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MUSCAT DAILY

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29°C/24°C

ENVOYS GREET HM THE SULTAN ON 50TH NATIONAL DAY
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Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said with Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa in Bahrain on Saturday

HM's special envoy travels to Bahrain to offer condolences

Muscat - Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, returned on Saturday from the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain after conveying condolences of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the

death of Prince Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa. Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, received the Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, and his accompanying delega-

tion, at Sakhir Air Base. Sayyid Fatik was accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Dr Abdullah

bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, and Abdullah bin Rashid al Medailwi, the sultanate's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. ONA

HM the Sultan issues two Royal Decrees

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued the following two Royal Decrees on Thursday:

Royal Decree No 125/2020 on the promulgation of the 'Law on Streamlining Litigation Procedures in Settlement of Some Disputes'.

Article 1 stipulates that the

said Law on Streamlining Litigation Procedures in Settlement of Some Disputes will be enforced.

Article 2 states that the Chairman of the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary will issue bylaws and decisions necessary for the implementation of provisions of

the said law.

Article 3 cancels all that contravenes this decree or contradicts with its provisions.

Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced three months from its date of publication.

Continued on **page04**

Land borders open; UAE allows Omanis to travel without prior approval

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After Oman announced the opening of its land borders allowing travellers to drive to neighbouring countries on Thursday, the UAE authorities on Friday issued a statement permitting all Omani citizens to travel to the Emirates without any prior approval through land ports starting November 16.

"The borders are open with neighbouring countries and travel is allowed for Omanis and residents as long as they adhere to the announced procedures when travelling outside as well as upon returning to the sultanate," said H E Dr Ahmed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

In a statement issued on Fri-



day, the UAE said that the beginning of movement through land ports will commence on Monday, November 16, 2020, the Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported.

According to the statement, citizens of Oman are exempt from the requirement of prior approval to enter the country

through land ports.

'Omani citizens are required to present a negative PCR test result, provided the pre-examination is from accredited laboratories in their country, and the test does not exceed 48 hours from the date of arrival,' the statement said.

'They are also required to take a COVID-19 test at the port of entry and follow all preventive and precautionary measures according to the approved protocols, in addition to installing the Al Hosn application on their phones. A PCR test is obligatory on the fourth day if they stay for four consecutive days in the UAE,' the statement added.

If a traveller tests positive at the port of entry, he/she will be denied entry.

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Envoys greet HM the Sultan on 50th National Day

To mark the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day, several ambassadors accredited to the sultanate have congratulated His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the citizens of the country on behalf of their governments and their countrymen. The ambassadors sent their messages via the personal website of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said which highlights his life and achievements. The contents of the website have been translated into 35 languages.

Hamoud bin Muhammad al Azri, general supervisor of Oman Qaboos website, appreciated the envoys' support over the years to the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. "I am honoured to greet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on this occasion. May God bless him with good health and protect him," Azri said.



LESLIE M TSOU Ambassador of United States of America

It gives me great pleasure to extend warm congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day, an important milestone in Oman's history and our bilateral partnership. Since 1840, when the sultanate's first envoy arrived in New York bearing gifts of friendship and goodwill, the US and Oman have enjoyed strong bonds between our governments and our peoples. The US Embassy and the American people wish all Omanis a joyous national celebration.



MARÍA LUISA HUIDOBRO Ambassador of Spain

On the occasion of the 50th National Day of Oman, it is a privilege for me as ambassador of Spain to convey, in the name of His Majesty King Felipe VI and the Spanish people, our best wishes for permanent prosperity to the Omani people under the rule of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to whom may God grant long life and lasting happiness.



LAETITIA VAN ASCH Ambassador of the Netherlands

I would like to convey our sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day. We look forward to continuing the strong bilateral relations between our two nations and to further strengthening those bonds in the years ahead.



SARMILA PARAJULI DHAKAL Ambassador of Nepal

I would like to commemorate the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and applaud his dynamic vision that led the sultanate to its development path. Taking the opportunity of this special day representing Government of Nepal and the Nepali people, I would like to extend greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the friendly people of Oman.

I am confident that the comprehensive Oman Vision 2040 engineered for development of the sultanate under

the guardianship of His Majesty Sultan Haitham will be able to fulfill the wishes of the Omani people.

AYŞE SÖZEN USLUER Ambassador of Turkey

It is an honour to serve as the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey during the 50th anniversary of the National Day of Oman. On behalf of Turkey, I have the honour to extend sincerest congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani people on this joyous occasion. May Allah continue to bestow his blessing on the people of Oman as well as His Majesty Sultan Haitham with good health, peace and prosperity.



FEDERICA FAVI Ambassador of Italy

I am honoured to express, on behalf of my government and myself, admiration and respect on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of a re-born Oman. The merit lies entirely with the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose rule not only propelled Oman's economy into the 20th and 21st centuries, putting it on par with those of the most advanced countries, but also brought to its citizens and the hundreds of thousands of expatriates living here harmony, peace, prosperity and aspirations for the future. The years of Sultan Qaboos' rule made Oman a beacon and an example to the countries of the region.

