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“As we vow to the Almighty Allah that we will dedicate our life for Oman and its citizens, to continue its triumphant march and blessed renaissance, we call upon you to vow to Allah to do so.”

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“MARS ON EARTH” MISSION EXPLAINED

OMAN

HM THANKED BY MALTA PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President George Vella of the Republic of Malta in reply to His Majesty’s cable of greetings on the occasion of his country’s Independence Anniversary. In the cable, President Vella expressed his appreciation for His Majesty’s greetings, stressing the importance of strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries in several fields to serve interests of the Omani and Maltese friendly peoples. — ONA

GCC Defence Council calls for joint military cooperation

The meeting discussed topics listed on its agenda, which were

raised by the Supreme Military Committee of the GCC Chiefs of Staff. It also reviewed the achievements made and results reached in the joint military fields.

The meeting also touched on several military topics of common interest that enhance the military cooperation march within the GCC framework in a manner that achieves the GCC joint interests according to the Joint Defence Agreements among the member states.

At the end of the meeting, the GCC Ministers of Defence underscored the importance of continuing the joint effort in a manner that achieves military cooperation among the GCC states in translation of the objectives of the GCC leaders. Several decisions and recommendations were taken that will be submitted at the 41st Summit of the Supreme Council of the GCC Leaders scheduled to be held in December 2020.

— ONA

REGION

SYRIA’S ASSAD NAMES NEW FM

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar al Assad has named Faisal Mekdad as the new foreign minister of the war-torn country, succeeding Walid al Moallem, who died last week, state media reported on Sunday. Mekdad, 66, has served as a deputy foreign minister since 2006. Assad has also appointed Bashar al Jaafari, Syria’s United Nations ambassador, as a deputy foreign minister, the Syrian state news agency Sana reported. Al Moallem, Syria’s veteran foreign minister, died last Monday at the age of 79.

Municipal Councils to get enhanced powers

NAWAL AL SAMSAMIYAH

The Municipal Councils Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 126/2020 gives the municipal councils enhanced powers including proposing ways for investing in the governorates’ resources to achieve sustainable development and generate job opportunities for the nationals.

As per the law, the municipal councils will be able to propose, change or abolish the municipal fee and ways of collecting them.

The law gives the municipal councils the power to set up regulations and standards of billboards and advertisements and determining the rules for placing signage boards of shops and stores after coordinating with the relevant authorities.

Also, the municipal councils will be able to draw up regulations for monitoring stray animals after coordinating with the relevant authorities, propose regulations for taxis and means of public transport, as well as proposing

regulations for managing and organising markets and cemeteries, slaughterhouses and landfills without prejudice to the remits of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources regarding the management of fish markets.

The municipal councils will be able to study the draft development plans which fall within the scope of the governorate, as well as suggesting development plans for the governorate. The councils may present proposals on the performance of the government’s services units within the governorate, express opinions on the proposed locations for the development, services and economic projects and the urban schemes.

As per the new law, the municipal councils will be authorised to follow up the procedures aimed to prevent and eliminate encroachment on the state’s properties and public utilities such as the wadis and beaches.

THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS WILL BE ABLE TO PROPOSE REGULATIONS FOR TAXIS AND MEANS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

TURN TO P5

BLOOD BANK CALLS FOR URGENT DONORS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The need for blood units at hospitals across the country has been more or less stable, if not increasing, thanks to less road accidents during the pandemic.

However, the supply of blood has been badly affected in the recent past and it has come down by 40 per cent and is likely to continue given the long weekend which is fast approaching.

The Central Blood

Bank has called upon both citizens and expatriates to support the central system from where blood units are supplied to all healthcare facilities which need urgent blood.

“The blood stocks at the Central Blood Bank are low, and we are calling upon blood donors to come forward in view of the long holidays,” said Dr Zainab bint Salim al Araiimi, Director of Blood Banks Services at the Ministry of Health, adding that during long weekends too they see

less number of donors.

On a given week, the blood bank needs anything around 500 to 700 units, whereas the supply is not at par with the requirement.

“The number of donors is less as some of the donors cannot donate for some reasons,” adds Dr Zainab.

The donor is not able to visit the centre either because he is tested positive for COVID-19 or is afraid of contracting the virus if they are exposed to medical instruments which is in fact an unfounded fear.

TURN TO P5

INSIDE

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WILL BIDEN FARE BETTER ON NORTH KOREA?

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Biden to announce first cabinet picks: Top adviser

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden will name on Tuesday the first picks to be part of his administration, his chief of staff said, as Donald Trump refuses to concede his loss to the Democrat.

Biden has been pushing ahead with preparations to take over as president in January despite Trump’s moves on multiple fronts to try to undo the results of the

November 3 vote.

“You are going to see the first of the president-elect’s cabinet picks on Tuesday of this week,” Biden’s chief of staff Ron Klain told ABC’s “This Week” on Sunday.

“You’ll have to wait for the president-elect to say that himself on Tuesday,” he added.

With the clock ticking down to Biden’s January 20 inauguration,

Trump’s team has focused on trying to stop battleground states from certifying election results while continuing to pursue legal challenges that have so far failed. A Pennsylvania judge on Saturday threw out Donald Trump’s claims of widespread electoral fraud there in a scathing ruling which excoriated the Trump team’s legal strategy.

“Donald Trump’s been

rejecting democracy. He has been... launching baseless claims of voter fraud, baseless litigation rejected by 34 courts,” Klain told ABC.

“It’s corrosive, it’s harmful, but... it’s not going to change the outcome of what happens here at 12 noon on January 20: Joe Biden will become the next president of the United States.”

— AFP

Shura discusses state budget reports

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday discussed two reports drafted by the Economic and Financial Committee — one on State Budget 2021 and the other on Five-Year Plan 2021-2025 draft project — that were forwarded to the Majlis by the government.

The deliberations took place live during the second ordinary session of the second annual sitting (2020-2021), of the 9th term, held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

In an opening speech, Al Maawali stressed the need to exert maximum efforts and provide the best means of upgrading performance in a manner that meets the expectations of citizens.



Then, Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, Head of Economic and Financial Committee, reviewed the two draft reports and the Majlis members



exchanged views on them.

On Monday, the Majlis members will listen, in a closed-door session, to the statements of Ministers of

Finance and Economy about the draft State Budget 2021 and the Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) draft project.

— ONA

Dhofar Municipal Council reviews projects, services



SALALAH: The Municipal Council of the Governorate of Dhofar held a meeting on Sunday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, Chairman of the Council.

The council discussed issues related to developing and improving services and municipal work in the wilayats of the governorate, including reviewing the final report of the team entrusted to study and organise the work of real estate offices, in addition to a proposal for investment in various infrastructure projects in the governorate.

The meeting also reviewed the latest developments and efforts exerted by the competent authorities to control the Yellow Fever Mosquito, as well as the ratification of minutes of the council's previous meeting and the procedures for implementing the recommendations and decisions taken at its fifth meeting. — ONA

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Agreement signed to off-take products of One Million Date Palm Project

MUSCAT: Within the framework of the joint cooperation between the public and private sectors to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040 which aims to boost the national income through diversifying the economy and empowering the private sector, and achieve balanced development in the governorates, the Diwan of Royal Court has signed a number of investment agreements.

The first agreement enables Nakheel Oman Development Company to off-take all of the products, derivatives and by-products produced by the One Million Date Palm Trees Project, for a period of 30 years.

The second and third agreements stipulate for renting lands in the wilayats of Barka and Nizwa for the purpose of setting up the company's projects in downstream investments within the dates and palm tree by-products sectors namely dates, fodder and fertilisers currently under focus by the company.

The agreements were signed by Abdullah bin Sha'ban al Farsi, Head of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Diwan of Royal Court, and Shaikh Rashid bin Saif al Mardhoof al Saadi, Vice-Chairman of Nakheel Oman Development Company, in the presence of Dr Saif bin Rashid al Shaqsi, Director-General of the One Million Date Palm Trees Project, and Ali bin Said al Araiimi, General Manager of Nakheel Oman Development Company.

Nakheel Oman Development Company is a joint venture between the Diwan of Royal Court and Oman National Investments Development Company (TANMIA). The Company seeks to become the leading Omani company in the processing of dates and related by-products and one of the biggest global suppliers of those products. The company also seeks to invest in date palm trees and healthy foods and sustainable agriculture. — ONA

Exceptional efforts of nurses in Oman appreciated

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The role of nurses in Oman has come into the forefront as the Oman Nursing Association received the acceptance from the International Council of Nurses.

The Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, congratulated the Oman Nursing Association on joining the International Council of Nurses, the global voice of nursing.

Established in 2017, the Oman Nursing Association represents all the nurses in Oman.

"I would like to congratulate the Oman Nursing Association and all nurses of Oman for being admitted in the International Council of Nurses. This is an important organisation, which gathers momentum and advocates for nurses worldwide," said Dr Al Saeedi.

Being a member of this organisation has so many advantages for our nurses in Oman and particularly the members of Oman Nursing Association.

"This year was declared by WHO to be the Year of Nurses and Midwives, unfortunately the event has been hijacked by COVID-19 and here I would have to repeat my gratitude and thank all the nurses in Oman and worldwide with their colleagues in the health profession

for looking after the patients and dedicating their effort and time to make a difference."

The minister of health expressed his pride, "We are very proud of our nurses in Oman and we will continue to do everything possible to empower them, facilitate further training and ensure that each person is working in the place that is fit for them."

The acceptance of ONA by the International Council of Oman has created excitement in the nursing community.

"In view of the current global pandemic situation, I salute all nurses and midwives on the front line who are risking their health and their family caring for COVID-19 patients. Nurses and midwives in Oman have worked hand in hand to cope with situation of COVID-19 and taking the initiative to nurse, lead, and plan. As nurses at SQUH and Oman, we are very proud to be part of the International Council of Nurses family to support Omani nurses across the country," said Shinoona al Harthy, Deputy Director General of Nursing Affairs at the Nursing Directorate, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

According to Shinoona, nurses are a critical part of healthcare and make up the largest section of the health professions. This year is la-



belled as the year for nurses and midwives by WHO; to appreciate them as being always in the front line and to appreciate their dedication.

"Nurses, existing and emerging talent, need support while building a workforce that is capable and flex-

ible enough to meet Oman's changing healthcare needs with innovation and creativity and a voice to be heard. Opportunities for young Omani leaders within healthcare organisations will become strong due to the advance knowledge and practices and the eagerness to

Nurses are a critical part of healthcare and make up the largest section of the health professions. This year is labelled as the year for nurses and midwives by WHO; to appreciate them as being always in the front line and to appreciate their dedication

learn," she pointed out.

"Moving towards specialised nursing and advanced care has added power to nurses for excellent evidence based practices and advanced care. Nurses will always face challenges and it is good to know advocacy for the frontline healthcare workers will always be the focus with the support of such an international organisation," she said.

The International Diabetes Federation also had this year's theme dedicated to nurses. Nurses currently account for over half of the global health workforce.

Dr Noor al Busaidy, Director of Diabetes and Endocrine Center and chairperson of Oman Diabetes Association, said nurses are

the backbone of chronic diseases clinic because they provide education and so in diabetes clinic nurses explain to the patients about the disease, the management and the follow up.

"They provide the social and psychological support to the patient and they see the patient frequently and use technology to follow up with the patients from WhatsApp or email. So really without the nurses help the management of the patient in the chronic diseases is not optimal as there would be a big gap because doctors cannot do what nurses do," she explained.

In their statement on the World Diabetes Day, the International Diabetes Federation stated: "They do outstanding work to support people living with a wide range of health concerns. People who either live with diabetes or are at risk of developing the condition need their support too."

According to the International Diabetes Federation, people living with diabetes face a number of challenges, and education is vital to equip nurses with the skills to support them. As the number of people with diabetes continues to rise across the world, the role of nurses and other health professional support staff becomes increasingly important in managing the impact of the condition.



Al Jisr Foundation hands over cardiac simulators to Royal Hospital

MUSCAT: Al Jisr Foundation handed over the National Heart Center at the Royal Hospital advanced cardiac simulation training devices along with equipping a back corridor connecting the outpatient clinics in the Center to the main building of the Hospital.

The handover ceremony was held in the presence of Dr Qasim bin Ahmed al Salmi, Director General of Royal Hospital, Dina al Khalili, Head of Al Jisr Foundation, and a number of health and administrative staff of the centre.

Dr Faiza al Kindi, Assistant Director at the National Heart Center, pointed out that the initiative included advanced realistic training manikins that contain accurate sensors for the main vital signs of the body such as heart pulses, blood pressure and oxygen concentration in the body. This equipment will help to train medical groups in dealing with

The equipment will help to train medical groups in dealing with the critical and intermediate cardiac cases in a realistic and simulated environment

DR FAIZA AL KINDI

Assistant Director at the National Heart Center

the critical and intermediate cardiac cases in a realistic and simulated environment. In addition, these manikins will be used in training the health workers and the patient's family in cardiovascular resuscitation.

The initiative also included equipping the back corridor connecting the outpatient clinics of the Center to the main building of the Hospital, which will facilitate the movement of the medical staff and patients easily.

Dr Qasim al Salmi praised this kind gesture that demonstrates the unified efforts between the public and private sectors to the advancement of society in various fields, particularly in the health field.

Dina al Khalili stressed that this initiative is part of the social responsibility programme of the Foundation to promote social solidarity in different fields that affects the lives of individuals, especially in the health field.



Ministry of Information

Directorate General of Press, Publication and Advertising

ANNOUNCEMENT

As the financial year 2020 is coming to an end, Ministry of Information, Directorate General of Press, Publication and Advertising, brings attention of all companies and establishments, with which it's dealing, to submit their financial claims to the Directorate of Finance no later than Thursday December 17, 2020 at its premise located in Madinat Al Ilam, Qurm. Furthermore, the Ministry shall not assume responsibility for delay of payments of claims submitted after the deadline.

