activity. Despite this impact, the IPO of Amlak International for Real Estate Finance represents a positive signal for markets, particularly in light of the fact that roadshows were held virtually, as a result of social distancing measures. In the remainder of the year, we are likely to see increased



Subdued activity: IPO activity is expected to pick up in Q4 and early 2021 as the region begins to come to terms with the impact of COVID-19

IPO activity in the region, as lockdown restrictions continue to ease. We expect listings to pick up in Q4, with Saudi grocery chain operator Bin Dawood Holding having already led the way with their IPO on Tadawul.”

Across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), markets have remained impacted by the pandemic and market volatility. With Amlak International for Real Estate Finance representing the only listing, proceeds have fallen 3 per cent when compared to Q3 2019.

Gregory Hughes, MENA IPO Leader, EY, says: “At the beginning of 2020, as many as 16 new issuances were expected to hit the regional markets. The fact that Amlak International

represented the only IPO of Q3 shows that even as restrictions ease and we begin to emerge from the economic impact of the pandemic, IPO volumes and proceeds in the MENA region remain subdued. Despite this, there are a number of IPOs in the pipeline across the United Arab Emirates, KSA, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, which to some extent bodes well for Q4 and is a positive indicator as we head into 2021.”

In Saudi Arabia, the Tadawul launched its derivatives market in Q3, which officials believe will enhance the depth of the Kingdom’s capital markets. The market’s first exchange-traded derivatives product is the MT30 Index Future, based on the MSCI

Tadawul 30 Index (MT30). This forms part of a wider strategy to attract more foreign investors to the country, and more products are expected to be launched next year. Saudi Arabia’s Capital Market Authority (CMA) also approved the first direct listing on the Nomu Parallel Market, of Saudi White Cement Company, which was listed on 2 September 2020. Direct listings were recently introduced on Nomu Parallel Market with the aim of boosting liquidity and increasing the number of listed companies. In addition, companies in Saudi Arabia can now opt to issue depository receipts out of the Kingdom after the board of the CMA approved the resolution as part of its strategic objectives to deepen the capital markets, promote its role in raising capital, and to increase market attractiveness to foreign investors.

PRESS RELEASES

JW MARRIOTT MUSCAT’S PINK SALT OFFERS SOPHISTICATED GRILL SPECIALTIES WITH FLAIR

Continuing to elevate luxury cuisine in the Sultanate, JW Marriott Muscat has opened the doors to Pink Salt. Introducing Muscat’s first dry-ageing refrigerator, full-fledged oyster bar, and three signature cooking methods, the sophisticated restaurant is the ideal place for refined tastes and those keen to try new things.

With a creative menu crafted by our Executive Chef Angelos, Pink Salt celebrates quality ingredients cooked to perfection. A chic and social



atmosphere is enhanced with contemporary furnishings both inside and outdoors, as well as an impressive open kitchen manned by the hotel’s dedicated team of professional grill-masters. Topping off the experience, the expert sommelier is on hand to suggest the perfect pairing for every dish.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE ORGANISES MOBILE PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Purshottam Kanji Exchange is organising a mobile phone photography competition in association with Life in Oman online, a Facebook page, to coincide with the 50th National Day of Oman.

Any subject related to the 50th National Day of Oman can be photographed. Post photos under the “Mobile Photography Contest” post on the Life in Oman online Facebook page. Pictures can be posted until November 20.

Purshottam Kanji Exchange



General Manager Supin James and Chief Operations Manager Binoy Simon Varghese said in a press release that anyone living in Oman can participate in the competition. One can post as many photos as one wants.



Disneyland furloughs more workers

CALIFORNIA: Walt Disney Co said it was furloughing more workers from its theme park in California, because it still does not know when the state will allow it to reopen. — **Reuters**



Gold gains more than 1 per cent

SINGAPORE: Gold jumped more than 1 per cent on Tuesday as focus returned to the likelihood of more monetary stimulus to revive a global economy. — **Reuters**



Oil falls on demand worries

MELBOURNE: Oil prices fell on Tuesday as worries over near term fuel demand in coronavirus-hit Europe and the United States haunted the market. — **Reuters**

In brief

■ DUBAI

GLOBAL SUKUK ISSUANCE TO DECLINE SLIGHTLY IN 2020



Global issuance of sukuk, or Islamic bonds, is expected to decline modestly in 2020 after four years of consecutive growth, ratings agency Moody's said on Tuesday.