I would like to congratulate and wish His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik a long and happy reign, rich with rewarding success, in light of the task he has given himself and so deftly begun, in circumstances much harsher than imagined, to take the country from Renaissance to the Future in the challenging path of reform he has drawn.



KIM CHANG-KYU Ambassador of Korea

On the occasion of the National Day of Oman in memory of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, on behalf of the Republic of Korea, I congratulate the Omani people. The Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos laid the foundation of not only the Renaissance but also long-lasting friendship between Oman and Korea by establishing bilateral ties in 1974.

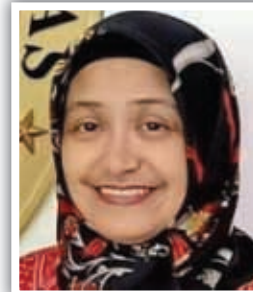
Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, I will remain dedicated to deepening our friendship while remembering the benevolence and generosity of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.



IMELDA M PANOLONG Ambassador of Philippine

On behalf of the Embassy of the Philippines and the Filipino community in Oman, I extend warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the government and the friendly people of Oman on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

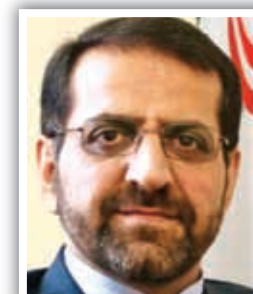
I am grateful for the hospitality extended to the close to 45,000 Filipinos living and working in Oman. I am also pleased that our countries maintain a strong relationship that is defined by mutually beneficial exchange in trade and commerce. I look forward to enhancing the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Oman, which co-incidentally is also making its 40th anniversary this year.



NAJAFI KHOSHRUDI Ambassador of Iran

On the occasion of the 50th National Day of Oman, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Iran and Oman, I would like to congratulate the friendly and neighbourly sultanate, its leadership, the government and people on this occasion, wishing them good health, progress and prosperity.

I am confident that just as the relations between the two countries witnessed stability and steadfastness - during the reign of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said - and turned into an example to follow, in continuation of that path, these relations will witness further development and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. In this context, we will seek to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries.



THOMAS F SCHNEIDER Ambassador of Germany

Just a few weeks after celebrating the 30th anniversary of Germany's peaceful reunification, the German Embassy in Muscat conveys sincere feelings of friendship to the people of Oman on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

The golden jubilee of Oman's Renaissance marks a significant moment in the sultanate's rich history. When the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said passed away earlier this year - may he rest in peace - he left behind a modern state with a proud history and a wealth of tradition and culture. This solid groundwork, which the founding father of modern Oman had laid down, allowed a swift transition of power to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin



Tarik whom we wish good health, happiness and wellbeing.

TOSHINORI KOBAYASHI Ambassador of Japan

I congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman on the glorious 50th National Day. Oman has come a long way in this past half century. A magnificent vision and dedication towards the welfare of his people by the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the commitment along with the continuous support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has brought Oman to this privileged period. Even in this time of the pandemic, the way Oman has pooled in resources to support the healthcare sector and keep infection at bay, is truly commendable. I take this opportunity to wish His Majesty Sultan Haitham and the people of this beautiful country on this occasion an abundance of peace, prosperity and good health always.



MUNU MAHAWAR Ambassador of India

India and Oman enjoy close and friendly relations rooted in millennia old historical contacts. The relationship has now transformed into a multifaceted and dynamic strategic partnership. Both, India and Oman share common values and approaches and are firm believers in promotion of peace and harmony.

I extend, on behalf of the government and people of India, warm greetings and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as well as the government and friendly people of Oman, continued peace, progress and prosperity. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, under whose reign Oman transformed into a modern and prosperous nation. He was a global statesman and peacemaker.



K K AHSAN WAGAN Ambassador of Pakistan

It is my honour to convey sincere and warmest felicitations on the glorious occasion of 50th National Day of the sultanate.

The historical bonds of affinity and kinship existing between our brotherly nations are rooted in common faith and cultural values. I am sure that under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's able and benevolent leadership, these will continue to grow stronger and deeper in times to come.



Quarantine period can't be considered as sick leave: MoH

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

For all travellers coming into the sultanate, the period of home quarantine cannot be considered as sick leave, the Minister of Health (MoH) said on Thursday.

"The traveller must use the quarantine period from his balance leave," said H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

H E Dr Sa'eedi also said that 40 per cent of the country's population will receive vaccination in the first stage by the end of the year. Speaking to the media on Thursday, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "Oman has reserved a good number of vaccine shots, and the goal is to vaccinate about 40 per cent of the population. Among those on the priority will be service providers on the front lines, people with chronic diseases, and the elderly."

However, H E Dr Sa'eedi said there is no country or company that can provide the vaccine on a large scale. "Till today, no vaccine has been officially regis-



Oman has reserved a good number of vaccine shots, and the goal is to vaccinate about 40 per cent of the population

H E DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL SA'EEDI

tered," he said.

H E Dr Sa'eedi also said that even though cases of COVID-19 have seen a decrease in Oman, he hoped that the decline in cases recorded recently will not

lead to complacency and a lack of commitment to precautionary measures. "Adherence to the precautionary measures and the night shutdown has had good results," he said.