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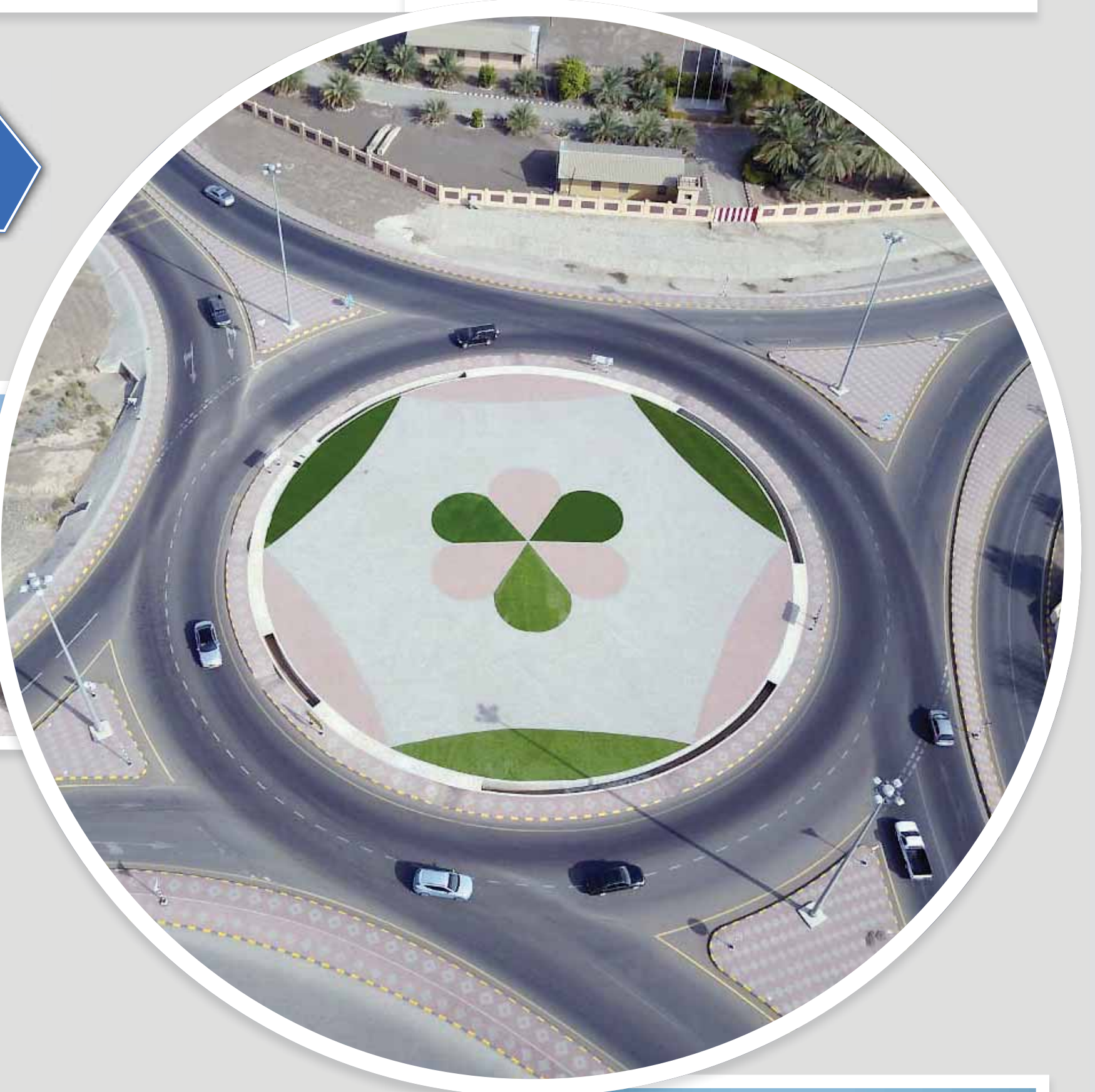


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Ibri



Rich in resources and cultural heritage

Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos called the Wilayat of Ibri, main city in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 'the promising city' as its deserts are rich in oil and liquefied gas.

The Wilayat of Ibri is strategically located as it borders 10 wilayats besides two Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Throughout history, Ibri was a major crossing land for commercial caravans proceeding to various locations in the Arabian Peninsula.

Ibri borders Haima from south, wilayats of Adam, Bahla and Al Hamra from east, Al Rustaq from the north-east, Al Khabourah, Saham, Yanqul from north, Dhank and Al Buraimi from north-west and the UAE and KSA from west.

The wilayat boasts several archaeological and touristic attractions, notably the beehive tombs in Bat, which have been declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco.

The other major attractions include

the Ibri Fort, which was restored by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Al Sulaif Fort.

Wadi Dham, scenic Kahf al Kittan and Jabal al Aflaj caves are also frequented by visitors. Ayn al Sakhna is a hot water spring in Bilad al Shuhoom visited by people for traditional treatment and relaxation.

The Wilayat of Ibri has witnessed all round development.

Presently, there are 57 schools, two hospitals, health centres and nursing institutes besides colleges of applied sciences, satellites station, Ibri Sports Complex and vocational training centre.

Currently, the wilayat has Al Massarat water project that supplies main villages with drinking water in addition to water and power networks.

The Ibri-Jibreen dual carriageway enhance trade and development, and boost land transport with other governorates.

The Ibri-Empty Quarter highway

linking the wilayat with the Saudi eases the journey of pilgrims proceeding to perform Haj in Mecca. The government has also restored forts and castles to attract tourists.

The majestic Ibri Fort is another major attraction. It has two towers and 29 residential rooms, which were mainly used by presiding walis and judges who governed from the fort. The original well and prayer room are also preserved near the gate. The most important feature of Ibri Fort is a mosque, which can accommodate about 1,000 worshippers. This is one of the largest mosques seen within the Sultanate's forts.

Visitors to Ibri are impressed with the area's agricultural wealth as the wilayat is famous for its limes, pomegranates, quince, peaches, oranges, guavas and mangos. The wilayat is reputed for the old souq, one of the old and historic markets in Al Dhahirah Governorate, where livestock are auctioned.



Work to enhance food and livestock sufficiency

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The arable land in the Sultanate is estimated at 5.5 million acres, while the area under agricultural stands at 355,000 acres, 262,000 acres of which is utilised depending on the availability of water, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The ministry has intensified efforts to search for new agricultural lands with water availability to create new investment projects and to organise and protect land use.

The ministry has adopted new methods to enhance agricultural investments and intensify interest in small and medium enterprises and agricultural associations as an alternative to the existing systems.

In addition, it works to activate the relationship between the government and private sectors to establish large investment projects which will increase local food

production, raise self-sufficiency ratios and enhance food security.

As a reflection of the efforts made in this direction, the agricultural sector, plant and animal husbandry achieved promising growth rates in 2019. The agricultural sector's contribution to the GDP increased at current prices from RO 416 million in 2018 to RO 433 million in 2019, recording a growth rate of about 4 per cent.

The total volume of plant production reached 3,018 tonnes in 2019 compared to 2,951 tonnes in 2018, recording an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent. This is due to the increase in productivity per unit area as a result of the use of modern technologies by agricultural companies and farmers of the agricultural association, which undoubtedly contributed to increasing the volume of agricultural production, and adopting integrated production and prevention packages," the ministry said.

For the animal wealth, the



Sultanate has animal wealth estimated at 3.7 million heads. The total volume of animal production

increased from 296,000 tonnes in 2018 to 301,000 tonnes in 2019, with an annual growth rate of

about 1.7 per cent. It is expected that the volume of animal production will increase during the com-

ing years due to the production of commercial companies that have been established by the Oman Food Investment Holding Company.

The ministry implements many programmes and projects related to livestock, the most prominent of which is the implementation of two programmes for treating and immunising livestock.

The number of veterinary clinics stood at 70 distributed over all governorates, while there is only one veterinary hospital in Salalah, Dhofar. However, treating and vaccinating livestock in remote regions are done through the mobile veterinary clinics prepared by the ministry, which number 41 clinics.

Private veterinary establishments are also being taken care of and organised by the ministry. There are 241 private vet clinics and pharmacies, in addition to 5 laboratories distributed in various governorates.

■ EDUCATION INDICATORS REVIEWED



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, on Sunday met with the former Education Council Secretariat's team responsible for the information system and education indicators in the Sultanate. Dr Rahma highlighted some topics on how to benefit from the system in developing the electronic link system with universities and colleges in the Sultanate, as well as developing systems for ranking national universities and improving the system of external scholarship standards. She stressed the need to benefit from international experiences and adding research and innovation indicators, as well as linking the information system and educational indicators with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Blood bank calls for urgent donors

FROM PAGE 1

The blood bank has also renewed its call to organisations and NGOs in the country to consider blood donation camps in view of the depleting stocks.

"We urge all associations and NGOs to initiate blood donation drives and educate the members to donate and take part in the national life-saving mission in the wake of shortage in the supply."

Any adult between the age brackets of 18-60 years, who is not suffering from any communicable disease or who is not chronically ill

can visit the Department of Blood Services in Bausher between 8 am to 8 pm and donate blood.

One can get in touch with the centre on WhatsApp 94555648 or by calling 24591255 and fix up an appointment.

The department has taken all necessary measures to protect donors visiting the Central Blood Bank including social distancing policy, and the number of donors at each time is restricted by pre-booking.

PASI board values initiatives to support job security system

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has expressed appreciation for the efforts of establishments and individuals who made donations to the Job Security Fund (JSF).

In a statement issued on Sunday, PASI board valued the noble initiatives which, it said, were typical of Omani society's social collaboration

and solidarity. It noted that the contributions will alleviate the suffering of workers whose jobs were terminated.

The PASI made the statement during its third meeting of the year, held under the chairmanship of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, Board Chairman of PASI.

The board also approved the final draft titled "Approach to the

Third Stage" of PASI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, considered a roadmap of initiatives and projects for the next five years. It also looked into accounts submitted by the executive administration outlining expenditures and revenues of the approved budget.

PASI also reviewed proposals on opportunities for investment in the domestic arena. — ONA

Municipal Councils to get enhanced powers

FROM PAGE 1

The municipal councils, in accordance with the law, will take part in identifying the requirements for public utilities and government services of their respective governorate. They can also devise recommendations regarding the public health and participate with relevant authorities to identify the public interest of the developmental projects as per the conditions set forth by the law of expropriation for the public benefit.

The candidate for the municipal council membership should be a holder of a general education diploma (GED) certificate as a minimum qualification, and should be registered at the electoral register of the wilayat where he/she is nominated, and should not be a member of the State Council of Majlis Ash'shura. The candidate should not be residing or working outside the Sultanate. They should not be affiliates of any military or security bodies.

WHO representative received



MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, on Sunday received Dr John Jabbour, Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation and partnership between the WHO and the Sultanate in various sectors related to education.

The meeting touched on a proposal to form a joint committee from sectors concerned in Oman and the WHO and other UN agencies on unifying

programmes of health, society and environment and compiling public awareness materials amid the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) conditions.

Dr Madeeha spoke about the education sector's situation in the Sultanate during the current school year (2020-2021). She outlined options undertaken by the ministry to operate schools, while at the same time applying precautionary measures — including the Health Protocol — and activating educational platforms. — ONA

Balqees al Hassani to speak at women leadership seminar

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman President, Balqees al Hassani, has been confirmed as a latest keynote speaker, among 25 professionals from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Kenya, to join the upcoming "Women in Leadership 2020" Seminar. The seminar is scheduled to be broadcasted online on two consecutive days, 23rd and 24th of November 2020.

"Women, like men, can lead

and indeed transform an organisation positively. They only need the necessary support, guidance and trust in their capabilities in order for them to demonstrate their excellence. I look forward to share the secrets that made women at Knowledge Oman deliver successful projects over the past 13 years," said Balqees.

Under the theme of "Unleashing the powers, potential and positivity of women in the workplace",



the seminar will see selected professionals and senior leaders across the region share practical knowledge and experience in the form of speaking engagement on how they have managed to overcome various challenges at workplace. Balqees will focus her talk around how Knowledge Oman engages, supports, develops and promotes women in leadership positions through its structure and organisation.

Since 2008, Knowledge Oman has managed to launch society initiatives in the form of seminars, workshops, programmes and activities along with 35 partners locally and internationally attracting over 80,000 registrations and 700 volunteers. Knowledge Oman received four awards that include an outstanding contribution to the cause of education from the World Human Resource Development (HRD) Congress.



Among Lebanon's multiple crises are growing poverty, a political vacuum, coronavirus and the fallout from a massive explosion at Beirut port in August that killed 200 people. — Reuters

Lebanon's president pledges to revive forensic audit of central bank

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Saturday that a forensic audit of the central bank was vital to combat corruption and that he would put it back on track following the withdrawal of the consultancy hired to do the audit.

Aoun said "interest-driven roadblocks" had derailed the audit, which is a key condition for foreign donors to help Lebanon out of a deep financial crisis that has posed the biggest threat to its stability since its 1975-1990 civil war.

Among Lebanon's multiple crises are growing poverty, a political vacuum, coronavirus and the fallout from a massive explosion at Beirut port in August that killed 200 people.

"Our reality today is not promising," Aoun said in a televised speech to mark Independence Day, adding that Lebanon was a prisoner of corruption, political scheming and external dictations.

"If we want statehood, then we must fight corruption... and this begins by imposing the forensic financial audit," he said, adding he would not "back off" on the issue. The caretaker finance minister announced on Friday that the restructuring consultancy Alvarez & Marsal had pulled out of the audit because the central bank had not provided all the information required to carry out the task, citing bank secrecy.

Lebanon has not yet formed a new government since the last one was brought down by the blast. Saad al Hariri, the prime minister-designate under a sectarian power-sharing agreement, is struggling to form a cabinet amid turf wars.

France, the United States and other donors have made clear there would be no bailout unless a credible government is formed to enact long-demanded reforms to tackle endemic waste, corruption and mismanagement.

— Reuters

Mourning after deadly new IS attack north of Baghdad

SAMARRA: Iraq's Salahaddin province declared three days of mourning from Sunday over a deadly attack blamed on the IS group, as some criticised authorities for failing to fight back militants.

Late on Saturday, a roadside bomb hit a civilian car on an open road near Mt Makhoul, about 200 kilometres north of Baghdad, police and a local official said.

When security forces arrived at the scene, militants opened fire on them, police said.

The attack killed at least six Iraqi security personnel and four civilians, including one who died of his wounds overnight, according to local medics.

There was no claim by IS, but both the local mayor and police blamed the group, which Iraq's government said in late 2017 it had defeated.

That victory came after three years of brutal fighting to wrench back the one-third of Iraqi territory that had been captured by IS.

Although the militants no longer hold territory, sleeper cells wage hit-and-run attacks on state infrastructure, particularly in desert areas north of the capital.

Two weeks ago, 11 people were killed in an IS attack on a lookout post at Al Radwaniyah on Baghdad's outskirts.

According to a study published this month by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague, the militant group has claimed more attacks in Iraq than in any other country



A member of the Iraqi security forces inspects the damage outside the Zawraa Park. — AFP

where it is active over the period December 2018 to May this year.

The study said that IS activity in Iraq "accelerated precipitously from February 2020 onwards," reaching levels that are "worryingly close" to those preceding its sweep across a third of Iraq in 2014.

Still, death tolls remain low. IS in Iraq "generally appears to be moving from a (re) building phase into one that is characterised by brazen guerrilla-style attacks," the study noted.

OUTRAGE AT POLICE

The attacks have coincided with a new campaign by Iraq's security forces to arrest militants hiding out in rugged terrain in the

A roadside bomb hit a civilian car on an open road near Mt Makhoul, about 200 km north of Baghdad. The attack killed at least six Iraqi security personnel and four civilians

IS in some remote areas are isolated cases and now under control," he said.

That outraged local figures. "Iraqi security forces just assured us this area had been cleaned," wrote Mashaan al Jaboury, a lawmaker representing Salahaddin, on Twitter after the violence late on Saturday.

For Jamal al Dhari, another figure writing on Twitter, the latest ambush "sheds light on the repeated failures in the fight against terrorism".

"The government of (Prime Minister) Mustafa al Kadhemi must seriously put in place a national strategy... and stop being satisfied with 'investigative committees,'" said Dhari. — AFP

Ethiopian mothers face giving birth in camps

UM RAQUBA REFUGEE CAMP, SUDAN: Like all mothers-to-be, Berekhti Burro dreamt of bringing new life into the world in a safe place, with love and care at home to give her baby the best start. But Burro, nine-months pregnant, was forced to flee intense fighting near her home in Humera in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, trekking for hours in the blazing sun to safety in neighbouring Sudan.

Now the 27-year-old sits with her husband in their new home; a makeshift shelter in the rapidly growing tent-town of Um Raquba refugee camp, some 80 kilometres

from the border.

With her baby due any day now, she has only one thought; what will become of her child?

"It's all I think, about day and night," Burro said.

"I am really scared to give birth here. What if he got sick, or needs an operation. What will I do then?"

She is not alone. UNFPA, the UN Population Fund, estimates there are more than 700 pregnant women among the new arrivals of refugees.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, unleashed a military campaign on November 4 against

I am really scared to give birth here. What if he got sick, or needs an operation. What will I do then?

BEREKHTI BURRO
A pregnant refugee

Tigray's dissident leaders, accusing them of attacking federal military camps and trying to destabilise his government.