Moody's expects global sukuk issuance to be \$170 billion this year, down from \$179 billion in 2019.

"Lower issuance activity in the first half of the year can be attributed to the pandemic", said Nitish Bhojnarwala, Vice-President at Moody's Investors Service.

Sovereign issuance of sharia-compliant debt was stable during the crisis, Moody's said, even as fiscal deficits ballooned because of lower oil prices and spending related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The global sukuk market has grown rapidly from around \$80 billion to \$179 billion over the last four years, supported by large pools of sharia-compliant funds in the Gulf. — **Reuters**

■ NEW DELHI

DEALERS IN INDIA CONSIDER LEGAL ACTION AGAINST HARLEY DAVIDSON



Dealers in India for Harley-Davidson Inc said on Tuesday they are exploring legal action against the iconic American motorcycle brand after it effectively abandoned the market as part of a broader restructuring plan.

The dealers have hired leading Indian law firm AZB & Partners to review their paperwork with Harley-Davidson and suggest if there is a legal remedy, Rishi Aggarwal, a dealer for the motorcycle company, told reporters.

"Harley has to compensate us for our losses. That is the only bone of contention. AZB is studying the case", he said during a press conference organised by The Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA) in India.

Harley-Davidson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Harley-Davidson in September said it would discontinue its sales and manufacturing operations in India in a move it said would involve \$75 million in restructuring costs, some 70 redundancies and the closure of its Bawal plant in northern India. — **Reuters**



Workers pick orders at the PC World and Carphone Warehouse distribution centre in Newark, Britain.

— **Reuters**

UK redundancies hit record high as job market slumps in Q3

LONDON: British employers laid off a record number of staff in the third quarter and the jobless rate jumped as the labour market weakened before Finance Minister Rishi Sunak made a U-turn on Covid support measures.

A record 314,000 British workers were made redundant in the three months to September, 181,000 more than in the second quarter, the Office for National Statistics said on Tuesday. The unemployment rate rose to 4.8 per cent, the highest rate since the three months to November 2016, from 4.5 per cent in the three months to August, as expected in a Reuters poll of economists.

While the public and investors were cheered on Monday by news that an experimental

A record 314,000 British workers were made redundant in the three months to September, 181,000 more than in the second quarter

COVID-19 vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective in trials, the ONS data showed hard months lie ahead for many Britons.

Last week, Sunak was forced to extend his costly coronavirus furlough scheme, which provides 80 per cent of the pay of temporarily laid-off workers, until the end of March, and he outlined billions of pounds in other forms of help.

"Unfortunately the extension of the furlough scheme didn't come soon enough for some workers but it should help stem the rise in unemployment over

the winter", said Jon Hudson, a fund manager at Premier Miton.

The BoE expects around 5.5 million employees will need furlough support during an England-wide lockdown this month, up from just over 2 million in October. The end to the Brexit transition period in seven weeks' time has also weighed on employers' confidence, with no trade deal struck yet between Britain and the European Union.

Sunak said after the data was published that the ONS figures "underline the scale of the challenge we're facing". Sunak's

critics have said his previous reluctance to extend the programme led to unnecessary redundancies.

"The government's failure to face up to the scale of this jobs crisis in time has cost people their livelihoods", said Jonathan Reynolds, the jobs spokesman for the opposition Labour Party.

Employment fell by 164,000 during the quarter, a sharper drop than expected. Tax data also released on Tuesday showed a 33,000 decline in the number of employees in October, and almost 800,000 job losses since March.