"Some countries relaxed restrictions after cases declined, but numbers rose again drastically. The decrease in the number of infected people does not mean that we have passed the danger; the precautionary measures must continue to be followed," he added.

He said that the rate of infection among children is still low, but once they transmit the virus, it may lead to catastrophic results.

"COVID-19 is not only a respiratory disease; it also causes other long-term effects on lungs, heart and other organs," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

"There will be a review of the activities that have not reopened yet across sectors, based on current health indicators. Also, there is a review on issuing certain visas."

@shadadm



A mosque in Muscat is ready with social distancing signage in place to open on Sunday (Syed Fasiuddin)

Volunteer work teams to be formed in wilayats to fight COVID-19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Volunteer work teams will be formed in each wilayat urging people to adhere to precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, according to H E Sheikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shams, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Social Development.

"People in the age group of 18-60, with any medical, legal or any other qualifications and who are free of chronic diseases can volunteer. A large percentage of people fall into the age group of 18-60, so we expect the number

of volunteers to be large."

He added registration will be open for seven days via an online link through the official media account of 'OmanvsCovid-19' and a local newspaper.

He explained that volunteer teams will be tasked to hold awareness raising campaigns, monitor the extent of compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee and give guidance to decision-makers.

"There might be other tasks assigned to the group in the future."

Volunteer teams will be organised in three phases - training the teams on dealing with public,

awareness-raising and promoting the campaign in media.

Talking about nurseries, he said, "The priority for any country and any institution is the health, safety and life of people. We really understand the suffering of parents who have children."

Mosques open on Sunday

"The Supreme Committee decided to allow reopening of mosques, which have a capacity to accommodate not less than 400 persons for the five obligatory prayers barring Friday prayer, from Sunday, November

15," said H E Dr Mohammed bin Said al Mamari, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. They will be open for a period of 25 minutes.

He added that it is important that everyone adheres to maintaining a safe distance, wearing masks and sanitising hands.

"Mosques' custodians shall supervise the reopening of mosques and ensure the adherence to the precautionary measures.

"Reopening of mosques will be allowed only after mosque supervisors ensure their readiness and their ability to take precautionary measures," he said.

National Day holiday on Nov 25, 26

Muscat - Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, issued a statement regarding holiday on the occasion of the 50th National Day.

"On the occasion of the 50th National Day and, upon the Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, it has been decided that Wednesday and Thursday, November 25 and 26, will be an official holiday for employees in units of the State's Administrative Apparatus (public sector), other legal entities and private sector establishments," said the statement.



'Employers at private sector establishments may agree with

their respective employees to continue working during the above-mentioned two days, if deemed necessary, provided the workers be compensated for that,' it added.

The minister took the opportunity to express heartfelt greetings to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing him continued good health and a long life, and the Omani people and the country abundant bounties of progress and prosperity under His Majesty's wise leadership. ONA

Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable)	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date
PDEN/2020/11/01	Construction of Filling station at Quroun Jaalan Bani Bu Ali at Sharqiya Governorate	150.000	19.11.2020	25.11.2020	29.11.2020

Bank Name & Account Number Bank Muscat (0319005687760012)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender document from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om. The tender may be collected on any working days between 08:00 AM - 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bids should be submitted in two separate sealed envelopes (Financial and Technical), addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelopes containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 02:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
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Al Nahdha Hospital launches unique clinical nutrition website

Muscat - Al Nahdha Hospital, represented by the Clinical Dietary Department, launched on Thursday a first-of-its-kind clinical nutrition website that was designed by the department to keep pace with the developments in the field of clinical nutrition.

The launch was held virtually under the auspices of Sayyid Dr Sultan Yarub al Busaidi, advisor for health affairs in the Ministry of Health, with a number of officials in attendance.

The website offers a simplified description of clinical nutri-

The website offers a description of clinical nutrition specialty and elaborates on the tasks of clinical nutritionists at hospitals, and educates medical and administrative cadres

tion specialty and elaborates on the tasks of clinical nutritionists at the referral hospitals. The website also educates both medical and administrative cadres on the most common diseases in Oman and the proper approach to manage such diseases.

Dr Eman al Hinai, head of Clinical Dietary Department of Al Nahdha Hospital, stressed that clinical nutrition is one of the basic pillars in the treatment of many diseases and sometimes is the only method of treatment for certain health conditions.

Dr Hinai elaborated that the food intake contributes largely to either enhancing the health aspects, or causing several diseases. Thus, clinical nutrition is an applied medical practice that involves the provision of a balanced diet that prevents some medical disorders such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, renal/kidney conditions and some forms of cancer.

The launching of the website is in line with the celebration of World Food Day, which aims to maintain the health of patients and upgrad the quality of health-

care by promoting awareness and knowledge of patients on disease related malnutrition.

Dr Hinai pointed out that the proper clinical nutrition system varies from one person to another. It can be determined by a specialist in the field after administering the required examinations.

Healthy nutrition is vital in having a healthy illness-free body that can function properly. Good diet improves human beings' physiological health and mood resulting for stress and pressure.