Hundreds are reported to have

been killed, and thousands of refugees have fled into neighbouring Sudan. Fighting continues, with Ethiopia's army on Sunday warning civilians to flee the key city of Mekelle before an all-out assault.

Sudan's government is already burdened by its own economic woes and grinding poverty, but authorities immediately sought to prepare camps.

The numbers of people arriving are overwhelming. Some 36,000 Ethiopians have already come, according to Sudan's refugee commission, but the United Nations warns numbers could rise to 200,000 within months. — AFP



An Ethiopian refugee who fled fighting in Tigray province carries her baby as she walks at the Um Rakuba camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref province. — AFP

TEL AVIV

Israel strikes Hamas targets in Gaza

Israel said on Sunday its military struck Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a rocket attack launched from the Palestinian enclave.

The Israeli air force struck two rocket ammunition manufacturing sites, a military compound and "underground infrastructures," the Israel Defence Forces said.

A rocket was fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip on Saturday evening, according to the army, shortly after warning sirens sounded in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon.



The army statement gave no further details, but emergency services said they had no notification of anyone wounded and Israeli media said the projectile fell on open ground. — AFP

TEHRAN

Dealings possible with US despite 'crimes': Iran

The "crimes" committed by the United States against Iran do not prevent "carefully considered" exchanges from taking place, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

"The future of relations between Iran and the United States is not simple," Saeed Khatibzadeh acknowledged at a press conference in Tehran, as President Hassan Rouhani's government makes signs of apparent overtures to US president-elect Joe Biden. "The United States has committed repeated crimes against the Iranian people," added Khatibzadeh, citing a long list.

They included Washington's support for Baghdad during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the "series of sanctions" against Tehran, and the US drone strike that killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in January.

"It is natural that (between two) members of the United Nations (like the US and Iran) there have always been, and there are, very carefully considered exchanges, in a known framework," Khatibzadeh said, while noting that "does not mean that Iran is forgetting this list of crimes." — AFP

BEIRUT

14 fighters in Syria killed in airstrikes

At least 14 militia fighters from Iraq and Afghanistan were killed in air strikes in war-torn eastern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Sunday.

The strikes on Saturday night in Deir Ezzor province, on the border with Iraq, were likely carried out by Israeli war planes, the Observatory said.

The Israeli army said it doesn't comment on foreign reports.

More than 10 strikes hit positions of militias outside the border town of Albu Kamal,



according to the war monitor. The attack killed eight Iraqis and six Afghan fighters, it said. It also destroyed two bases as well as several military vehicles, the Observatory added. — AFP

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD

MASSIVE RALLY AMID
SECOND WAVE OF
CORONAVIRUS

Thousands of people rallied in Pakistan on Sunday to ratchet up pressure on the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan amid a second wave of the COVID-19. The rally was organised in Peshawar by Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of 11 political parties. "Pakistan's second COVID-19 spike is of concern," Prime Minister Khan posted on Twitter on Sunday.

He said the opposition was "callously" destroying people's lives and livelihood. "If cases continue to rise at the rate we are seeing, we will be compelled to go into complete lockdown & PDM will be responsible for consequences," Khan said. — dpa

■ MELBOURNE

INCHING TOWARDS
NORMAL, GOVT
EASES SOME CURBS

Australia moved a step closer to normal life on Sunday, opening some internal borders and easing restrictions in regions affected by COVID-19, as the vast majority of the country has seen no new community infections or deaths for weeks.

South Australia, which last week became the epicentre of infections, reported no new community cases and lifted a drastic lockdown earlier than planned, with the state premier saying swift action had avoided disaster. The number of active cases in the state stood at 37 after an outbreak linked to a returned traveller from Britain forced 4,500 people to quarantine. — Reuters

■ SYDNEY

MAN DIES IN SHARK
ATTACK OFF AUSTRALIA'S
WEST COAST

A man has died after being bitten by a shark at a beach popular with tourists on Australia's northwest coast, authorities said on Sunday. Police were called to a Cable Beach in the morning after reports of the attack.

The man was pulled from the water and given medical treatment but later succumbed to his injuries. "Police can confirm that tragically the man has died," Western Australia police said in a statement.

Shark attacks are rare on Cable Beach, a 22-kilometre stretch of pristine white sand next to the town of Broome.

— AFP

Afghanistan meet to set aid cuts and conditions amid war, pandemic

GENEVA: Afghanistan faces funding cuts and tighter restrictions on vital aid from an international donor conference this week, marking further challenges for a nation torn by two decades of war and now ravaged by COVID-19.

Ministers from about 70 countries and officials of humanitarian organisations, at the virtual conference hosted in Geneva on Monday and Tuesday, are expected to pledge billions of dollars to safeguard development projects, with talks between the Afghan government and Taliban rebels stalled and President Trump sharply reducing US forces in the country.

Although the fragile economy depends heavily on foreign aid, Kabul will see cuts in donations, and donors will introduce stringent political and human rights conditions on the money, five participants said.

Afghanistan's economy is set to contract by at least 5.5 per cent this year because of COVID-19 impacts, stated the World Bank in a recent report. The strategy aims to protect the peace talks and prod the Afghan government to improve allocation, they said.

Donors at the last conference,



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets with Taliban chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar amid talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, in Doha, Qatar on Saturday. — Reuters

in Brussels in 2016, pledged \$15.2 billion for 2017 to 2020, or \$3.8 billion a year. That could be cut by 15 per cent to 20 per cent, said a senior Western diplomat participating in the conference. "This is the best countries can offer amid the domestic challenge of managing a pandemic."

Trump will cut US forces in

Afghanistan to 2,500 from 4,500 by mid-January, the Pentagon said last week, seeking to wind down America's longest war. The drawdown of foreign forces — Britain plans to follow the US lead — could mean greater influence for the Taliban.

This makes donors uneasy over whether the hardliners will try

to roll back progress on human rights and girls' education. The peace talks in the Qatari capital Doha have stalled and the Taliban refuses to call a ceasefire.

Its attacks have sometimes prompted US airstrikes to protect urban areas. But senior diplomats said that a breakthrough was expected in the peace talks after

the donor conference. "Taliban and Afghan government representatives will take a break from the peace talks after the Geneva conference but not before they have joint declaration of agreement over key security issues," said a senior Western official.

At the Geneva meeting, the government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani will present a peace and development framework meant to allocate funds to key projects, safeguard millions of jobs and protect democratic institutions.

AFGHAN VP'S PLEDGE

Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh vowed on Sunday to track down those responsible for a rocket attack on the capital that killed at least 10 people, even as the IS group claimed to have fired the salvo.

The rockets struck several densely populated districts of Kabul on Saturday — including in and around the heavily fortified Green Zone that houses embassies and foreign firms.

The attack came hours before Pompeo was to meet with negotiators from the Taliban and Afghan government in Qatar.

— Reuters/AFP

China to launch moon probe,
seeking lunar rock retrieval

BEIJING: China plans to launch an unmanned spacecraft to the moon this week to bring back lunar rocks in the first attempt by any nation to retrieve samples from Earth's natural satellite since the 1970s.

The Chang'e-5 probe, named after the ancient Chinese goddess of the moon, will seek to collect material that can help scientists understand more about the moon's origins and formation.

The mission will test China's ability to remotely acquire samples from space, ahead of more complex missions. If successful, the mission will make China only the third country to have retrieved lunar samples, following the United States and

the Soviet Union decades ago.

Since the Soviet Union crash-landed the Luna 2 on the moon in 1959, the first human-made object to reach another celestial body, a handful of other countries including Japan and India have launched moon missions.

In the Apollo programme, which first put men on the moon, the United States landed 12 astronauts over six flights from 1969 to 1972, bringing back 382 kg (842 pounds) of rocks and soil.

The Soviet Union deployed three successful robotic sample return missions in the 1970s. The last, the Luna 24, retrieved 170.1 grams (6 ounces) of samples in 1976 from Mare Crisium, or "Sea of Crises". China's probe,

scheduled to launch in coming days, will attempt to collect 2 kg (4 ½ pounds) of samples in a previously unvisited area in a massive lava plain known as Oceanus Procellarum, or "Ocean of Storms".

"The Apollo-Luna sample zone of the moon, while critical to our understanding, was undertaken in an area that comprises far less than half the lunar surface," said James Head, a planetary scientist at Brown University. Subsequent data from orbital remote sensing missions have shown a wider diversity of rock types, mineralogies and ages than represented in the Apollo-Luna sample collections, he said.

— Reuters



A worker wearing traditional attire wears a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the daily re-enactment of the changing of the Royal Guards at Gyeongbok Palace in central Seoul. — Reuters

S Korea to close pubs,
restrict restaurants

SEOUL: South Korea's capital city and nearby areas will close pubs and nightclubs, limit religious gatherings, and restrict service at restaurants, in a bid to contain a burgeoning third wave of coronavirus infections, the health minister said on Sunday.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 330 new daily coronavirus cases as of midnight on Saturday, a drop from 386 reported the day before, but the fifth straight day of more than 300 new cases.

"The third wave of COVID-19 outbreaks is increasingly in full swing," Health Minister Park Neung-hoo told a briefing.

"The situation is extremely serious and grave." A nationwide outbreak was being driven by clusters of infections in the densely-populated Seoul metropolitan area, he said, home to around half of the country's 52 million residents.

As of Tuesday, major coffee shops in the Seoul area will be

required to only offer takeaway and delivery service, while restaurants must close to in-person dining after 9 pm. Other restrictions will be placed on facilities like gyms, with attendance caps on religious gatherings and sporting events.

Earlier in the day Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun told a government meeting that preemptive distancing regulations might be needed to head off a wider outbreak, Yonhap news agency reported.

"We're at a critical juncture of facing a large number of infections nationwide," Chung said. On Saturday, a KDCA official said the country could be facing an outbreak that surpasses two earlier waves of infections, if it fails to block the current spread.

The tightened prevention guidelines are aimed partly at allowing students to go ahead with highly competitive annual college entrance exams scheduled for December 3.

— Reuters



People stand in front of a scaled model of the Challenger space shuttle at a space science museum in Wenchang, Hainan province, China on Sunday. — Reuters



Trump faces new pressure to concede election

WASHINGTON: After a scathing court setback in Pennsylvania, President Donald Trump faces increased pressure from his fellow Republicans to drop his effort to overturn the US presidential election and concede to Democrat Joe Biden. Since Biden was declared the winner two weeks ago, Trump has launched a barrage of lawsuits and mounted a pressure campaign to prevent states from certifying their vote totals. So far, attempts to thwart certification have failed in courts in Georgia, Michigan and Arizona. On Saturday, Matthew Brann, a Republican federal judge nominated by former president Barack Obama, dismissed a similar effort in Pennsylvania, writing that the case amounted to “strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations.”

For Trump to have any hope of remaining in the White House, he needs to eliminate Biden’s 81,000-vote lead in Pennsylvania. The state is due to begin certifying its results on Monday. Trump’s lawyers vowed a quick appeal, but lawyers who opposed him in court say he is out of time. “This should put the nail in the coffin on any further attempts by President Trump to use the



Tricia Richardson, a supporter of President Donald Trump, takes part in a protest against the results of the presidential election in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday. — Reuters

federal courts to rewrite the outcome of the 2020 election,” said Kristen Clarke, president of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Some of Trump’s fellow Republicans in Congress are now breaking ranks. Republican Senator Pat Toomey said the ruling closed off any chance for a legal victory in Pennsylvania and called on

Trump to concede the election. Liz Cheney, a member of the Republican leadership team in the House of Representatives, earlier called on Trump to respect “the sanctity of our electoral process” if he does not succeed in court. **TRUMP REFUSES TO CONCEDE** Biden got 6 million more votes

than Trump in the November 3 election, and also prevailed 306-232 in the state-by-state Electoral College system that determines who will take the oath of office on January 20. He has spent the past several weeks preparing to take office, though Trump’s administration has refused to provide funding and security clearances to do so. — Reuters

WHO envoy fears third wave, calls Europe response ‘incomplete’

ZURICH: A World Health Organization (WHO) special COVID-19 envoy predicted a third wave of the pandemic in Europe in early 2021, if governments repeat what he said was a failure to do what was needed to prevent the second wave of infections. “They missed building up the necessary infrastructure during the summer months, after they brought the first wave under the control,” the WHO’s David Nabarro said in an interview with Swiss newspapers.

“Now we have the second wave. If they don’t build the necessary infrastructure, we’ll have a third wave early next year,” said Nabarro, a Briton who campaigned unsuccessfully to become the WHO director general in 2017. Europe briefly enjoyed sinking infection rates that are now surging again: Germany and France on Saturday saw cases rise by 33,000 combined, Switzerland and Austria have thousands of cases daily, while Turkey reported a record 5,532 new infections. Nabarro singled out Switzerland’s move to allow skiing — with masks required in gondolas — as other Alpine nations like Austria have shuttered

Now we have the second wave. If they don’t build the necessary infrastructure, we’ll have a third wave early next year
NABARRO
WHO official

resorts. Nabarro said Switzerland could reach a “very high level of sicknesses and deaths.” “Once the infection rates sink, and they will sink, then we can be as free as we want,” Nabarro was quoted as saying by the *Solothurner Zeitung*. “But right now? Should ski resorts open? Under what conditions?” Nabarro lauded the response of Asian countries like South Korea, where infections are now relatively low: “People are fully engaged, they take on behaviours that make it difficult for the virus. They keep their distance, wear masks, isolate when they’re sick, wash hands and surfaces. They protect the most endangered groups” — Reuters

Thousands march in Belarus opposition rally in Minsk

MINSK: Tens of thousands of Belarus opposition protesters took to the streets on Sunday, the latest large-scale rally against President Alexandre Lukashenko’s contested re-election. For more than three months Belarus has been gripped by historic weekly opposition rallies following Lukashenko’s reelection to a sixth term in August, which Western governments have refused to recognise. Tens of thousands of protesters marched through different neighbourhoods in the capital Minsk on Sunday, chanting “Long live Belarus” and waving red and white flags of the opposition, a reporter at the scene said. Security forces deployed heavily around the city with armoured vehicles and water



cannons before the rally. Around 70 demonstrators were arrested by the police, according to the Viasna centre for the defence of human rights. “I can’t accept what is going on at the moment,” one protester, 22-year-old computer scientist Olga Matchits, said. “I feel like vomiting when I think of the people in power in the country and of the values they are defending.” — AFP

World’s deepest diving pool opens in Poland

MSZCZONOW: A 45.5-metre deep diving pool with artificial underwater caves and Mayan ruins, the world’s deepest such structure, opened near Warsaw this weekend. The complex, named Deepspot, even includes a small wreck for scuba and free divers to explore. It has 8,000 cubic metres of water — more than 20 times the amount in an ordinary 25-metre pool. Unlike regular swimming pools, Deepspot can open despite coronavirus restrictions in Poland because it is a training centre that offers courses. A hotel with rooms from which guests will be able to watch divers at a depth of five metres is also planned. “It’s the world’s deepest pool,” Deepspot director Michal Braszczynski, a 47-year-old diving enthusiast, said at



A diver is seen in the deepest pool in the world with 45.5-metre located in Mszczonow, about 50 km from Warsaw, on Saturday. — AFP

the opening on Saturday. The current holder of the Guinness world record is in Montegrotto Terme in Italy and is 42 metres deep. The Blue Abyss pool planned to open in Britain in 2021 will

be 50 metres deep. Around a dozen customers came on the first day, including eight seasoned divers who hoped to pass an exam to become instructors. “There are no magnificent

fish or coral reefs here so it is no substitute for the sea, but it is definitely a good place to learn and to train in order to dive safely in open water,” said Przemyslaw Kacprzak, a 39-year-old diving instructor. “And it’s fun! It’s like a kindergarten for divers!” Jerzy Nowacki, a 30-year-old forestry officer and diving novice, said: “For my first time, we went down five metres but you can see all the way to the bottom — the wreck, the caves — it’s magnificent!” Braszczynski said the pool “will also be used by the fire brigade and the army. There are many scenarios for training and we can also test different equipment.” Some 5,000 cubic metres of concrete were used over the two years it took to build the pool and it cost around 40 million zloty (\$10.6 million). — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Merkel marks 15th anniversary as chancellor

Congratulations, but also some barbs, reached Angela Merkel on Sunday, as she marked her 15th anniversary as German chancellor. French newspaper *Le Parisien* took the anniversary as an opportunity to interview politicians with whom Merkel has held consultations and negotiations throughout her career. “She is by far the greatest political personality in Europe,” the newspaper quoted former French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner as saying.