The number of job vacancies showed signs of recovery, rising by 146,000 in the three months to October to 525,000, still well below levels above 800,000 seen before the pandemic. — **Reuters**

Huawei plans to sell Honor unit for \$15 billion

HONG KONG: Huawei plans to sell budget-brand smartphone unit Honor in a 100 billion yuan (\$15.2 billion) deal to a consortium led by handset distributor Digital China and the government of its home town of Shenzhen, people with knowledge of the matter said.

The plan comes as US restrictions on supplying Huawei Technologies Co Ltd force the world's second-biggest smartphone maker — after South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co — to focus on high-end handsets and corporate-oriented business, the people said.

It also indicates little expectation for any swift change in the US perception of Huawei as a security risk following a change in US administration, one of the people said.

The all-cash sale will include



Huawei's new Honor 20 smartphone is seen in this image. — **Reuters**

almost all assets including brand, research & development capabilities and supply chain management, the people said. Huawei could announce it as early as Sunday, one of the people said.

Main Honor distributor Digital China Group Co Ltd will become a top-two shareholder of sold-off entity Honor Terminal Co Ltd with a near-15 per cent stake, said two of the people. Honor Terminal was incorporated in April and is fully owned by Huawei. — **Reuters**

US to see more Chinese listings

HONG KONG: Chinese companies' stock market listings in the United States reached a six-year high in 2020 and advisers expect the trend to accelerate in the year ahead in expectation of a stable regulatory regime under US President-elect Joe Biden.

Twenty-six initial public offerings of Chinese firms worth \$10.6 billion have been completed in the United States so far in 2020, up from the \$3.4 billion worth of deals last year, according to Refinitiv data.

The volume this year is already the highest since 2014 when there was \$29 billion worth of Chinese IPOs in the United States led by Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's \$25 billion listing, the data shows.

While Biden is not expected to make major changes to



People celebrate after the IPO launching of Chinese real estate company FangDD at the Nasdaq Market Site in New York, in this file photo. — **Reuters**

Washington's tough stance on China-led investment, bankers and lawyers believe policy and regulatory stability could return following four turbulent years of the Trump administration.

"We won't be waking up in the middle of the night anymore to a Trump tweet that

can ruin a deal", said a Hong Kong capital markets lawyer.

Analysts have said Biden would take a more measured approach to Chinese tech threats but was unlikely to unwind President Donald Trump's unilateral curbs on Chinese firms such as Huawei Technologies Co. — **Reuters**

Oman's tourism economy grows to RO 1.3 bn in 2019

FROM PAGE 13

However, inbound tourism accounted for the lion's share (52.9 per cent) of the sector's total contribution (RO 684.7 million) to the tourism economy, the report said. Around 3.506 million tourists and visitors travelled to the Sultanate last year, up from 3.242 million a year earlier, representing a growth of 8.2 per cent.

The sector itself has expanded over the years in step with the uptrend in tourist arrivals. According to the NCSI report, as many as 491 hotel properties distributed across all star ratings were in operation around the Sultanate last year. The majority — numbering 348 properties — belonged to the category of one-star and unclassified hotels, guesthouses and hotel apartments.

Five-star properties totalled 26 in 2019, up from 11 in 2015, while four-star hotels grew modestly to 24 last year, up from 23 in 2015. Those in the 3-star category jumped from 27 in 2015 to 38 last year, while the one-star and other properties nearly doubled to 348 last year, up from 186 in 2016.

Hotel properties are distributed across all of the Sultanate's governorates, with Muscat home to 179 of them, followed by South Al Sharqiyah (65), Al Dakhiliyah (56) Dhofar Governorate (33), North Al Sharqiyah (33) North Al Batinah (32), Al Buraimi (30), South Al Batinah (30), Al Wusta (13), Musandam (10) and Al Dhahirah (10).