RAINS AND WADIS OVERFLOW IN MUSANDAM



Low pressure caused heavy rains that led to overflowing of wadis in Musandam on Saturday. The Civil Aviation Authority has warned of rains in northern parts of Oman on Sunday as well (Supplied photos)

MEDC shifts workshop to South Ma'abala

Muscat - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) announced to its customers in the Governorate of Muscat that its power meters workshop has been shifted to a new location in South Ma'abala.

This step comes to ensure providing high quality services to all customers as the company seeks to make this building a model in all aspects, it said.

The new building contains a laboratory and store for power meters. It also has a meeting room and employees' lounge.

The company said it is seeking to consolidate on its core values of 'Care', 'Deliver' and 'Do better' to provide safe and reliable electricity service to customers.

WALK THE TALK

Walking helps us think by triggering areas of the brain responsible for focus and attention, and scientists suggest thinking is basically a series of steps. So, the longer you walk, the 'deeper' the thought. The actual physical act of walking can amplify and thereby perhaps enhance this mental process. It's why *Muscat Daily's* new series 'Walk the Talk' interviews newsmakers on the go - there is after all, a science behind walking and talking



WALKING AND TALKING ABOUT...

P Chandrasekr, group general manager of Jawad Sultan Group, delves in detail into the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, the new reality of working from home and more.

"It is a very complex situation. The world has not actually understood it. There is panic. COVID-19 has denied many people around the world their livelihood and companies don't know what sort of relief they can provide.

"But there is a silver lining to it. Working from home is the new norm. It has shown new potential, a new mantra and a new idea to start something afresh. You don't have to be confined to an office with four cubicles. You can work for five different people from your home," says Chandrasekr.



Scan the QR Code to view the full interview of this episode of WALK THE TALK on Muscat Daily's social media handles

Ministry of Labour carries out over 500 inspection visits



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour said its Department of Occupational Safety and Health carried out 516 inspection visits at firms between March 23 and October 30 to check if they followed the Supreme Committee's decisions on preventing the spread of coronavirus in the sultanate.

Some 63 firms were found defying the Supreme Committee's decisions on safety measures while 140 firms were found lacking in taking necessary precautionary measures.

One facility was referred to the Public Prosecution and 12 labour housing facilities were closed, the ministry said.

The ministry said that the epidemiological investigation team for private sector institutions was formed in May according to the directives of the Supreme Committee. The team aims to ensure that firms adhere to implementing precautionary measures to protect their workers from the threat of COVID-19 infection.

"The team used an electronic inspection system to monitor the establishments," it said.

HM issues two Royal Decrees

Continued from Page 01
Royal Decree No 126/2020 on the promulgation of Municipal Councils Law.

Article 1 stipulates that the said Municipal Councils Law will be enforced.

Article 2 states that the Minister of Interior will issue bylaws and decisions necessary for the implementation of the said law.

Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions will continue to be applied without prejudice to the provisions of the said law.

Article 3 cancels the Municipal Councils Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 116/2011, as well as all that contravenes this decree or contradicts with its provisions.

Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced a day following the date of its publication except for Article 8 - Clause 2 and Article 15 of the said law, both of which will be enforced with effect from the first elections to restructure municipal councils, in accordance with provisions of the said law. **ONA**

HOTLINES

24-hour pharmacies

Scientific Pharmacy: Qurum
24566601, Ruwi 24702850
Muscat Pharmacy: Ruwi
24702542, Salalah 23291635
Al Hashar Pharmacy: Ruwi
24783334

Hospitals and Clinics

Al Hayat International Hospital, Al Ghubra-
22004000, 94267068 / 97049520

94442000 (Emergency)

Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat -
24618900/1/2/3
Sohar - 26704639/49/50

Apollo Hospital Muscat,
Hamriya: 24787766, 24782666,
24787780

Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat
24770800, 90999335,
90999334 (Emergency)

Starcare Hospital: 24557200
Emergency number: 24558333
Dr Harub's Clinic:

24563217, 2456381,

99254940 (Emergency)
Emirates Medical Center:
24604540

KIMS Oman Hospital:
24760105
Lama Polyclinic: CBD
24799655,

Al Khuwayr 24478817,
24478818,
Sohar 26751128

Muscat Municipality:
80077222

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C.R. No.: 1/96540/2

Ministry produces 200,000 fruit seedlings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to achieve economic and social development, diversify sources of income, and improve food security in the sultanate, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has produced around 200,000 date palm and various other fruit seedlings.

The ministry has already started distributing them, an official said.

Eng Badr bin Abdullah al Siyabi, assistant director general of the General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dakhliyah governorate, said the ministry is implementing a comprehensive package of policies and strategies that helps achieve economic and social development in the sultanate as well as create job opportunities to ensure social stability and improve the livelihood of workers in the agricultural sector.

"The strategy aims to pay attention to agricultural lands and preserve their fertility, introduce modern irrigation systems with the optimal use of aflaj water and benefit from salty water in cultivating crops," said Eng Siyabi.

It also looks at ways to use triple-treated wastewater in irrigation of crops and expand production and distribution of offshoots from date palm and various fruit seedlings, he said.

He said the ministry has im-



Date palm cultivation is the largest agricultural activity in the sultanate covering 35 per cent of the total cultivated land and 78 per cent of the total fruit cultivation

plemented several programmes to help farmers. They include pest control programmes, awareness drives about soil erosion, desertification and removal of harmful trees and programmes related to honey production and livestock.