Merkel is “a woman who knows how to be strong, but never hard.” Merkel is very matter-of-fact, an example of “German quality,” recalled Jean-Marc Ayrault, who was France’s prime minister from 2012 to 2014. — dpa

KOBELNZ

Stamped letter auctioned for \$510,000

A historical stamped letter has been sold for 430,000 euros (\$510,000) in Germany. The letter with the first stamps from the city of Luebeck from 1859 was auctioned off in the city of Wiesbaden on Saturday. The Heinrich Koehler auction house, which says it is the oldest stamp auction house in Germany, said that the starting bid for the letter was only 80,000 euros. An anonymous bidder bought the historic letter after parts of the stamp collection of the former Tengelmann supermarket group boss Erivan Haub were auctioned. According to the auction house, a stamped so-called Baden letter from 1856, which entered the race for 100,000 euros, brought in 320,000 euros. It once belonged to King Carol II of Romania, a passionate stamp collector. When he escaped into exile in 1940 by special train, he took his collection with him. “Even when Carol II had to sell part of his collection to secure a livelihood, the letter remained in his possession,” the auction house said. — dpa

THE HAGUE

Dutch cull chickens after bird flu outbreaks

Dutch authorities have culled some 190,000 chickens after a highly-contagious strain of bird flu broke out at least two poultry farms, the agriculture ministry said on Sunday. Health workers slaughtered around 100,000 hens at a poultry farm at Hekendorp outside Gouda while 90,000 chicks were culled at Witmarsum, in northern Friesland. In both cases “a highly-contagious strain of the H5 variant” was suspected, the



ministry said in a statement. There were no other poultry farms within a one-kilometre radius of the outbreaks, it added. “Both farms were cleared to prevent further spread of the disease,” the ministry said. — AFP

Proud of Oman...

History of nations is mostly made of the sacrifice of people's time, efforts and life of course. What our ancestors have achieved is history, what we are doing now is present and what our children and grandchildren will do would be the future. One should imagine how history is made and passed over generations. All of this is a national inheritance and legacy that everyone is responsible for preserving.

Oman started narrating a distinctive historical story to the world since five decades ago. As a matter of fact, Oman was building a nation where peace is born, hospitality is inherited and culture is cherished. Different chapters of this story have been written throughout the 50 years of glory and prosperity. Building the homeland march was a shared responsibility shouldered by the government and citizens alike.

The first scene of the story conveyed the noble promise of late Sultan Qaboos to his fellow citizens upon ascending to the throne in 1970. He promised Omanis: "My people, I will proceed as quickly as possible to transform your life into a prosperous one with a bright future." Though it was a challenging promise, he could fulfil his promise to the people of Oman in a record time.

This promise was a spark of



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OMAN STARTED
NARRATING
A DISTINCTIVE
HISTORICAL
STORY TO
THE WORLD
SINCE FIVE
DECADES AGO

inspiration for all; it instilled hope in Omanis as they were having a difficult life and hard time trying to make a living. It was even a relief and a start towards delivering a prosperous life. This was reflected in His Majesty's address: "We hope that this day will mark the beginning of a new age and a great future for us all. We promise you that we shall do our duty towards the people of our dear country."

The second scene of the story portrayed the confidence of late Sultan Qaboos on Omanis, calling them to contribute in building the nation. His Majesty stated, "We also hope that every one of you will do his duty in helping us to build the thriving and happy future that we seek for this country, because, as you know, unless there is cooperation between the government and the people, we will not be able to build our country with the speed required to free her from the backwardness she has endured for so long."

As the country has been developed on firm foundations, Oman is growing up and moving forward with the same values in the new era of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. In his first speech, His Majesty praised the reign of the late Sultan, stating "Our only relief — the best with which we can eternalise

his achievements — is to pursue his rightful legacy and derive impetus for the brilliant steps that he treaded in full confidence and determination, to preserve the gains that he made and to build upon them".

Reconfirming the government's trust on Omanis, upon ascending on throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham, addressed his fellow citizens, "Nation-building and development are a public responsibility that requires the commitment of all, without exempting any one from their role, in their respective specialties, and within their capabilities". As Oman is witnessing a new era, we, Omanis, are all urged to join forces with the new government, led by His Majesty, while proceeding with the renewed renaissance.

Regardless of gender and age, Omanis were urged to join forces with the government and take part in the nation-building process. People of Oman always mark a key factor of the overall national development. Likewise, they are trusted now as a reliable resource to help in shaping the new era, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham. Oman, as a nation, will continue thriving and become a destination of peace and prosperity to citizens, while providing warm hospitality to residents and visitors alike.

NO MEMORIALS

Mexico confronts the coronavirus

PATRICK J MCDONNELL

It was time for a break, Marisela Perez decided, a chance to ditch concerns about masks and social-distancing and the pervasive fear of infection. She and her husband gathered up the couple's two children, aged 10 and 6, and drove last weekend to Acapulco.

"My kids are stuck at home all day, doing their classes online, never getting out," said Perez, 37, a cosmetics salesperson. "I see them angry, full of anxiety. How is that possible? They are only kids! So we took them to the beach. I haven't seen them this happy in months."

Last Thursday, Mexico passed a doleful milestone: The country's pandemic death toll topped 100,000. Only the United States, Brazil and India have more. Five days earlier, Mexico recorded infection number 1 million. Mexico ranks 11th on the global infection list, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. But the true number of deaths here is considerably higher, officials concede, because Mexico lags most other countries in testing. Many virus-related fatalities have been attributed to other causes, health authorities say.

There were no memorial ceremonies to mark the latest metrics of calamity. Rather, surging case numbers and shrinking hospital bed space have forced new restrictions for restaurants, shopping centres, gyms and other venues in Mexico City and elsewhere.

The 100,000 marker spurred a renewed wave of criticism against

“My kids are stuck at home all day, doing their classes online, never getting out

MARISELA PEREZ
A salesperson

Trump was foiled by the North Korea problem. Will Biden fare better?

VICTORIA KIM

US President Donald Trump's cool-headed nuclear envoy told the North Koreans it was "a window of opportunity." Here was a US president willing to venture far outside traditional diplomacy, particularly with regard to a pariah nation like North Korea.

As quick as he was to fire off insults on Twitter and threaten "fire and fury," Trump stunned many by agreeing to meet with leader Kim Jong Un — even stepping onto North Korean soil when he crossed the demilitarised zone between the two Koreas.

"You know how to reach us," said Stephen Biegun, now the deputy secretary of state, in late 2019. But at the end of all the photo ops and summitry, North Korea wasn't buying the deal Trump was selling.

As Trump's whipsaw diplomacy with North Korea draws to a close, the country is no nearer to relinquishing its nuclear arsenal. It has instead blown up a liaison office with South Korea, shot and killed a South Korean man in its waters and last month showcased a new, larger intercontinental ballistic missile in a triumphant military parade. Enter president-elect Joe Biden, who in debates likened Trump's tete-a-tetes with Kim to meeting with Adolph Hitler on the eve of World War II. The incoming US president has promised South Koreans he will return to "principled diplomacy" in dealing with North Korea and the ever-emboldened Kim.

As capricious and unorthodox as Trump's approach was, for some on the Korean peninsula, it raised hopes



A supporter wearing a President Donald Trump protective mask takes part in a protest against the results of the presidential election in Atlanta. — Reuters

BIDEN HAS
PROMISED SOUTH
KOREANS HE
WILL RETURN
TO 'PRINCIPLED
DIPLOMACY'
IN DEALING
WITH NORTH

of a breakthrough in the long impasse in talks to denuclearise North Korea. Trump's engagement with Pyongyang as his foreign-policy centrepiece appeared to jibe with Kim's eagerness to strengthen his country's economy and a liberal South Korean president's desire to improve ties with the North.

Even their personalities — two outsize men with mercurial natures — made Trump and Kim well-suited and compelling characters in an odd and fleeting bromance.

"There are South Koreans who would have wanted to see Trump's unconventional style persist," said Duyeon Kim, a fellow at Center for a

New American Security, a US think-tank.

"But it's not black and white; Trump is a mixed bag."

Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in spoke on the phone earlier this month, pledging to collaborate closely on the North Korea nuclear issue, according to South Korea's presidential office. In the days following the US presidential election, all attention in South Korea has been focused on what Biden's North Korea policy would look like and whether it would be a continuation of the "strategic patience" approach under President Barack Obama. — dpa

a president whose government has eschewed mandatory lockdowns and curfews, stressed voluntary compliance with mask-wearing and social-distancing guidelines, and discounted virus testing and contact tracing.

Headlines highlighted the official "failure" in a nation where, as in the United States, the pandemic has become thoroughly politicised. In response, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a left-wing populist, assailed conservative "vultures" for partisan weaponising of a calamity.

"From the beginning, they wanted to use the misfortune of the Mexican people in this pandemic to blame us," the president said. "It's obvious."

Past governments, he noted, had left a hollowed-out health network, short on hospitals, equipment and physicians.

The system had to be rebuilt on the fly, he said, as the pandemic swept across Mexico. Still, he asserted, the country's emergency response had "yielded results," noting that Mexico's known death rate of 79 persons per 100,000 persons places the country 10th on the global list, according to Johns Hopkins figures. Belgium is first with a death rate of 133 per 100,000. Peru tops the Americas with 110 deaths per 100,000.

The United States ranks 13th with 77 deaths per 100,000. Regardless of the numbers, Mexicans continue to get sick and die, and cases are spiking again. People fret not only about their physical health, but also their psychological well-being — and that of their children.

In-school learning has been shut down since the spring. "Of course the coronavirus scares me, but I'm also concerned about the mental health of my kids — no school, not being able to see their friends, missing recreational activities," said Perez, the mother of two who decamped to Acapulco last weekend with her family. — dpa

sport



MEDVEDEV
UPSTAGES
NADAL

THIEM FIGHTS BACK
TO STUN DJOKOVIC IN SEMIS
AT ATP FINALS

LONDON: Daniil Medvedev sent Rafael Nadal packing after a grueling slugfest at the ATP Finals in London on Saturday to set up a title match against Novak Djokovic's conqueror Dominic Thiem.

The Spanish world number two, who has never won the elite event in his illustrious career, faltered when serving for the match in the second set and was beaten 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Earlier, US Open champion Thiem recovered from 4-0 down in the third-set tie-break against Djokovic to win 7-5, 6-7 (10/12), 7-6 (7/5).

Russian giant Medvedev — who has won nine matches in a row — put Nadal's serve under intense pressure in the early stages of their evening match at the empty O2 Arena.

But he was unable to make his chances count and a drop in his level allowed the Spaniard to break to love to lead 5-3 before he served out for the set.

Medvedev immediately found his focus at the start of the second set, winning his first service game to love before Nadal, a two-time finalist at the event, double-faulted to give the Russian a 2-0 lead.

Just when it seemed as though Medvedev was cruising, Nadal, 34, broke back twice to take total control and stepped up to serve for the match.

But in another astonishing twist, the 20-time Grand Slam champion played a sloppy game, allowing the Russian back into the match, and Medvedev won the eventual tie-break.

The deciding set hinged on the

ATP FINALS RESULTS
Singles (semifinals)
Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) 7-5, 6-7 (10/12), 7-6 (7/5)
Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3
Doubles (semifinals)
Wesley Koolhof/Nikola Pietrangeli (NED/CRO x5) bt Marcel Granollers/Horacio Zeballos (ESP/ARG x4) 6-3, 6-4
Jurgen Melzer/Edouard Roger-Vasselin (AUT/FRA x7) bt Rajeev Ram/Joe Salisbury (USA/GBR x2) 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 11-9

seventh game — the Russian produced an overhead winner on his third break point, breaking again to beat Nadal for the first time. The Spaniard entered the match on a 71-match winning streak after taking the opening set, but 24-year-old snapped that run with a gritty mental and physical performance over two hours and 36 minutes.

"I felt really strange until 5-4 for him in the second set, when he was serving for the match," said the fourth seed, who lost all three of his matches on his debut at the season-ending tournament last year.

"It felt like I was doing great shots but there was no link in my game and that was why I was los-

ing. He was better in the important moments. I couldn't return in the important moments, I couldn't make a good shot in the important moments.

"I decided to change some small things. Just being closer, going for it a little bit more. I felt like I had the chances to win before (in) some games, a set maybe, but it didn't work, so I had to change and it worked really well. I am really happy about it."

DJOKOVIC AGONY

Thiem's victory against Djokovic ended the world number one's hopes of equalling Roger Federer's record of six titles at the eight-man event. The 2019 runner-up faced an uphill battle psychologically after squandering four match points in the second-set tie-break.

But he was quickly back in the groove and rallied from a desperate situation in the final-set tie-break, winning six successive points to earn two match points, taking the second of those.

"It was for sure a mental battle," said Thiem. "I got so tight in the second-set tie-break, first of all because to play these legends is always going to be something special. "And then playing for a final here at the ATP Finals is also something very special. I thought after my first big title in New York, maybe I'm going to be a little bit more calm but that was a mistake I guess."

The Austrian is only the second player in 2020 to win a tie-break against Djokovic, who entered the third-set decider with a 15-1 tie-break record this season. — AFP

Oman Tennis Association postpones election till May next year

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, NOV 22

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) has postponed its board elections until May 16, 2021, according to the decision of the Extraordinary General Assembly that was convened recently.

The General Assembly, presided over by Chairman Khalid al Aadi, was attended by 17 clubs and the board members of the OTA at the Al Murooj Grand Hotel in Bausher on November 17.

The meeting was attended by Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Majees, Dhofar, Qurayat, Bidiyah, Rabat, Al Suwaiq, Masirah, Al Wahda, Salalah, Oman Club, Al Itifaq,

Nizwa, Al Musannah, Saham, Al Talia and Al Mudhaibi clubs under the OTA.

"The main idea of postponing the election is to give the current board time till Tokyo Olympics to guide the Oman tennis during the challenging period of COVID-19 pandemic," OTA Chairman Khalid al Aadi said.

"The players are currently training at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex following the medical protocol stipulated by the government authorities. Resumption of OTA tournaments will be decided later," the OTA chairman said.

OTA sources indicated that a decision is likely during December-January in line with the Davis Cup preparation



of Oman team. During the meeting, Saham Club and Masirah Club expressed their reservations on holding the General Assembly while recognising the extra-ordinary situation due to the pandemic.

The representative of the Salalah Club appreciated the efforts of the OTA and the General Assembly.

The representative of the Al Ittifaq Club asked the members of the General Assembly to delegate club officials to discuss the administrative and financial reports. A team was formed to review the minutes of the General Assembly meeting, consisting of the representatives of the Majees, Al Ittifaq and Al Nasr clubs.