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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Oman herbs make their way into local brand of cosmetics

For decades, Omani women have used herbs for medicine and as a beauty supplement. Samah al Mahrouqiyah, the co-founder of the Omani brand Yome, shares with us her brand story and how it is inspired by Omani botanicals... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HERITAGE



CAIRO'S 'CITY OF THE DEAD' BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE
In Egypt's "City of the Dead", centuries-old monuments are being restored and artisanal heritage revived, turning a corner of the vast historical cemetery into a vibrant neighbourhood full of life... **Story on Page P20**

COOK LIKE A CHEF



JING JIANG ROU SI
Oman is at the crossroad of the world's important wildlife highway. Every year, millions of birds make a stopover in the country not only to escape changing weather from their home countries but also lavish in the country's natural offerings... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE WONDER BOY OF WHISTLE STOP
BY FANNIE FLAGG
Bud Threadgoode returns to his hometown and sets off some life-changing events.

DISCOVERY



ANCIENT SKELETON FIND IN GERMANY OFFERS CLUES ON PREHISTORIC ERA
German researchers are piecing together the life of a prehistoric woman who died more than 5,000 years ago in the Neolithic period, after her skeleton was found during excavation works for wind turbines... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



SINGLE'S DAY
Being single is a blessing. Taken in the right context, it is the perfect time to know one's self. Single's Day was started by Chinese and is celebrated as a holiday with the original idea of allowing people to meet up. Today, it's purpose is so that people can show their pride in being single.



Oman herbs make their way into local brand of cosmetics

BAYAN AL HADHRAMI

Oman is a country rich in a great variety of botanicals that can be utilised in the creation of safe and natural skincare and hair-care products. Since the past, Omani women have used herbs for medicine and their own beauty products. They had concerns like pigmentation changes, redness or first signs of ageing, and recognised that botanical-powered skincare products can help them keep their complexion looking its best. They ended with a conclusion that whether they are aiming to treat fine lines or banish dry spots, there's a botanical to soothe what's ailing the skin. Honestly, even old women over their 60s do look younger than their age with healthy skin.

Samah al Mahrouqiyah, the co-founder of the Omani brand Yome shares with us her brand story and how it is inspired by Omani botanicals.

The brand Yome was established in early 2019 and began operation in October 2019.

"Knowledge of natural skincare is growing across Oman. The goodness of Oman has sparked these ideas" says Al Mahrouqiyah. The brand strongly believes that Oman is blessed with the finest botanicals and ingredients. What sets Yome apart from other cosmetic brands in the country is the brand's

combination of natural care formulas with the finest Omani extractions and botanicals. The products are free from any harmful ingredients such as SLS, mineral oils, colourants and synthetic perfumes. Yome also aims at modernising Omani beauty rituals and traditions to befit modern consumers. One of the most popular Omani

One of the most popular Omani botanicals utilised by Yome is Sider leaves. It is a famous ingredient that is widely used in Oman as a body scrub and as a hair mask. It has natural surfactant agents that cleanse and soothe the skin

botanicals utilised by Yome is Sider leaves. It is a famous ingredient that is widely used in Oman as a body scrub and as a hair mask. It has natural surfactant agents that cleanse and soothe the skin. Yome offers Sider and Shea Body Scrub; it is an excellent mixture for nour-

ishing, scrubbing and cleansing the skin. The Sider and Shea Body Scrub is a bestseller, says Al Mahrouqiyah, alongside Yome's haircare set which utilises another popular Omani ingredient; date oil.

"Since Oman is popular for the best kinds of dates, Yome thought of extracting oil out of it. Not a new discovery, but the kind of dates used makes the difference," says Al Mahrouqiyah.

It is known that dates work as antioxidant. Date oil contains many classes of bioactive components, and one of them is carotenoids. It is a well-known antioxidant that helps strengthen the hair by protecting it from free radicals.

Apart from preventing dandruff and scalp acne, date oil is also widely used for its moisturising benefits. The Omega-6 and Omega-9 fatty acids contained in the oil helps control water loss so the hair's moisture is kept intact and the cuticles sealed.

While many Omani botanicals are easy to source and work within formulas such as date oil, mahlab seeds and Omani honey, Al Mahrouqiyah states that there are still some wild and unexplored botanicals that Yome aims to develop.