He explained that the date palm cultivation is the largest agricultural activity in the sultanate covering 35 per cent of the total cultivated land and 78

per cent of the total fruit cultivation. The 2012/13 agricultural census said there were 7.6mn palm trees on an area exceeding 57,000 acres.

Eng Ibrahim bin Yaqoub al Numani, assistant director general for Planning and Development in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the ministry is making efforts to implement investment plans and projects in coordination with the private sector to raise food production and pay attention to marketing and manufacturing.

He said, "Agricultural production plays an active role in the development and stability of the rural community. The number of Omanis and their families who own agricultural holdings has reached about 255,000."

He explained that the total agricultural, animal and fish production constituted 3.9mn tonnes in 2019.

OIA takes action to raise efficiency of companies

Muscat - In continuation of the comprehensive review of state-owned companies with the aim of raising their efficiency, developing their performance and achieving optimal governance, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the formation of the board of directors of the Agricultural Production and Marketing Company, apart from restructuring boards of a few other companies.

According to OIA standards regarding the operating conditions of these companies and the sectors they represent, and in continuation of social cooperation, a number of government and private sector experts and specialists have been appointed to represent OIA as chairpersons and members of its affiliated companies' board of directors.

The Agricultural Production and Marketing Company board of directors will include two members from Oman Agriculture Association, a representa-

tive from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in addition to Oman Food Investment Holding Company representatives. The company is considered among OIA's newly established companies, and will fall under the umbrella of the Oman Food Investment Holding Company.

It is hoped that it will help enable farmers to market their products using modern methods inside and outside the sultanate, and embody positive partnership with the private sector by contributing to raising the efficiency of the supply chain in its various stages from production to marketing.

It will also help build a production system that aims to achieve balance in local markets with special focus on providing high-quality local alternatives to agricultural imports for consumers.

As for the electricity sector, OIA has coordinated with Nama Holding to make the boards of directors of some of its electricity

sector companies smaller, while ensuring the consistency of their strategic plans within the group, in addition to preparing Muscat Electricity Distribution Company to privatise part of its government share, by forming a lean and diversified board of directors.

In the same context, OIA has appointed a new chairman for the Oman Development Bank board of directors, after it became vacant due to Royal Decree 113/2020 appointing the former chairman as the Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

All boards of directors will work according to the corporate governance procedures and controls, as well as the unified national goals OIA is overseeing, especially as per Rawabet programme outputs, launched by the authority recently to establish a clear set of governance framework and policies.

MEDRC Eco School Prize 2020 launched

Muscat - For the second year in a row, Middle East Desalination Research Centre (MEDRC) has launched its Eco School Prize, an inter-school competition designed to build greater water and energy use awareness among school children in Oman.

Sponsored by the Embassy of Netherlands and Oman LNG Development Foundation, five schools (Anas bin Nader, Kaab bin Zaid School, Barka bint Thalaba, Jamila bint Thabit and Atika bint Zaid) were nominated by the Seeb office of the Directorate General of Education to compete for the prize. Each school appointed five students to represent the school in a kick off

meeting held online where Eng Ayisha al Hinaai, research project manager at MEDRC, delivered a youth water and energy awareness workshop to the students.

Competing schools will also attend a virtual tour of an Eco House as one of the activities in a series of activities expected in the upcoming weeks. The virtual tour will demonstrate simple yet effective techniques students can adopt in their own homes to save energy and water.

Each school will eventually present the progress they have achieved in their homes to conserve water and energy and the steps they have taken to achieve

this. Students will also showcase the efforts they made in spreading the message to the rest of their communities and school.

In parallel with the prize, a video competition was also launched in an effort to raise awareness through film. Participating students will attend an online film making workshop with an expert from the Oman Film Society and create a three-minute awareness video each for social media.

An esteemed panel of judges with representatives from the private and public sector will be tasked to select the overall prize winner as well as the best video award.

REGIONAL WEATHER			
ABU DHABI Max 30°C Min 18°C	DUBAI Max 30°C Min 19°C	MANAMA Max 27°C Min 20°C	
DOHA Max 28°C Min 19°C	KUWAIT CITY Max 25°C Min 20°C	RIYADH Max 27°C Min 16°C	

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.03am
Sunrise	6.21am
Duhr	11.56am
Asr	3.05pm
Maghrib	5.27pm
Isha	6.40pm

Notice

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة
Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones
Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عمان



It has come to the attention of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) that some of the investors and beneficiaries of the land usufruct law in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) are conducting malpractices, such as advertising for sale of the lands allocated to them for investment in different channels, including social media, online markets and commercial platforms.

Such practices are considered trespassing on state-owned properties and a violation of the laws and regulations in force, issued in accordance with the Royal Decree No. 105/2020 establishing the Public Authority for Economic Zones and Free Zones and the Royal Decree No. 79/2013 issuing the regulation of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

These lands were granted to the beneficiaries and investors for establishing specific projects as per in accordance with the terms and conditions of the previously signed agreements in this regard. Therefore, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones calls on all beneficiaries and investors to avoid such malpractices that violate the law and shall hold them to legal accountability.