Nienaber uses putting skills to lead Joburg Open

Big-hitting Wilco Nienaber from South Africa displayed another strength on Saturday with a string of superb putts to take a one-shot lead into the Joburg Open final round. The 20-year-old, who turned professional last year, won rave reviews this week after slamming a tee shot 401.5 metres, with many pundits labelling him the South African answer to Bryson DeChambeau. DeChambeau has averaged 325 yards on the PGA circuit. — AFP



Siraj stays with India on tour despite father's death

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj has opted to stay with the Indian tourists in Australia despite the sudden death of his father, his team said on Saturday. Siraj's father died on Friday as the Indian side prepared for the start of their limited over games against Australia. The BCCI said that Siraj "was offered the option of flying back and be with his family in this hour of grief." — AFP

Tactical Tottenham outwit City



Tottenham Hotspur's Giovanni Lo Celso celebrates scoring their second goal with Son Heung-min and Steven Bergwijn. — Reuters

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, NOV 22

Spurs produced a display of tactical discipline and efficiency in their 2-0 win over Manchester City which took them towards the top of the Premier League.

It was their second consecutive win over their northern opponents and a delighted manager, Jose Mourinho said: "I'm super happy and super proud of them. They were fantastic. They gave everything. They followed a strategy and more than ever strategy plays an important part."

Mourinho, who joined the club a year ago was full of praise for all his players and particularly mentioned the performance of his centre forward. "Every player did his job in an amazing way. Harry Kane represents the spirit of all the guys. The way he works for the team is the way all the others do it. He can change the way people look at a striker. I congratulate the person who made him man of the match because a striker can be man of

I'm super happy and super proud of them. They were fantastic. They gave everything. They followed a strategy and more than ever strategy plays an important part

JOSE MOURINHO
Tottenham manager

the match if he does not score." He added: "This spirit is the DNA of the team. It's a good feeling to be home tonight."

This win over City led by his old nemesis Pep Guardiola was a Mourinho masterclass. It wasn't just the clinical finish that brought two superb goals but it was the tactics that counted in the end. Mourinho sensed the opposition's weakness and exploited it. He knew they were vulnerable in defence — despite the back five players that Guardiola fielded was signed for

EPL RESULTS

On Sunday:
Fulham 2 (Decordova-Reid 15, Loftus-Cheek 70) Everton 3 (Calvert-Lewin 1, 29, Doucoure 35)
On Saturday
Aston Villa 1 (Konsa 47) Brighton 2 (Welbeck 12, March 56)
Newcastle 0 Chelsea 2 (Fernandez 10-og, Abraham 65)
Tottenham 2 (Son 5, Lo Celso 65) Manchester City 0 Manchester United 1 (Fernandes 56-pen) West Brom 0

combined figure of £267.4million — so he allowed them possession for long periods and then hit them hard on the counter-attack ensuring that the two clear shots he had on target brought the right result each time.

Spurs went into early lead, within five minutes of the start, a scooped pass from Tanguy Ndombele took four defenders out of the game. It left Son Heung-min to advance, running on to the pass and beat Ederson which he did with his typical

calmness and clinical finishing.

City had a goal by Aymeric Laporte disallowed half-way through the first half for handball by Gabriel Jesus. It was ruled out by VAR with arguments raging yet again on the rules applied. Another City opportunity to equalise was lost when Jesus dithered and allowed Toby Alderweireld to make a fine blocking tackle. Five minutes into the second half City missed another chance to equalise when Kevin De Bruyne's low shot went inches wide from the edge of the box. Despite City's dominance and having almost twice the possession, Spurs doubled their lead. Giovanni Lo Celso replaced Ndombele in the 65th minute and within 35 seconds of arrival he picked up a pinpoint pass from Kane and drilled his shot inside the far post.

Guardiola, who has recently signed a new two-year contract with the club, said: "We have to start winning games. We made chances but are struggling to score goals. Ten goals in nine games is not good enough."

Oman Sail's Rashid elected to World Sailing Council

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's Director of Sailing, Rashid al Kindi, has been appointed to prestigious international water sports committee following recent elections. Rashid will serve on the World Sailing Council, where he will represent Group I — the Asian member nations — for the period of 2021-2024.

Quanhai Li from China was elected as new World Sailing President with a new Board of Directors selected to serve a four-year term up until the 2024 General Assembly.

Speaking of his appointment, Rashid al Kindi said, "This is a great honour for me personally to have the opportunity to represent my country. It is a reflection of Oman Sail's standing in the global sailing community that the World Sailing Council has placed their trust in me and I am looking forward to taking up this role and helping to shape the future of sailing for the next four years and beyond. I look forward to working closely with the sailing's governing body and gaining a new perspective on international sailing to help sailing in Oman continue to progress."

Mohammed al Amri, President of Oman's Maritime Sports Committee, said, "This



Rashid al Kindi

is an excellent appointment and I have great confidence in Rashid's ability to contribute to the international sailing scene. He possesses vast experience gained with Oman Sail in organising events, designing sailing programmes and coaching young sailors to maximise their potential. We're incredibly proud that he has been recognised on the world stage."

The appointment strengthens Oman Sail's commitment to empowering the youth of Oman and unlocking development opportunities to build competencies and skill sets through sailing. By hosting and participating high-profile world-class events and international competitions, Oman Sail is also able to showcase the Sultanate to a worldwide audience in line with the goals set forth by Oman Vision 2040.



Zawawi, Sarco seal A Division victories; Bank Muscat win

MUSCAT: A magnificent 124 by Nishad KS helped Zawawi Powertech maintain their unbeaten run as they thrashed Basta CT by 141 runs in an A Division 50-over League game at Oman Cricket's Turf 2 ground on Saturday.

Invited to bat first, Zawawi posted a big 323 for 7 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Nishad, Natarajan Kalairasan (50 not out) and Suhil Kanagaraj (42 not out). Nazish Mohammed and Prasad Peruli took two wickets each.

Basta did well to reach 102 for 3 but a dramatic collapse saw they being dismissed for 182 in the 44th over. Only Najeeb Shaheer batted well, scoring a solid 75. Nalaka Pathum, Ashwin Yagnik and Kannan Prabhakaran all claimed two wickets each.

Brief scores (A Division 50 overs League): Zawawi Powertech 323 for 7 in 20 overs (Nishad KS 124 – 15x4,

Natarajan Kalairasan 50 not out – 4x4, 2x6, Suhil Kanagaraj 42 not out – 3x4, 3x6, Nalaka Pathum 38 – 6x4, 1x6. Nazish Mohammed 2-32, Prasad Peruli 2-60) trounced Basta CT 182 all out in 43.1 overs (Najeeb Shaheer 75 – 6x4, 2x6, Rajesh Khetani 23 – 4x4. Nalaka Pathum 2-15, Ashwin Yagnik 2-22, Kannan Prabhakaran 2-37) by 141 runs.

PATEL POWERS SARCO

In another A Division match on Friday, Sarco rode on a splendid all-round show by Sandip Patel to clobber ACT by 161 runs at OC Turf 2.

Patel, who struck an unbeaten 78, was involved in two major partnerships to help his side to a big total. He scored 70 runs for the sixth wicket along with Murad Khan who got out for a well made 37. Patel then put up an unbroken 117-run seventh wicket partnership with Ajay Menon who remained not out at 55. Rajesh

Devashya bowled a great spell, taking 4 for 34 in his 10 overs, two of which were maiden.

Facing a mountain to climb, ACT crumbled to 102 all out due largely to outstanding bowling by Patel (4 for 28), Hafiz Zahid (3 for 33) and Dileepa Srilal (2-05).

Brief scores (A Division 50 overs League): Sarco 263 for 6 in 49.4 overs (Sandip Patel 78 not out – 8x4, 1x6, Ajay Menon 55 – 6x4, 1x6, Murad Khan 37 – 1x4, 3x6, Rajesh Devashya 4-34) thrashed ACT 102 for 10 in 21.3 overs (Ilyas Afreedi 34 – 2x4, 3x6, Qasim Ali 24 – 1x4, 3x6, Sandip Patel 4-28, Hafiz Zahid 3-33, Dileepa Srilal 2-5) by 161 runs.

ASGHAR STARS IN BANK MUSCAT WIN

Asghar Khan's strokeful 80 led Bank Muscat to a comfortable 59-run win over OCT Al Hail A in a B Division 30 overs League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.



Zawawi Powertech's Nishad KS

Bank Muscat batted well to post an imposing 206 for 5 on the board thanks to major contributions from Khan and Abbas al Balushi (54 not out).

OCT Al Hail A failed to keep pace with the mounting run rate and were dismissed for 147 in the 27th over. Adil al Balushi and Waleed al Balushi scored 38 not out and 35 respectively. Ajay

Hirelkar, Muhammed Zeeshan, Zeeshan Tufail and Ashish Gupta all bagged two wickets each.

Brief scores (B Division 30 overs League): Bank Muscat 206 for 5 in 30 overs (Asghar Khan 80 – 10x4, 1x6, Abbas al Balushi 50 not out – 5x4) defeated OCT Al Hail A 147 all out in 26.3 overs (Adil al Balushi 38 not out – 3x4, Waleed al Balushi 35 – 3x4, Hisham Shafi 25 – 4x4. Ajay Hirelkar 2-11, Muhammed Zeeshan 2-24, Zeeshan Tufail 2-27, Ashish Gupta 2-27) by 59 runs.

MUBASHAR, MUSTANSAR STEER PDO TO VICTORY

Zubair CT emerged victorious in a battle of B Division batting powerhouses, beating PDO RC by 5 wickets at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

PDO run machine Abdul Naveed slammed a breezy 104 off 71 to lay the foundation for his team's impressive 225 all out in 29.2 overs. Mubashar Iqbal

bowled well, taking 4 for 38 in his six-over spell.

Zubair got off to a flyer, racing to 62 without loss in little over six overs and continued to maintain the momentum before claiming victory in the 29th over, scoring 226 for 5. Mustansar Hussain's 56 not out, Naveed Khan's 54 and a solid unbeaten 40 by Jagath Chandana were instrumental in leading Zubair to a successful chase. Abdul Naveed bowled well too, taking 2 for 38.

Brief scores (B Division 30 overs League): PDO RC 225 all out in 29.2 overs (Abdul Naveed 104 – 16x4, Nadeem Ahmed 31 – 6x4, Asadullah Asghar 29 – 1x4. Mubashar Iqbal 4-38, Ruwan Sighe 2-32) lost to Zubair CT 226 for 5 in 28.2 overs (Mustansar Hussain 56 not out – 8x4, Naveed Khan 54 – 8x4, Jagath Chandana 40 not out – 4x4, Muhammed Amjad 33 – 4x4, 1x6. Abdul Naveed 2-38) by 5 wickets.



ABDULLAH BRINGS CHEERS TO HOSTS

UK'S WILLCOX CLAIMS TOP SPOT IN ROUND 2 OPEN CATEGORY OF OCA CHAMPIONSHIP



Top three winners of open category.



Top three winners of youth category.

**ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH**
MUSCAT, NOV 22

Young Omani rider Abdullah al Ghilani brought cheers to the hosts with top spot in the under-23 category and a second-place finish in the open category of the Oman Cycling Association (OCA) Championship 2020-21 second round held on Friday.

Abdullah's timing of 23:35.59 earned him second best time of the Round 2. The Arsen Endurance rider is leading the U-23 section for Bank Nizwa jersey with 70 points.

Paul Willcox from United Kingdom romped home with the best timing of the day — 22

minutes, 15.69 seconds — to take the top honours in the open category of the 18 km individual time trial staged at the Al Batinah Coastal Road.

Willcox also claimed the first place in the 40 plus age category with the timing.

The North Road Oman rider is leading the open section for the Omantel jersey with 120 points and wearing the Sohar International jersey for 40 plus category with 70 points.

Another cyclist from UK, Daniel Baldwin claimed the third in open category with a timing of 24:03.45.

Omani riders made an excellent outing by sweeping the fourth to tenth positions in the

open category for Omantel Jersey.

Sultan Hamed al Rawahi, OCA board member, said the championship is witnessing good participation of 14 teams and two youth centres in Muscat and Nizwa.

“Out of 136 riders registered for the race, 116 cyclists competed and the second round saw good competition,” Sultan said.

OCA President Saif al Rashdi was the chief guest for the concluding ceremony as he honoured the top three place winners in open, under-23, youth, 40 plus and women categories.

YOUTH RIDERS EXCEL

In the under-23 section, Mundher

al Hasani (24:57.54) took second position and Waleed al Fahdi finished third with a timing of 25:45.72.

In youth section, Islam Ayad of Egypt clinched the first place with a timing of 13:09.42, while Omanis Mohammed al Ghaithi (13:15.52) and Abdulaziz al Mandhari (14:01.09) finished second and third.

Oman's Haitham al Faril (24:32.62) grabbed second spot in 40 plus category, while Gregory Pollard of UK finished third with a timing of 25:15.00.

In the women's category, Asta Reynisdottir Parker (27:34.27) and Robynn Pollard (30:27.68) impressed with first and second positions.

NEXT RACE ON NOV 27

The next race, Race 3 will be 90km road race with 15 laps at Halban on November 27.

A total of eight races are scheduled for this season's championship.

Teams will collect points from each of the races.

After the first race, North Road Oman have 250 points, while Arsen Endurance have 230 points and Al Ahli Sidab A have 210 points.

In the opening 45km team time trial event of the OCA Championship on November 6, North Road Oman won the honours.

Arsen Endurance and Al Ahli Sidab A finished second and

third respectively at the season-opening event for OCA from Al Amerat to Al Salil and back.

The championship, which runs for a total of 641 km, consists eight races — six road races, one individual time trial and one team time trial. All the races are one-day events with separate prizes on each day.

Prizes will be given in the Open category, under-23, team and 40 plus. This year's event is being competed by Ahli Sidab A and B teams, Al Rustaq, Al Shabab, Sur, Izki, North Road Oman, Gulf Cycles, Arsen Endurance/Diver Store, Nizwa Club, Brothers Team, Capital Team, Ibri Club and Royal Army of Oman.



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Bahrain economy ‘expected to recover in 2021’: S&P

MANAMA: Bahrain’s economy is expected to recover moderately in 2021, with real GDP expanding by 3.5 per cent, says the latest assessment by S&P Global Ratings. The US-based firm, widely considered the largest ratings agency in the world, sees economic growth in the kingdom averaging around 2.3 per cent in 2022-2023.

S&P has forecast Bahrain’s real GDP contracting by 5 per cent this year, because of the effects of the pandemic and lower oil prices on consumption and investment activities.

It said Bahrain’s relatively diverse economy would benefit from its proximity to the large market of Saudi Arabia, sound regulatory oversight of the financial sector, and a relatively well-educated work force.

However, the new year could turn out to be the toughest test for banks world-wide since the aftermath of the global financial crisis, says the firm’s Global Banks 2021 Outlook. The withdrawal of supports that have steadied banks and helped borrowers survive will reveal a truer picture of underlying bank asset quality, even as economies start to recover.

“The sharp rebound in global growth we expect in 2021, together with strong bank balance sheets, support from authorities to retail and corporate markets, and regulators’ flexibility, should limit bank downgrades in 2021,” said S&P. — **Reuters**

Oman plans major perishables hub to drive air cargo growth

AIR LOGISTICS: 150,000 tonne-capacity centre for handling perishables proposed to be set up at Terminal 1 of Muscat International Airport

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman Aviation Group (OAG) has plans to invest in the development of a sizable hub for the handling of perishable cargo at Muscat International Airport. The proposed facility is an integral part of the Omani government’s National Cargo Strategy to, among other goals, boost air cargo throughput volumes to 780,000 tonnes per annum by 2030, rising to 1.5 million tonnes per annum by 2040.