Currently, the brand is working on developing a new product line with new and specialised Omani botanicals that will be unique in the market. The line will offer natural care for the face, body and hair, in addition to a kid's collection free from harmful ingredients such as SLS, paraben, silicone and allergin aroma.





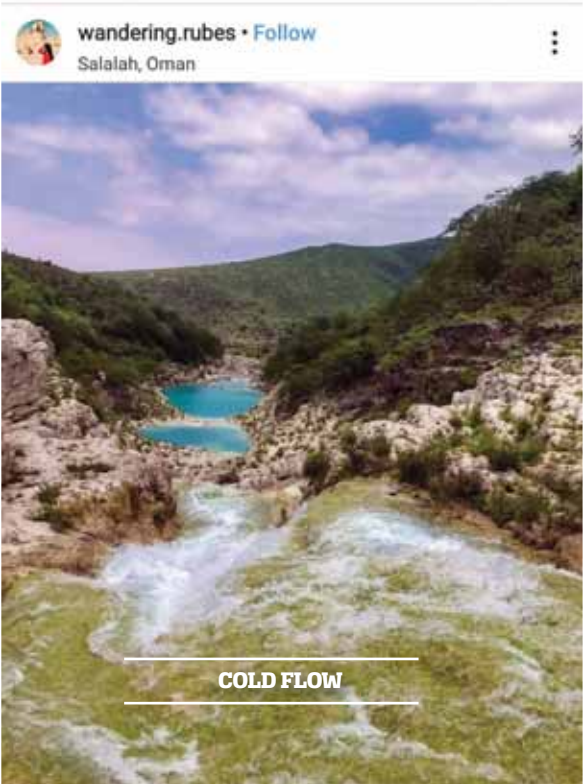
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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Jing Jiang Rou Si



SALALAH FOOD SCENE

In the next two editions, Chef Zhiwu Lai (Elvis), the Chef de Cuisine of Anantara Salalah will be showcasing some of the best dishes served at this famed hotel. Today's dish originated from Beijing. Jing Jiang Rou Si is a trademark of the capital's extraordinary cuisine, consisting of sliced beef prepared in a sauce based on sweet beans. The dish is then traditionally rolled in soya bean wraps, although it can be wrapped in any pancake.

The dish is of a reddish hue due to the distinctive Beijing sauce in which it's cooked in and is usually garnished with chopped green onions or shredded leeks. There are also some regional varieties of the dish with either sha cha sauce (traditionally used in Fujian cuisine) or hoisin sauce replacing the sweet bean sauce in the process.

PREPARATION METHOD

Cut beef tenderloin into julienne, marinate with salt, pepper and corn starch for 10 mins.
Pan sear beef until half cooked.
On a separate pan, sauté ginger, garlic and leeks. Add oyster sauce, soy sauce, sweet soy sauce, water and black bean paste. Allow to simmer for 1 minute.
Add beef and remove from the fire after 30 seconds.

INGREDIENTS:

SERVES 1 PERSON



150g Beef tenderloin
20g Leeks, cut into Julienne
25ml Soy sauce
25ml Oyster sauce
10ml Sweet soy sauce
5ml Black bean paste
15 ml of water
5g Cornflour
3 garlic cloves
5 g chopped ginger
A pinch of salt and white pepper

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF ZHIWU LAI (ELVIS)

Executive Chef
Chef de Cuisine
Anantara Salalah

Born in Hainan China, Zhiwu (Elvis) commenced his career at Crown Plaza Int. China, at the age of 19. He then made his way to Kihavah Maldives where he worked for Anantara and progressed his career into the culinary industry as a part of the kitchen brigade.

He joined as a Sous Chef and progressed to Senior Sous chef. Chef Elvis continued working with passion through his time at the Mekong, Al Baleed Resort's signature restaurant to eventually become the current Chef de Cuisine in the same property.

Chef Elvis was a key member when he flew to Tunisia for a month-long task force for the preopening of Mekong at the Anantara Tozeur. Here Chef Elvis has conducted all preopening tasks including sourcing all kitchen equipment, connecting with suppliers, organising training and implementing the same Mekong standards as the other MINOR properties. The kitchen brigade has been very successful with the innovative menus proposed by Elvis and has been increasing in popularity within the northern region of Africa.