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

RE TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C Re Invites Interested Companies To Participate In The Following RFQ:

RFQ No.	Description	Last Date to Participate	Date of Submission	Grade	Price (R.O)	Sit Visit	Note
RFQ 97/2020	Selling of Dismantled/Used GRP Type Substations Enclosures	23/11/2020	30/11/2020	Specialized	Free	24/11/2020 at 9:00 Al Amerate with HSE PPE	To obtain the RFQ document, please contact us via e-mail sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	• Companies may obtain documents online.
Purchase timing	• Documents can be purchased at the official working time between 08:00 – 13:00 hours • To obtain the RFQ document, please contact us via e-mail sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com
Enquiries	Any inquiry can be sent using clarification available in the tender documents, one week before bid submission date
Submission	• Should be submitted in a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to the MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO. marked only with RFQ number and the subject
Bid Placement	The Completed Tender should be deposited in the Tender Box No. 4 in the ground floor of MEDC Head Office building at Airport Heights, before 10 a.m. on the assigned date of tender submission
Email/Tele No.	24588600 sabra.jahdhami@medcoman.com

80070008
www.medcoman.com



Muscat Electricity Distribution Co.S.A.O.C
PO Box 1239, PC 131 - Al Hamryah / Sultanate of Oman
Contact Center : 80070008 / Tel : 24588600
info@medcoman.com / www.medcoman.com



medc.muscat



medc.oman



medc.oman



medctube

Oman Banks Association celebrates 50th National Day

On the landmark occasion of the sultanate's 50th National Day, Oman Banks Association (OBA), gave out a strong message of progressive change, as it highlighted the crucial role being played by Oman's banking and finance sector, contribute to the nation's sustenance goals and lead to the development of Oman.

Ever since its inception, Oman Banks Association has been a strong voice of Oman's banking industry, representing it to promote Omani banking activities, coordinate with the regulators on matters of policy and strategy, and to support banking excellence in Oman.

Abdul Hakeem Omar al Ojaili, chairman of the Board of Directors, Oman Banks Association, stated, "Oman's 50th National Day is a historic milestone in the sultanate's renaissance, as it envisions a new chapter in the nation's development - a new era which underpins the commitment to Oman's Vision 2040. At Oman Banks Association, it is our constant endeavour to be a part of this growth story, under the leadership of HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, as he takes forward the rich and futuristic



legacy of the Late HM Sultan Qaboos. The next few years are expected to bring a renewed thrust to Oman's socio-economic environment and will be based on progressive, digitised ways of working. In line with the same, Oman's banking sector remains strong while supporting the growth of diversified economic activities in the sultanate."

One of the key elements of Oman's Vision 2040 is a diversified and sustainable economy that is based on technology, knowledge and innovation, operates within integrated frameworks, ensures competitiveness, embraces industrial revolutions and achieves fiscal sustainability. Towards this objective, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), continues to pursue policies that

enables the banking sector to fulfil its role of financial intermediation efficiently and strengthening financial stability. OBA supports these efforts with the aim of spreading financial literacy, awareness and inclusion. In this regard, the association organises many special events, including discussions on cloud services, digital transactions and tokenisation along with knowledge-sharing sessions on Fintech, Blockchain, and other emerging technologies.

"The importance of financial inclusion cannot be ignored going forward. It is imperative for the unbanked to have bank accounts in order to maintain financial stability, economic growth, social stability, and for creating job opportunities in the society. The more we work towards the goal of financial inclusion, the more prospects are bound to open up - enhanced branch networks, automated banking services, user friendly and simple ways to bank and most importantly awareness. For this purpose, a number of specialized committees' function within the OBA umbrella, meeting on a regular basis to discuss matters of common interest and put forward

recommendations to further boost the banking industry in Oman with focus on compliance, risk, operations, human resources, technology, finance, legal, and cyber security," he added.

Over the years, OBA has organised several training programmes covering various areas of banking while also forming partnerships with public and private sector institutions. OBA continues to work on and is engaged in discussions with the regulators on important topics such as International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), financial inclusion, the Oman Credit Bureau, anti-money laundering, common reporting standards and Internal Audit regulations, amongst others.

The association has put in concerted efforts towards Omanising several roles and positions in the sector, and has been successful in placing young local talent to boost their skills and growth. The OBA Academy, launched in 2020, was instituted with the purpose of offering a wide range of specialised banking workshops and webinars, to employees of the banking and finance sector in Oman.

Bank Muscat launches Sayyarati offer for 50th National Day



Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has launched an attractive Sayyarati auto finance offer to celebrate the glorious 50th National Day of Oman. The latest Sayyarati auto finance offer was launched by the bank in line with its commitment to banking convenience and comes with a low interest rate of 5 per cent, the fastest loan processing and absolutely no need for post-dated cheques. The feature-rich Sayyarati auto finance can be obtained for a loan tenure up to 5 years and the lowest equated monthly instalments (EMIs) in Oman.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, deputy general manager - Institutional Sales & Products Development, Bank Muscat said, "Sayyarati auto finance has always been the preferred vehicle finance for everybody in Oman. We are very happy to now launch a special offer till December 31 to celebrate the glorious 50th National Day at a very special rate of only 5 per cent. It will now be easier and more affordable to own your dream vehicle. We are also happy for customers to enjoy the fastest loan processing time in Oman thanks to our state-of-the-art technology and highly-



trained employees."