Plans for the perishables centre are being spearheaded by Transom SATS Cargo, the Omani-Singaporean joint venture operating under the auspices of Oman Aviation Group. Transom SATS Cargo is one of five companies that together constitute the Transom Group, the other four being Transom Handling, Transom Catering, Transom Hospitality, and Muscat Duty Free. Transom Group, along with Oman Airports and Oman Air, together make up Oman Aviation Group – part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

According to a top official of Transom SATS Cargo, the proposed perishables centre is among a broad list of initiatives being pursuing by the cargo handling subsidiary, and the wider Oman Aviation Group, to support the growth of a robust air logistics industry in the Sultanate.

S T Tan, CEO, said a 150,000 tonnes per annum capacity complex is envisioned at Terminal 1 of Muscat International Airport. The dedicated facility is proposed to be established on a 7,000 sq metre built-up area at an existing part of the airport’s air-cargo



complex.

Participating in an online forum organised recently by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Tan said the achievement of long-term targets set under the National Air Cargo Strategy is predicated on the growth of industries the output of which can be shipped by air to international markets.

Opportunities falling in the category of perishables include Omani beans, which enjoy great demand in Japanese markets, as well as other fruits and vegetables, value-added date products, and halal foods. Chilled and processed fish sourced from conventional fisheries or

“

Opportunities falling in the category of perishables include Omani beans, which enjoy great demand in Japanese markets, as well as other fruits and vegetables, value-added date products, and halal foods.

S T TAN
CEO, Transom SATS Cargo

aquaculture can also help generate air cargo volumes, he said.

The official also underlined the potential for the airfreighting of spare parts, among other hardware, for distribution across free zones operating at Suhar, Duqm and Salalah.

Equally prospective are sea-to-air logistics activities that leverage enhanced connectivity between Oman’s maritime gateways and airports, coupled with a streamlined customs clearance system, to move value-added products to overseas markets by air.

Transom SATS Cargo, owned 33 per cent by Singapore-based SATS – a leading global provider of airline catering and gateway services, offers a full range of services expected of an international air cargo operator, said the official. It includes the handling of, among other goods, postal articles, e-commerce goods, livestock, perishables, pharmaceuticals, dangerous goods, and valuable articles.

In other initiatives being pursued by the JV, Tan said the company is working with SATS Singapore to develop an “e-fulfilment corridor” that links Muscat with key cities like Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

To this end, it is also collaborating with Asyad Express – a brand of Oman Post – to support door-to-door, last-mile delivery, he noted.

Saudi Arabia’s FDI up in first half of 2020

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Investment Khalid al Falih said foreign direct investment (FDI) increased by 12 per cent in the first half of 2020 compared with the same period last year.

The Saudi government, which is hosting this year’s G20 summit, has made attracting greater foreign investment a cornerstone of its Vision 2030 plan to diversify the economy of the world’s largest oil exporter away from oil revenues.

“I’m glad to say that FDI, my area of focus, in the first half has been reported to increase by 12 per cent compared to last year,” Falih, who previously chaired state oil company Saudi Aramco, told a G20 conference.

Falih said in September the kingdom had experienced a slowdown in FDI this year due to the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When I mentioned the 12 per cent increase I wanted to assure people that there was no decline, our FDI target is much higher,” Falih said.

As part of efforts to attract foreign investors, Saudi Arabia will launch next year special economic zones dedicated to several sectors, Falih said.

In addition to attracting higher investment volumes, it will focus on “qualitative growth”, he said, mentioning areas such as cloud computing, renewable energy, tourism, culture, entertainment, and logistics.

“These investments may have lower investment volumes but higher impact on the economy.”

Saudi Arabia is chairing a two-day summit this weekend of leaders of the 20 biggest world economies, who will debate how to deal with a pandemic that has caused a global recession and how to manage the recovery once it is under control. — **Reuters**

Ministry of Finance sets deadline for submission of FY 2020 final accounts

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 22

The Ministry of Finance (MOF) has issued a circular directing all ministries and government units to submit their final accounts for FY 2020 to the Ministry and State Audit Institution (SAI) latest by March 31, 2021.

Circular 1/2020 requires that such final accounts should include most salient results and objectives achieved during the implementation of the budgets approved for various ministries and government units over the fiscal year.

The final accounts should also include actual revenue and expenditure compared to budgeted

revenue and expenditure.

The financial position should include details of cash balances of all ministries and government units in their bank accounts and government’s coffers, debit and credit balances, permanent and temporary advance, financial stamps and government’s financial entitlements.

A detailed statement should be



Circular 1/2020 requires that such final accounts should include most salient results and objectives achieved during the implementation of the budgets approved for various ministries and government units over the fiscal year

made on government’s non-financial assets such as but not limited to real-estate, lands, inventory, equipment, government libraries and others.

The circular emphasised that each ministry and government unit should also submit a copy of the

report prepared by its internal audit department on the fourth quarter of FY 2020, and bank statements for those which are not funded by MOF.

The Ministry has asked public authorities and establishments, which apply different systems, to submit their accounts and financial statements for FY 2020 to MOF by no later than January 17, 2021.

The Ministry has urged all relevant entities to follow the prescribed procedures and provisions set out in the circular. MOF asserts that any violation of the provisions of the circular will be considered as financial misconduct as per the Article (No. 41) of the Financial Law promulgated by the Royal Decree No. (47/98).

Britain’s Sunak: No return to austerity in new spending plan

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak (pictured) said there would be no return to austerity in a spending plan he will announce on Wednesday, even as the coronavirus crisis pushes the country’s debt further above 2 trillion pounds.

Sunak, who has rushed out massive government spending increases and tax cuts equating to about 10 per cent of economic output, said he would announce “quite a significant” increase in funding for public services.

“You will not see austerity next week,” Sunak told Sky News on Sunday, saying his priority in the one-year spending plan was to fight the health and economic crises.

More than 3 billion pounds will be set aside in extra help for the health service. Economists think Britain will borrow about 400 billion pounds (\$531



billion) this year, approaching 20 per cent of gross domestic product, the most since World War Two.

It would be nearly double the hit from the global financial crisis, which took a decade to work down, and some lawmakers in Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party want more fiscal restraint now.

Sunak said forecasts to be published on Wednesday would show the “enormous strain” on the economy and now was not the time to cut back on spending or raise taxes. — **Reuters**



SPOTLIGHT

Weekly 'Made in Oman' series



Nourishing our economy

PROSPECTS FOR OMAN'S FOOD INDUSTRY: Interview with Dr Nadiya al Saadi, Executive Director, Oman Animal, Plant & Genetic Resources Centre



I think there are a lot of opportunities for forward-thinking Omani entrepreneurs who want to jump on the food industry train

DR NADIYA AL SAADI

Is there a demand for locally grown food?

Let's look at this from a global perspective, by 2050 the world's population will reach 9.1 billion, over 30 per cent higher than today and nearly all of this increase will occur in developing countries.

Urbanisation will continue at an accelerated pace, and about 70 per cent of the

world's population will live in cities.

Income levels will be many multiples of what they are now. In order to feed this larger, more urban and richer population, food production will have to increase by 70 per cent.

So, yes, I think there are a lot of opportunities for forward-thinking Omani entrepreneurs who want to jump on the food industry train.

What's your take on the sustainable-food movement?

As more Omani consumers become conscious about what they eat, where it comes from, how it is produced, how it impacts health and well-being — demand for fresh, healthy, locally sourced organic food will continue to rise.

It is crucial we look at ways of boosting our local food system to feed a growing population. In other words, we need to localise our sustainable food supply to the greatest level possible.

The sustainable-food movement, with a focus on local food networks and healthy eating, has proven to be increasingly popular with the Omani public.

Usually sold within 24 hours of being harvested, locally produced fruits and

vegetables are fresher and taste better than produce which has been shipped for a long period of time.

Statistics reveal that much of the produce purchased in supermarkets has been shipped from overseas travelling on average over 2,000 kilometres for as many as 7 to 14 days.

Does buying local produce really have an impact on communities?

Absolutely. Buying local produce does not just taste better, it also leads to money being reinvested in our communities, creating jobs and by cutting the distance food travels it reduces carbon emissions in line with our commitments on climate change.

The growing demand for local sustainable food provides exciting commercial opportunities for Omani farmers, manufacturers, supermarkets, restaurants and hotel chains.

Indeed, local start-ups, particularly those run by young people are tapping into the public desire to give back to the community — they are concerned for the future of the planet and feel personally responsible to make a difference. They have my full support.

Pact to support growth of clay-based innovations



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 22

The Industrial Innovation Centre has signed an agreement with Al Mudar Al Ahlia Foundation to establish an innovation unit to promote and invest in the development of clay-based innovations in the Sultanate.

It is aimed at supporting entrepreneurs from among craftsperson and developing traditional crafts in line with the requirements of the times.

This will help in the promotion of crafts in the country. With funding support from the Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC), Al Mudar Al Ahlia Foundation will supervise the unit and support entrepreneurs who want to make craft products through production lines provided by the unit.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi of IIC signed the agreement with Yousuf bin

Abdullah al Jahwari, CEO of Al Mudar Al Ahlia Foundation.

It is aimed at supporting entrepreneurs from among craftsperson and developing traditional crafts in line with the requirements of the times

Dr Al Mahrouqi said: "We are delighted to have this agreement of cooperation. The Industrial Innovation Centre believes that it is important to strengthen and invest in promising national sectors, which include clay innovative industries, which are rooted in ancient Omani civilisation.

The centre is presenting it in an innovative manner which matches the requirements of the time."

Al Jahwari said: "This agreement is considered as a

milestone in the activity of the foundation.

It will help in the adoption of high-quality products with a unique innovative character which meets the requirements of individuals and institutions."

The first phase includes financing of the innovation project, coordinating with the concerned authorities to provide Omani clay for the purpose of research and development, contributing to innovations meant for development of joint products with added value, undertaking research and development for suitability of using Omani white clay on pottery products.

The second phase includes financing the construction of the unit for clay innovative industries, which will include an exhibition area, educational laboratory, laboratory for development and designing, modelling laboratory, mini production lines, and storage facility for raw materials.

CMA kicks off Capital Market and Insurance Sector survey

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 22

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the launch of a 'Capital Market and Insurance Sector Stakeholders Perception Assessment Project' in collaboration with an international survey company.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi (**pictured**), Executive President, said the initiative will help assess perceptions of stakeholders of capital market and insurance sector institutions with regard to the regulation of these key segments of the economy.

Learnings garnered from this survey will help in preparations



to implement CMA's strategy to enhance the performance of the capital market and insurance sector during the 2021-2025 timeframe, which is aligned with the 2040 Oman Vision.

The findings of the project will help in strengthening any shortcomings in the regulatory and legislative infrastructure

governing the capital market and insurance industry, he added.

The survey will cover all the entities regulated by the CMA or dealing with it, such as Muscat Securities Market, Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, the companies operating in the field of securities, public listed companies,

insurance companies, brokers and agents, audit firms accredited by the CMA, individual and institutional investors in addition to the prospective participants from among the family businesses, oil and gas companies and the companies in which the government hold shares and other entities licensed by the CMA.

Biggest private super-specialty hospital set for Q1 2021 opening

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 22

Oman International Hospital (OIH), one of the Sultanate's largest private-owned super-specialty hospitals, is set to open its doors in the first quarter of 2021 in the capital city.

The project, backed by Oman Brunei Investment Company in association with Suhail Bahwan Group, will be managed by Idealmed GHS — part of IGHS, an integrated health group based in Coimbra, Portugal, which is a global healthcare hub. It will provide world class healthcare services and treatments to the



people of Oman, said OIH in a statement.

Manuel Carvalho, COO of Oman International hospital said, "Oman International Hospital conveys warmest wishes and felicitations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on this great occasion.

The healthcare sector has always been a focus of the government, and this is evident

in the country's 9th Five Year Plan (2016-2020) which prioritises and emphasises the importance of the development of integrated medical services and further investment in medical training of human resources. The government has also encouraged the participation of the private sector in the healthcare sector in order to aid the country in reaching its healthcare goals."

PRESS RELEASES

OMAN ARAB BANK LAUNCHES SECOND SERIES OF ONLINE WORKSHOPS

Oman Arab Bank has announced the launch of its second series of educational workshops. The Learning Hub platform specialises



in accelerating the skills and knowledge of entrepreneurs and the youth, to ensure their readiness to meet the demands of the future.

The workshops commenced on Sunday, November 22, and will run until February 2021. They comprise of several topics of interest, presented by local and international experts. Speakers will be announced every month on OAB's social media platforms.

Adil al Rahbi, Head of Human Resources Division at OAB, said, "Fresh graduates and budding entrepreneurs require a wider set of skills, in addition to what was taught during their academic studies, for them to be able to achieve success."

NBO LAUNCHES SPECIAL EDITION BADEEL CARD TO MARK THE SULTANATE'S 50TH NATIONAL DAY

As part of a string of initiatives to mark the occasion of the Sultanate's 50th National Day under the theme 'From the Nation's Bank, to the Nation', National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched a special edition of its popular Badeel Prepaid Card.



Available for a limited time only, the card features exclusive offers and discounts, starting with 5 per cent cash back when using it to pay at particular fuel stations across Oman and online shopping. Both NBO customers and non-NBO customers can get their hands on the card for just RO 5 until December 10, 2020.

Adding to the unique benefits of its award-winning Badeel portfolio, NBO continues to be at the forefront of innovation in the Sultanate's banking industry.

In brief

■ CALIFORNIA



US RETAILER GUITAR CENTER FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

Guitar Center Inc, the largest US retailer of music instruments and equipment, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on Saturday, as music lovers moved their shopping online during the coronavirus pandemic.

The retailer has negotiated to have a total of \$375 million in debtor-in-possession financing from its existing lenders and intends to raise \$335 million in new senior secured notes, the company said. — Reuters

■ NEW YORK



HERSHEY GRABS COCOA STOCKS FROM EXCHANGE, AVOIDS AFRICAN PRICE PREMIUM

US chocolate maker Hershey Co has positioned itself to receive a sizeable amount of cheap cocoa from futures exchange ICE, a move that highlights difficulties African producers are having to sell beans at a recently-agreed premium, traders said.

According to several market sources, Hershey moved to take delivery of thousands of cocoa lots before the December contract expires on December 15. Dealers suggest volumes of up to 30,000 tonnes.

Hershey's move happens in a moment when Ghana and Ivory Coast are selling their first full crop under a new scheme that includes a price premium of \$400 per tonne, created to help alleviate farmer poverty.

— Reuters

■ ALGIERS



ALGERIAN GAS EXPORTS TO DROP BY 4.7 PER CENT

Algeria's gas exports this year are expected to drop by 4.7 per cent, Energy Minister Abdelmadjid Attar said, hit by reduced demand from Europe and competition from cheaper US supplies.

The North African country, which derives 95 per cent of its foreign revenue from oil and gas sales, is expected to export 41 billion cubic metres of gas this year, down from 43 billion cubic metres in 2019, the minister said.

Oil and gas revenue amounted to \$33 billion in 2019 and is forecast to be \$23 billion this year. Total gas output will reach 126 billion cubic metres, versus 127 billion cubic metres in 2019, Attar said, with production hampered by ageing fields and lack of investment while domestic consumption has grown by 5.3 per cent per year since 2009 to reach 46 billion cubic metres last year. — Reuters

G20 leaders seek to help poorest nations in post-COVID world

BEIJING/DUBAI: Leaders of the 20 biggest economies on Saturday vowed to ensure a fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, drugs and tests around the world and do what was needed to support poorer countries struggling to recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

"We will spare no effort to ensure their affordable and equitable access for all people, consistent with members' commitments to incentivize innovation," the leaders said in a draft G20 communique.