DISCOVERY

Ancient skeleton find in Germany offers clues on prehistoric era



GERMAN RESEARCHERS are piecing together the life of a prehistoric woman who died more than 5,000 years ago in the Neolithic period, after her skeleton was found during excavation works for wind turbines.

The "Lady of Bietikow," as she has been named, was found near a village of the same name in north-eastern Germany's Uckermark region.

The skeleton had been buried in a settlement in a squatting position, one of the oldest known forms of burial, according to local media.

Investigations have shown that she was between 30 and

much more spectacular due to the conditions of preservation," Roskoschinski said.

All that is left of Lady Bietikow are bones and some fragments of clothing, but researchers have still managed to piece together some details about her life.

It was during the Neolithic period that humans first introduced grains into their diet, since they could be stored more easily than meat and could also be used as a means of payment, according to anthropologist Bettina Jungklaus.

However, this led to a deterioration in people's general health.



45 years old and died more than 5,000 years ago.

That means that she lived during the same period as Oetzi the Iceman, the stunningly preserved corpse found by tourists in the Alps in the 1990s.

"You can compare Oetzi and the Lady of Bietikow in terms of age," said Philipp Roskoschinski, one of the two archaeologists who made the discovery in the state of Brandenburg, which surrounds Berlin.

Oetzi was found by two hikers in 1991 in the Oetzal Alps on the border between Austria and Italy.

His body was extremely well preserved, with organs, skin and other organic material still intact — researchers were even able to see what he had eaten hours before he died.

"The discovery of Oetzi was

This can be seen in the state of the Lady of Bietikow's teeth, which are severely eroded and missing completely in some places, Jungklaus said.

"Normally there is enamel on the surface of the teeth. But here it is heavily worn, chewed off," she said.

"This allows us to draw conclusions about her diet: it was probably very rich in fibre, very hard. There are certain grains that cause the teeth to wear out easily."

It remains unclear whether the condition of Lady Bietikow's teeth indicates an illness or even the cause of her death.

Researchers are now hoping to find out more about her life, including whether she came from the Uckermark region or had immigrated there from elsewhere.—AFP



Cairo's 'City of the Dead' brought back to life

In Egypt's "City of the Dead", centuries-old monuments are being restored and artisanal heritage revived, turning a corner of the vast historical cemetery into a vibrant neighbourhood full of life.

Wood, leather and jewellery workshops have joined those of glassblowers and others near the 15th-Century mosque of Sultan Qaitbay, in the east of the capital Cairo.

From the Mamluk period, the celebrated structure — featured on Egypt's one-pound notes — is surrounded by monumental tombs, dusty alleys and informal housing.

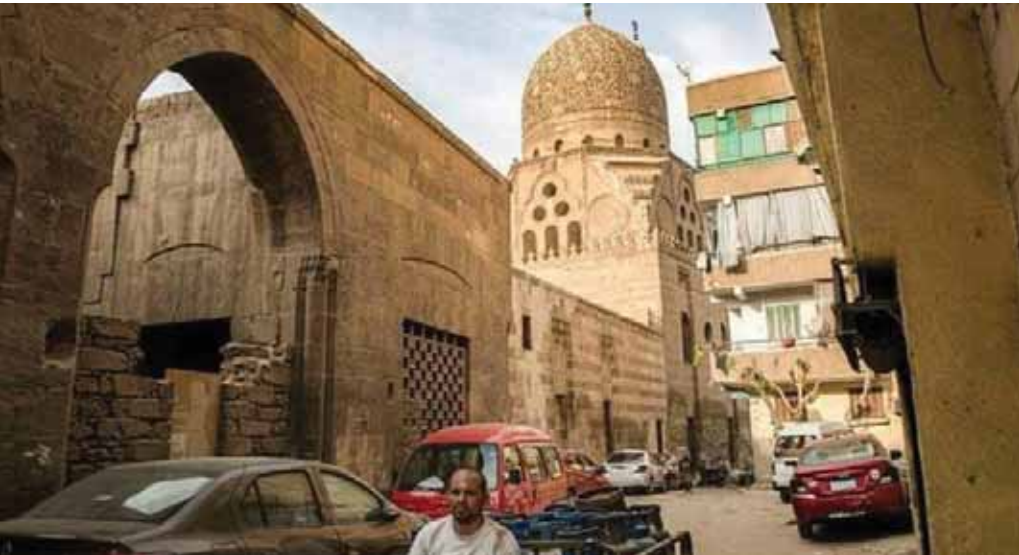
Since 2014, a series of projects financed by the European Union has changed the face of this small section of the sprawling necropolis — home to many people who are unable to afford Cairo's prohibitively high rents.