Mashani added that the bank is always up to date with developments in the automotive world as it is keen to continuously develop Sayyarati and introduce new benefits and facilities that meets the needs of all segments of society. Sayyarati financing is very popular with both customers and the general public throughout the year, and more so during those times such as National Day celebrations and annual festivals. He added that the bank will continue to develop products and services to meet the requirements of all its customers and help them achieve their aspirations and dreams.

Loans up to RO60,000 are available for buying new and second-hand vehicles. Customers

looking for auto loans can take advantage of the quick processing procedure for auto loans, with loans being disbursed within 24 hours subject to all requirements being met. Documents to process Sayyarati applications include the buyer's ID card, salary assignment letter, quotation/car valuation from an approved valuator, driving licence, mulkiya (for pre-owned cars only) and seller ID (for pre-owned cars only). Sayyarati loans are available up to 80 per cent of the vehicle value.

Customers have also been invited to take advantage of the very competitive bancassurance plans offered by Bank Muscat. These offer some of the lowest premiums in the country.

A major advantage of Sayyarati auto loans is that post-dated cheques are not required and the EMIs will be automatically debited from the customer's account on a monthly basis as per the customer's standing instructions. More details on the special Sayyarati finance offer is available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/details.aspx#sayyarati>. Customers can also visit any branch, or Sayyarati Centres at Wattayah and Salalah as well as Saad team sales agents.

Dhofar Poultry celebrates National Day with offers

On the occasion of the sultanate's 50th National Day, Dhofar Poultry Company, Oman's oldest, premium quality chicken brand, has announced a range of irresistible offers across its portfolio of fresh and frozen chicken packs.

With discounts ranging between 10-50 per cent off, the brand's National Day promotions are running across product categories of fresh whole chicken, frozen whole chicken, wings, thighs, drumsticks, liver, and others. Additionally, high selling SKUs, such as, the 800g twin packs, 700g-900g carton chicken and the 450g-900g pack of wings, are also a part of the two-day promotions.

Valid on November 18 and 19, the offers can be availed across popular supermarkets and hypermarkets in Oman, including, Lulu, Carrefour, Nesto, KM Trading, Makkah, Noor shopping and Spar.

Commenting on celebrating the milestone, Truptha Lakshman, head of Sale & Marketing, Oman & UAE, said, "On behalf of Dhofar Poultry, I would like to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and the people of Oman, on completion of an



incredible 50-years of the sultanate's renaissance.

"As a home grown brand, we are proud to say that we have been an inherent part of this legacy and are committed to the future roadmap of Oman. The National Day is a joyous occasion which is celebrated in true festive spirit across the country.

"Through our special offers and promotions, we wanted to be a part of the celebrations in every household, with our delectable, fresh, 100 per cent halal, naturally fed chicken, being

served on this happy event."

With Oman's growing indigenous food sector, companies such as Dhofar Poultry are innovating with products, variants and coming up with versatile applications of simple food sources such as chicken.

Dhofar Poultry is a leading supplier of superior quality natural chicken in Oman, and other GCC countries.

The brand enjoys leadership in products such as chicken skinless twin pack, lollipop, and chicken feet in Oman.