"We recognise the role of extensive immunisation as a global public good."

The twin crises of the pandemic and an uneven, uncertain global recovery dominated the first day of a two-day summit under the chairmanship of Saudi Arabia, which hands off the rotating presidency of the G20 to Italy next month.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has thrown the global economy into a deep recession this year, and efforts needed to underpin an economic rebound in 2021, were at the top of the agenda.

"We must work to create the conditions for affordable and equitable access to these tools for all peoples," Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz said in his opening remarks.

G20 leaders are concerned that the pandemic might further deepen global divisions between the rich and the poor. "We need to avoid at all costs a scenario of a two-speed world where only the richer can protect themselves against the virus and restart normal lives," French President Emmanuel Macron told the summit.

World Bank warns G20 against doing too little to tackle



Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud and other leaders are seen on a screen before the start of the virtual G20 meeting hosted by Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

debt problems. To do that, the European Union urged G20 leaders quickly to put more money into a global project for vaccines, tests and therapeutics — called Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator — and its COVAX facility to distribute vaccines.

"At the G20 Summit I called for \$4.5 billion to be invested in ACT Accelerator by the end of 2020, for procurement & delivery of COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines everywhere," European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen said on Twitter.

"We need to show global solidarity," she said. Germany was contributing more than 500 million euros (\$592.65 million) to the effort, Chancellor Angela Merkel told the G20, urging other countries to do their part, according to a text of her remarks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to provide Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine to other countries and said Moscow was also preparing a second and third vaccine. China, where the pandemic originated a year ago, also offered to cooperate on vaccines. China has five home-grown candidates for a vaccine undergoing the last phase of trials.

"China is willing to strengthen cooperation with other countries in the research and development, production, and distribution of vaccines," President Xi Jinping told the G20 Summit.

"We will... offer help and support to other developing countries, and work hard to make vaccines a public good that citizens of all countries can use and can afford," he said.

US President Donald Trump, who lost the US presidential

election but has refused to concede to former vice-president Joe Biden, addressed G20 leaders briefly before going golfing. He discussed the need to work together to restore economic growth, White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said in a summary.

She made no mention of any US pledge to support the global vaccine distribution effort. One European source said Trump's remarks were focused on what he described as an unprecedented US recovery and the US drive to develop its own vaccines. To prepare for future outbreaks, the EU is proposing a treaty on pandemics.

"An international treaty would help us respond more quickly and in a more coordinated manner," European Council President Charles Michel told the G20.

— Reuters

European regulator to lift Boeing 737 MAX grounding in January

PARIS: Europe is set to lift its flight ban on the Boeing 737 MAX passenger jetliner in January after US regulators last week ended a 20-month grounding triggered by two fatal crashes.

The head of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) said in remarks aired on Saturday that the 737 MAX was safe to fly after changes to the design of the jet that crashed twice in five months in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people.

"We wanted to carry out a totally independent analysis of the safety of this aircraft, so we performed our own checks and flight tests," Executive Director Patrick Ky told the Paris Air Forum, an online aviation conference hosted by La Tribune.

"All these studies tell us that the 737 MAX can return to service. We have started to put in place all the measures," he said. "It is likely that in our case we will adopt the decisions, allowing it to return to service, some time in January."

EASA's decision is seen as the most important milestone after



Grounded Boeing 737 MAX aircraft are seen parked at Grant County International Airport in Moses Lake, Washington. — Reuters

the FAA's approval since, as the watchdog responsible for Airbus, it too carries significant weight in the industry.

Officials confirmed a draft EASA directive proposing to end the grounding in Europe will be published next week, followed by a 30-day comment period. After finishing touches, that would lead to an ungrounding decision in January.

How long it takes for flights to resume in Europe depends on

Western Union buys 15 per cent stake in Saudi Arabia's STC Group



A man sits on a chair next to Western Union currency exchange office in Prague. — Reuters

DUBAI: Western Union, the world's largest money transfer firm, has acquired a 15-per cent stake in the digital payment unit of Saudi Arabia's STC Group for \$200 million.

The acquisition of stc pay, which values the company at 5 billion riyals (\$1.3 billion), will finance its capital and support long-term expansion plans, Saudi Arabia's largest telecoms operator said.

STC Group Chairman Mohammed bin Khalid al Faisal said the investment reflected the company's position as a "digital enabler". He said the deal created the first "Saudi unicorn and the first fintech unicorn in the Middle East".

Unicorns are generally defined as private companies valued at \$1 billion or more. Sources said that STC had hired banks to arrange a potential initial sale of shares in its product and services development arm, Solutions by STC. Reducing dependence on cash is part of Saudi government efforts to modernise the economy of the world's largest oil exporter.

STC said its stc pay unit is the first licensed fintech company by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority and has more than 4.5 million users.

— Reuters

Apple asks for tough protection for data

WASHINGTON: Apple Inc, advertising giant GroupM and others, asked the judge hearing the Justice Department's lawsuit against Alphabet's Google to allow them to designate certain data used by the government as "highly confidential," to ensure that no-one from Google could see it.

The Justice Department, which sued the search and advertising giant in October, put at the core of its antitrust case the billions of dollars that Google paid to be the default search engine on Apple's iPhones, and Apple noted in its filing that sensitive data was used to write the complaint.

The government is accusing Google of illegally using its market muscle to hobble rivals in a lawsuit that is the biggest challenge to the power and influence of Big Tech in decades.

Google had offered to ensure that any confidential information would be made



available solely to two in-house attorneys at the offices of Google's outside counsel or in another secure manner, adding that it would promptly report any disclosure.

Like Apple, companies including AT&T, Microsoft Corp and Amazon.com Inc which assisted the government asked Judge Amit Mehta of the US District Court for the District of Columbia to create a tier of data deemed "highly confidential" and to prohibit any Google employee from having access to it.

GroupM further asked that the information be "disclosed only on an 'outside attorneys' eyes only' basis." — Reuters

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MONDAY NOVEMBER 23, 2020 RABEE AL THANI 7, 1442 AH

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FLATS in Mumtaz, Al Khuwair and Al Ghubrah, 2BHK and 1 BHK. 99341138/ 90991079.

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NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/- . 92838118

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1BHK & 2 bhk flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. 93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

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DENTAL Clinic looking for experienced Female Nurse with bachelor/ diploma & three years' experience. Candidates who are ready to join, please send your resume to hiringmedicalstaff@hotmail.com

URGENT requirement, Marble grounding expert 2 nos. External glass cleaner - 2 nos. Visa available. Mobile: 95175645, 97468796

Duct Man/ Fabricator URGENTLY required for Duct Factory Duct Men/ Fabricator With minimum 4 years Oman experience. Contact: 98901648.

WE are urgently for AC & Auto electrician (car electrician) who can join immediately. Contact: 99677756.

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LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM 92541510

33 years, Indian, female having MBA in finance looking for position of accountant, having 8 years of experience in Muscat as accountant. NOC available. Contact No: 79161458.

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkhdhanush11@gmail.com

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. 968 94991705.

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WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company Al Mashary Al'alyt Llmoawlat, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 126521, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 255,000.000 to

5,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

ACC AVAILABLE

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non-cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact 99657906

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COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

NEW 3 storey villas for sale/rents Wadi Kabir/Al Khuwair), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). 96596348.

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SIT. WANTED

LIGHT driver, Pakistani male, 39, with good knowledge of Oman roads and areas, speaks English, Arabic, Urdu and Hindi. Looking for suitable placement. Contact 79250786.

A reputed company in Sultanate of Oman is looking for the following personnel :

1. Wiring Electrician – General:

- To read SLD, GA Drawing, Schematic drawing & BOM
- Prepare Layout & component assembly as per GA drawing
- Prepare Busbar links and busbar assembly
- Wiring of electrical components based on schematic drawing
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- Should follow his superior instructions and work closely with team

2. Technician for Cold Storage Systems:

- ITI holder (Mechanical), candidate should be able to install insulated cold storage panels, condensing units and evaporator units. Basic electrical knowledge will be an added advantage.

3. AC Technician:

- ITI holder. Adept in handling package unit/chiller installation and commissioning.

4. Laundry Technician:

- ITI/Diploma Holder: Capable to handle the installation of the Industrial Heavy duty Laundry Equipments namely washers, dryers, dry cleaning machines, flat work ironers and finishing presses. Basic knowledge in electronics/programming feature of the machine will be an added advantage.

5. Kitchen Equipment Technician:

- Preferably ITI / Diploma Holder in Electrical/Electronics.
- Min 5 years hands on experience in installation / Trouble shooting and Maintenance of Commercial kitchen equipments (Combi ovens, All gas and electrical cooking equipments, Dishwashers, Ice machines, Refrigeration system etc.)
- Must have hands on experience in reading Circuit drawings, operation manual and trouble shooting guide.
- Must be able to work independently with minimum supervision with maximum flexibility.

Experience: 5-8 years

Age Group: 25 -32 years

Interested candidates may send in their resume on igcc.res@gmail.com or fax on 24816976.

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A Graduate Civil Engineer having 25+ years of rich experience in Oman and GCC in lead roles is looking for a suitable placement. Visa available.

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VACANCIES

A leading company in Oman is looking for suitable candidates for following positions.

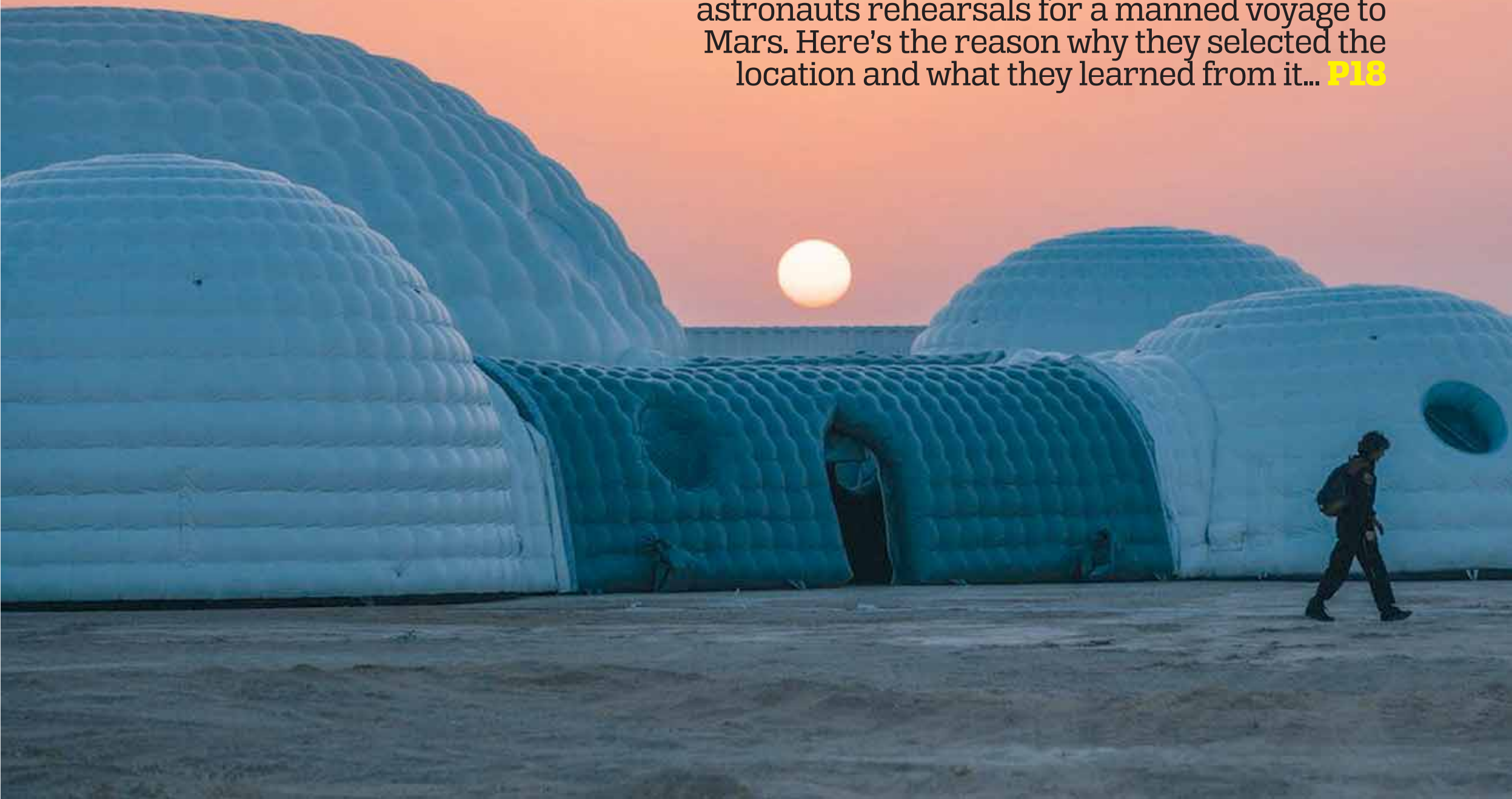
Trade	Qty	Salary (OMR)	Qualification	Contact Details
Rotating Technicians	30	250 - 300	Preferred Diploma in Mech/ Elect and experience of Maintenance in Oil & Gas. (VISA readily available) (Work Place: Sohar & Fahud)	careers1572@gmail.com
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features

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

“Mars on Earth” mission explained

Marmul desert in the governorate of Dhofar became an important spot for Science in February 2018 when more than 200 scientists from 25 countries conducted a real-life astronauts rehearsals for a manned voyage to Mars. Here's the reason why they selected the location and what they learned from it... **P18**



INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



UPROOTED BY WAR, SYRIANS SETTLE ON RUINS OF ROMAN TEMPLE

Abdelaziz al Hassan did not want to live in an overcrowded camp after fleeing war in northwestern Syria, so instead his family pitched a tent in the ruins of a Roman temple... **Story on Page P20**

GASTRONOMY



KOREAN CULTURE EXCHANGED THROUGH TRADITIONAL CUISINE CALLED HANSIK

Culture and tradition are exchanged, to a great extent, through the traditional cuisines of a country and the essence of its heritage is reflected in its gastronomic delights... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT

BY WALTER TEVIS

Sixteen-year-old Beth Harmon goes through changes as she plays chess in the US Open championship. The basis of the Netflix series.

DISCOVERIES



POMPEII'S RUINS YIELD SCALDED BODIES OF RICH MAN AND SLAVE

Archaeologists have discovered the exceptionally well-preserved remains of two men scalded to death by the volcanic eruption that destroyed the ancient Roman city of Pompeii in 79 AD... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



ITALIAN CUISINE WEEK

In the next seven days, Italian chef Alessandro Battisti will be conducting a pre-recorded masterclass showcasing traditional Italian recipes to the Oman public. Made available on Oman Daily Observer's online platforms, the classes on traditional recipes will be in English and Arabic... **Story on Page 18**



“Mars on Earth” mission explained

BY SAM KUTTY

MUSCAT: Like what we read in science fictions, a desolate desert with seemingly endless dunes becomes a space station where scientists and volunteers are busy preparing their voyage to another planet.

This is what the Marmul desert in the Dhofar Governorate witnessed in February 2018! A real-life with astronauts making rehearsals for a manned voyage to Mars. More than 200 scientists from 25 countries organised by the Austrian Space Forum spent a month in isolation on a simulated 'red planet' in the cinnamon-coloured dunes in the Dhofar desert.