Authorities began construction on a major road in July a short distance from the Qaitbay mosque, drawing strong criticism online for the resulting demolitions and evictions of residents of the "City of the Dead".

A final resting place for illustrious figures, including singer Farid al Atrash and writer Ihsan Abdel Kouddous as well as ordinary Egyptians, the Islamic necropolis founded in the seventh century stretches over 6.5 kilometres (four miles).

"Before the projects, there was rubbish all over the streets," said 57-year-old Issem Abou Rami, who owns a small restaurant facing the mosque. "Now, a truck comes every day to collect it."

Products made in the impoverished neighbourhood are now sold in elegant



Since 2014, a series of projects financed by the European Union has changed the face of this small section of the sprawling necropolis — home to many people who are unable to afford Cairo's prohibitively high rents.

booths under restored stone arches — and even online.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The renovation efforts started six years ago with the refurbishment of a drinking trough for animals, and then, the reception area of a residential complex of the sultan.

The EU contributed nearly a million euros (\$1.1 million) towards the latest project, "The Heritage for the Living, in the 'City of the Dead'", which launched in 2018 and focuses on social development.

The project coordinator, architect Agnieszka Dobrowolska, was a linchpin to the area's metamorphosis.

She supervised the restorations of the monuments and the renovation of the workshop and their signage, as well as designed jewellery and leather products inspired by Mamluk motifs.

"When we first came here, our main

object was to conserve the monuments," she explained.

"And we quickly realised that we cannot simply conserve the monuments, in disrespect to the people who live and work in the area," added Dobrowolska, founder of Archinos Architecture, which has worked on numerous conservation projects in Cairo.

Work in the ateliers was interrupted for several weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but now the workshops are again up and running, with some 50 women making leather products and jewellery, all stamped with the local brand Mishka.

Aida Hassan, 45, has worked in the leather workshop for three years, and said she is happy to be earning "1,500 pounds (\$96) per month — and sometimes more".

"This project has helped improve my income," she added, saying she had gone on to train other women in leatherwork.

Hundreds of women and children in the neighbourhood have benefited from courses and workshops on subjects as diverse as science and technology, English language and sports.

OBJECT OF SUPERSTITION

For the EU, the primary donor to the project — due to end in 2021 — the social elements of the programme were key, said Christian Berger, head of the EU delegation in Egypt.

"Our intention is to support this type of project that benefits immediately vulnerable groups and disadvantaged groups, projects that have a broader socio-economic impact," Berger said.

The neighbourhood has hosted concerts, from jazz to folk and traditional Egyptian music, and visual artists from Egypt and abroad have come to show their work.

The aim is to bring "contemporary art and culture here to enhance diversity of cultural expression (and) artistic expression, to build bridges between east and west," said Dobrowolska.

Another hope of the project in transforming the neighbourhood is to draw in tourists.

The "City of the Dead" is sometimes an object of superstition due to its status as a necropolis, and is not a usual stop on mainstream Cairo tours.

But it is the tourists who are looking for something out of the ordinary that Dobrowolska said the project is counting on.

"We seek to attract tourists who are off-track from the mass tourism destinations — people who might appreciate and enjoy the unique urban character of the necropolis," she said. — AFP