For them, the desert, where temperatures reach 51 degrees Celsius, was the most realistic place on Earth, which is as uninviting as the landscape of Mars. And the surface of the desert is distinguished by salt domes, wadis, various types of geomorphology and structures that are similar to those on Mars.

The findings of this international simulated Mars mission AMADEE-18 along with the features of the Dhofar desert have been highlighted in a special edition devoted to the mission by Astrobiology Journal.

In cooperation with the Oman Astronomical Society and research teams from 25 nations, the Austrian Space Forum simulated a human-robotic Mars expedition conducting 19 experiments relevant to astrobiology, engineering disciplines, geoscience, operations research, and human factors.

Astrobiology Journal is dedicated to the understanding of life's origin, evolution, and distribution in the universe, with a focus on new findings and discoveries from interplanetary exploration and laboratory research.

Commenting on the report, Gernot Grömer, Director of the Austrian Space Forum, said "This special edition of Astrobiology Journal marks a milestone in our commitment to sharing our findings with the scientific community.

Through simulating Mars missions and subsequently publishing their results the Austrian Space Forum has dedicated itself to further preparations of the human exploration of the Red Planet".

According to the report, the deserts of Dhofar, the largest governorate in the Sultanate of Oman, have a resemblance to various Mars surface features, such as sedimentary structures dating back to the Paleocene and Eocene, salt domes of the South Oman Salt Basin and ancient river beds.

"The AMADEE-18 objectives were to study operational workflows of a human/robotic Mars mission and experiments pertinent to future flight missions. It not only served as a testing platform for human factors observations, geoscientific techniques, and engineering experiments but also to study the test site for its analogue potential", point out the report.



In cooperation with the Oman Astronomical Society and research teams from 25 nations, the Austrian Space Forum simulated a human-robotic Mars expedition conducting 19 experiments relevant to astrobiology, engineering disciplines, geoscience, operations research, and human factors.

logue potential", point out the report.

The Austrian Space Forum's next mission will take a crew of six astronauts to Israel in October 2021, the Forum said. The mission will be hosted by the Israel Space Agency and conducted in cooperation with science teams from nine countries.

A carefully selected field crew, supported by a Mission Support Center in

Innsbruck, Austria, conducted 19 experiments relevant to astrobiology, engineering disciplines, geoscience, operations research, and human factors.

"This expedition was the 12th in a series of analogue missions that emulate selected aspects of the science expected for a human Mars mission, including the characterisation of the geological environment, human factors studies, and the search for biomarkers", the report reveals.

In particular, an Exploration Cascade was deployed as a suggested workflow for coordinating the timing and location of the respective instruments and experiments. In validation of this workflow, the decision-making interaction between the field and the Mission Support Center was studied.

The Austrian Space Forum is a national network for aerospace engineers, scientists and people with a passion for space. The citizen-science organisation is involved in cutting-edge space exploration research and serves as a communication and networking platform between the space sector, industry, academia and the public.

The report in the Journal describes the mission architecture, infrastructure, and the test site, and includes an overview of the Mission Support Center architecture. This is followed by descriptions of the experiments and a reference to other articles in this special collection and the "Exploration Cascade" as an innovative approach to combining the workflows of the experiments, as well as an analysis of the mission performance and lessons learned.

CELEBRATE

Online cooking masterclass highlights Italian Cuisine week in Oman



IN THE NEXT seven days, Italian chef Alessandro Battisti will be conducting a pre-recorded masterclass showcasing traditional Italian recipes to the Oman public.

Made available on Oman Daily Observer's online platforms, the classes on traditional recipes will be in English and Arabic, a way for the Italian community in Oman through the Italian Embassy to give people in the Sultanate a taste of Italian gastronomy despite the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Italian cuisine week will run from November 23 to 29 and promoted by MAECI (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation), has adopted the theme "Knowledge and flavours of Italian lands, 200 years after the birth of

Battisti's experience ranks along the big names in contemporary Italian cuisine from Fabio Baldassarre to Cristina Bowerman, Maurizio Santin and Alain Ducasse.

"We want to share with our Omani friends the importance of the quality of the ingredients, a fundamental element of a cuisine that aims to enhance individual flavours" shared Battisti, who added, "traditional recipes tell us how few elements, all very fresh, make possible to create dishes able to satisfy every palate in the name of a healthy and balanced diet, like the Mediterranean one, listed in the intangible cultural heritage of humanity".

Special guests are Amal Salim Mabrook al Habsi and Anastasia bint Sahim Muri. Amal, an Omani lady and expert



Pellegrino Artusi."

"This will be an opportunity to celebrate the variety and authenticity of Italian cuisine and to reach the general public of the Sultanate at a time when precautionary measures do not allow convivial events and live tastings," said Federica Favi, Ambassador of Italy in Muscat.

From risotto to tagliatelle, from Tuscan ribollita to baked fish to veal rollè and tiramisù, the masterclass videos will cover some of the most popular and beloved Italian cuisines. The great classic, pizza, will also be part of the show-cased recipes and the secrets to making a great Italian pizza will be unveiled.

Each recipe will be executed in their original preparation by young talent, Chef Alessandro Battisti, a face known for his television appearances. Chef

cook, who has recently moved to Italy and Anastasia, who has lived in Italy for many years, are the special students for the occasion.

"We want to bring Italy directly to the homes of our Omani friends. We would like to encourage them to visit Italy as soon as possible," Ambassador Favi said.

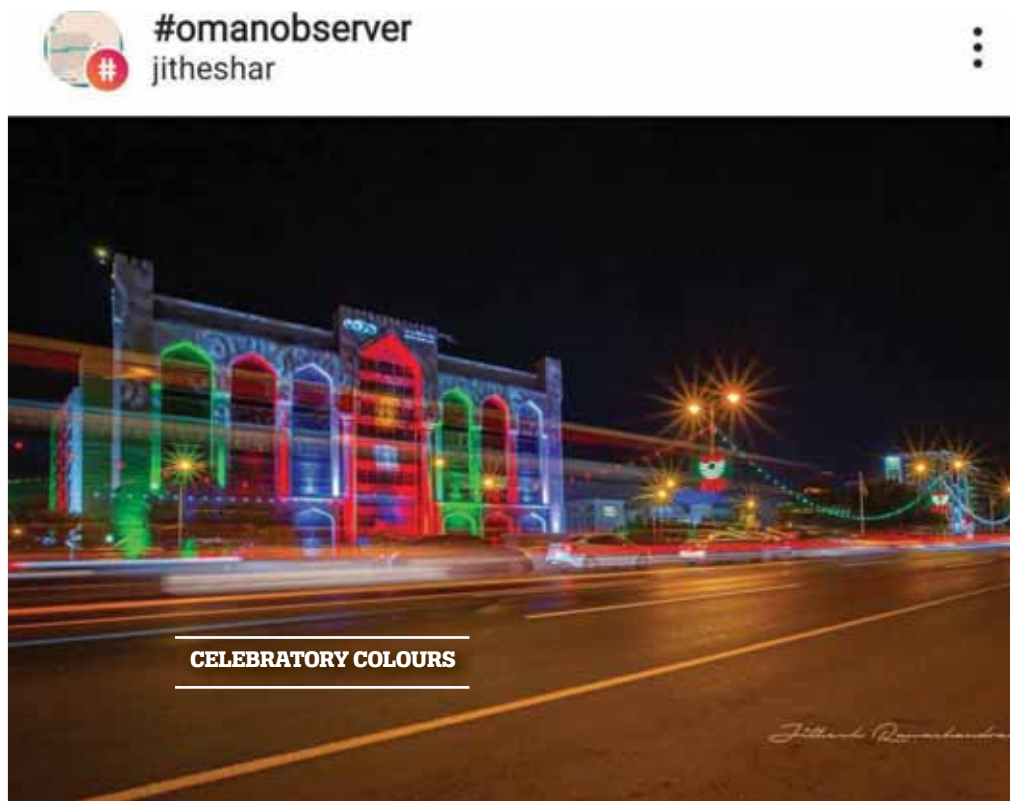
The masterclass will be made on omanobserver.om and will be shared on Facebook and other social media.

The programme will be also enriched with multimedia contents relating to the figure of the great gastronome Pellegrino Artusi, the nutritional labelling systems, the benefits of olive oil and the kitchens of some historic Italian residences that will be shared on the social media channels of the Italian Embassy in Muscat.



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Korean culture exchanged through traditional cuisine called Hansik

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Culture and tradition are exchanged, to a great extent, through the traditional cuisines of a country and the essence of its heritage is reflected in its gastronomic delights. World tourism today is heavily dependent on the authentic foods of a region, more so in terms of attracting tourists to savour the delicacies of a culture. Korean nationals, just as any other nation is, hold pride in their traditional cuisine, also known as Hansik which represents a national food source for the whole country. "Hansik has evolved over some time, using the various vegetables and ingredients that are produced in the Korean peninsula, and today, it is known to be the best recipes that attend to the health of societies," says Jeongmin Kwon, Second Secretary – Consul at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. For Koreans, rice is their staple food and a soup or stew,

Kimchi, and other dishes made with meat, fish, or seaweed and the like, make their side dishes. "Hansik has become popular for its healthiness because this cuisine is based on vegetarian and fermented foods as traditionally, Koreans are used to having vegetables more than livestock due to its geographical features," says Sukyoung Kang, chef, the Korean Embassy. "The impact of Hansik foods on the environment too is well known and has been emerging as a new and unique alternative source of food for people around the world in addition to being labelled healthy food," Yerin Yim, Admin Officer, Korean Embassy. Korean barbecue (Bulgogi) is one of the most popular Korean dishes in the world. Yet, it is not an everyday dish to Koreans, because beef used to be consumed only on special occasions in the past. Even now, if you are served 'Bulgogi' by a Korean, it is safe to assume that it is a special treat. Chef Sukyoung Kang shared the recipe of Bulgogi



which enables even a beginner in cookery to prepare a delicious course for an occasion.

RECIPE FOR BULGOGI:
Ingredients
250g Beef
1/2 Onion
1/3 Carrot
50ml Soy sauce

(MARINADE)
1 t sesame oil
2 ts sugar
1/2 ts black pepper
1 t crushed garlic
30g spring onion
1/4 onion
1/4 (Korean) pear

PREPARATION METHOD:
[Marinade]
1. Mix soy sauce (50ml), sugar, crushed garlic and sesame oil in a bowl
2. Blend onion and pear in a blender (25ml each)
3. Mince spring onion and mix all of them together
4. Prepare sliced beef (0.3cm thick)
5. Marinate the beef in the marinade (# 1-3) for 30 minutes
6. Slice onion and carrot into 1cm thick
7. Grease a pan lightly with oil and grill marinated beef with sliced onions and carrots.

DISCOVERY

Pompeii's ruins yield scalded bodies of rich man and slave



ROME: Archaeologists have discovered the exceptionally well-preserved remains of two men scalded to death by the volcanic eruption that destroyed the ancient Roman city of Pompeii in 79 AD, the Italian culture ministry said on Saturday. One was probably a man of high status, aged

between 30 and 40, who still bore traces of a woolen cloak under his neck. The second, probably aged 18 to 23, was dressed in a tunic and had a number of crushed vertebrae, indicating that he had been a slave who did heavy labour. The remains were found in Civita Giuliana, 700 metres northwest of the centre of ancient Pompeii, in an underground chamber in the area of a large villa being excavated. The men's teeth and bones were preserved, and the voids left by their soft tissues were filled with plaster that was left to harden and then excavated to show the outline of their bodies. "These two victims were perhaps seeking refuge when they were swept away by the pyroclastic current at about 9 in the morning," said Massimo Osanna, director of the archeological site. "It is a death by thermal shock, as also demonstrated by their



clenched feet and hands." In a statement, Culture Minister Dario Franceschini said the find underlined Pompeii's status as "an incredible place for research and study". Pompeii, 23 km (14 miles) southeast of Naples, was home to about 13,000 people when the eruption buried it under ash, pumice pebbles and dust, freezing it in time. The remains were not discovered until the 16th century and organised excavations began around 1750. However, more recently, attention has focused on arresting the decay or collapse of the exposed ruins. — Reuters



Uprooted by war, Syrians settle on ruins of Roman temple

Abdelaziz al Hassan did not want to live in an overcrowded camp after fleeing war in northwestern Syria, so instead his family pitched a tent in the ruins of a Roman temple.

He, his wife and three children are among almost one million Syrians who fled their homes last winter during a Russia-backed offensive on Syria's last rebel stronghold of Idlib.

In the UNESCO-listed site of Baqirha, near the Turkish border, they are now among dozens of Syrians uprooted by war who have settled among centuries-old Roman and Byzantine ruins.

Hassan and his family have set up a tunnel-shaped tent between the three surviving walls of a second-century temple to the Greek god Zeus, on a site strewn with broken columns and a plinth.

Behind their tent, laundry hung on a rope strung between the ancient walls. Propped up over the centuries-old stones, solar panels soaked in the sun near a blackened pot on a small wood-burning stove.

Hassan says the site is a far better option than living in one of the numerous informal displacement camps that have sprouted up along the frontier, especially amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"I chose this place because it provides peace of mind, far from overcrowded places and those riddled with disease," said the middle-aged man with a salt-and-pepper beard.

SNAKES AND SCORPIONS

Syria is filled with archaeological sites, from Roman temples and Crusader castles to Ottoman-era caravanserais.

Many have been damaged, bombarded or plundered throughout a nine-year-old conflict that has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions.

Northwest Syria is home to 40 UNESCO-listed villages from the first to the seventh centuries that, the UN cultural body says, provide insight into "rural life in late Antiquity and during the Byzantine period".

Dotted with the remains of temples and churches, the sites illustrate "the transition from the ancient pagan world of the Roman Empire to Byzantine

Christianity," it says.

In Baqirha, Zeus Bomos, or Zeus of the Altar, was built almost two millennia ago, historians say, in a wider area that later prospered from olive oil production.

Maamoun Abdel Karim, the head of

Syria is filled with archaeological sites, from Roman temples and Crusader castles to Ottoman-era caravanserais. Many have been damaged, bombarded or plundered throughout a nine-year-old conflict.

Syria's antiquities authority, said Baqirha was exceptional for its well-preserved buildings, also including two churches from the sixth century.

But for all the grand architecture, Hassan admitted there were a few inconveniences to living where he does, including a long walk for his children to the village school.

He also said the area is crawling with poisonous snakes and insects.

"Two days ago, near the tent's opening, I killed a viper," he said. And "every other day, we have to kill a scorpion".

"But we haven't found anywhere better than here yet."

'WHERE ELSE CAN WE GO?'

Hassan's brother-in-law, Saleh Jaour, and his dozen children have also made the ancient ruins of Baqirha their new home, after fleeing bombardment last winter that killed his wife and a son.

"I chose this region because it's close to the Turkish border. If anything happens, we can flee to Turkey on foot," said the portly 64-year-old wearing a long dark robe.

As the crow flies, the Turkish border lies just four kilometres (2.5 miles) away.

"This place is far from the crowds and the noise," he added, saying he too was taken aback by how many people were living at close proximity in the camps.

Both Hassan and Jaour's families escaped their homes further south during a government-led offensive between December last year and March on the jihadist-dominated stronghold of Idlib.

A ceasefire deal reached by rebel backer Turkey and regime ally Russia has since largely stemmed the fighting, but less than a quarter have returned.

Local officials have asked families living on the archaeological site in Baqirha to leave, but they have refused until they are provided with alternative shelter.

"We've gotten used to this place," said Jaour, reluctant to uproot the family again at the start of the rainy winter season.

"Where else can we go?" — **AFP**