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)				
Post Box No. 2740, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24628900, Fax: +968 24628990 Email: contact@tanufwater.com , Web: www.nmwcoman.com				
DIRECTOR'S REPORT				
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the un-audited consolidated financial statements for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2020.				
Review of Operations: The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the Parent company and its subsidiary Valuedeal Trading LLC, for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2020 (together referred to as the Group).				
Sales and Operational Performance: The Parent Company's sales for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2020 was RO 5,573,610 compared to RO 5,389,697 in the previous year during the same period. The parent company's operating profit for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2020 was RO 102,193. This compares with the operating profit of RO 227,188 for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2019. The net sales of the Group for the nine months ended 30th Sept 2020 were RO 5,580,612 compared to RO 5,406,003 in the previous year, and its operating profit was RO 108,770 in 2020 compared to an operating profit of RO 227,944 in 2019 for the same period.				
Subsidiary Company: Valuedeal Trading LLC (VDT): The company trades in confectionery items and plastic products.				
Future Outlook Demand for the company's core products continue to grow and a number of initiatives for improved profitability in the parent company are being considered. Management has identified that the main drivers for change are 'increased output' and 'greater efficiency'. With this in mind, management is confident that the overall profitability of the business will continue to grow.				
Human Resources Your company is currently employing 38% Omani Staff and will continue to support this initiative of employing more Omanis. Your company recognizes the importance of human asset to achieve its short term and long term objectives.				
Internal Control System The board continues to review the effectiveness of the existing internal control systems and considers the controls to be adequate for the size and nature of the business operations.				
Corporate Governance Code The company has complied with CMA directives on the Corporate Governance Code. A detailed report on compliance with Corporate Governance Code together with the Auditor's Report is included in the Annual Report.				
Acknowledgement On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for the support extended to private sector. We also express our earnest appreciation to our stakeholders, bankers and clients for their support and patronage and to our employees for their dedication and hard work.				
Chairman H.E. Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi				
1) The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of written request at the above address. 2) The complete accounts have been uploaded on Website of MSM. 3) Any shareholder who is having incorrect address or not having any address in the company's register or Co. (MDSRC) may approach the registered office to register their correct address. Register maintained by Maintained by Muscat Depository Securities Registration.				
CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 SEPT 2020				
	Parent Company		Group	
	30.9.2020	30.9.2019	30.9.2020	30.9.2019
	RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,592,794	1,654,676	2,593,634	1,655,797
Investment in subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
Deferred tax asset	4,773	4,773	4,773	4,773
Total non-current assets	2,692,567	1,754,449	2,598,407	1,660,570
Current assets				
Inventories	1,028,579	763,564	1,034,271	769,227
Trade and other receivables	3,045,238	3,277,140	3,080,179	3,290,193
Due from related parties	60,140	10,189	14,616	10,189
Cash and bank balances	110,539	54,780	145,326	59,822
Total current assets	4,244,497	4,105,673	4,274,392	4,129,431
Total assets	6,937,063	5,860,122	6,872,799	5,790,001
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	475,680	475,680	475,680	475,680
General reserve	-	-	-	-
Accumulated losses	(609,144)	(524,546)	(674,945)	(595,909)
Equity attributable to Shareholders of parent company	2,702,009	2,786,607	2,636,208	2,715,244
Non-controlling interest	-	-	1,519	1,243
Total capital and reserves	2,702,009	2,786,607	2,637,727	2,716,487
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' benefit liabilities	354,495	300,820	354,495	300,820
Bank borrowings	923,124	471,969	923,124	471,969
Other payables	294,360	-	294,360	-
Total non-current liabilities	1,571,979	772,789	1,571,979	772,789
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	1,179,677	1,239,481	1,179,692	1,239,481
Due to related parties	-	-	-	-
Bank borrowings	1,483,398	1,061,245	1,483,398	1,061,245
Income tax payable	-	-	-	-
Total current liabilities	2,663,075	2,300,726	2,663,090	2,300,726
Total liabilities	4,235,054	3,073,515	4,235,069	3,073,515
Total equity and liabilities	6,937,063	5,860,122	6,872,799	5,790,001
Net assets per share	0.100	0.103	0.098	0.101
CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 30 SEPT 2020				
	Parent Company		Group	
	30.9.2020	30.9.2019	30.9.2020	30.9.2019
	RO	RO	RO	RO
Revenue	5,573,610	5,389,697	5,580,612	5,406,003
Cost of revenue	(3,517,310)	(3,297,215)	(3,517,310)	(3,307,845)
Gross profit	2,056,300	2,092,482	2,063,303	2,098,158
Other income	150	1,317	150	1,317
Total	2,056,450	2,093,799	2,063,453	2,099,475
Expenses				
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,561,264)	(1,489,199)	(1,561,264)	(1,492,664)
General and administrative expenses	(392,993)	(377,412)	(393,419)	(378,867)
	(1,954,257)	(1,866,611)	(1,954,683)	(1,871,531)
Operating profit	102,193	227,188	108,770	227,944
Finance costs	(63,299)	(56,052)	(63,299)	(56,057)
Net profit before tax	38,894	171,136	45,471	171,887
Income tax expenses	-	-	-	-
Net (loss) / profit after tax and total comprehensive (loss) / income	38,894	171,136	45,471	171,887
Net profit attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	-	-	45,142	171,849
Non-controlling interest	-	-	329	38
Basic profit per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	0.001	0.006	0.002	0.006

SF90 Spider: Beyond imagination

The spider version of the SF90 Stradale, the SF90 Spider, was unveiled during a dedicated digital event. Not only is the car the Prancing Horse's first production plug-in hybrid spider, but the SF90 Spider also sets new benchmarks for performance, innovation and the thrill of driving, not only for the marque's range, but for the entire sports car sector.

The new convertible has the same extreme supercar specification and record-breaking performance as the SF90 Stradale, yet also adds further excitement and versatility to the mix, thanks to latest iteration of Ferrari's signature Retractable Hard Top architecture which first debuted on a mid-rear engined berlinetta in 2011. The SF90 Spider thus represents a fundamental revision of the supercar concept that makes it the ideal car for owners that demand the very pinnacle of Ferrari technology, but still want to experience the joy of open-top driving.

The SF90 Spider's plug-in hybrid system guarantees performance levels unmatched by any other production spider: the car's 780cv turbo-charged V8 is augmented by three electric motors, one at the rear and two on the front axle, bringing its maximum power output to a staggering 1,000cv. This state-of-the-art system does not complicate the driving experience in any way as a sophisticated control logic autonomously monitors and adjust power flows to suit the conditions of use. All the driver has to do is to select one of the power



unit modes (eDrive, Hybrid, Performance and Qualify) on the brand-new eManettino for a wonderfully exhilarating experience behind the wheel. Like the SF90 Stradale, the SF90 Spider also has AWD, which has raised the bar for standing starts to unparalleled new speeds: 0-100 km/h in 2.5 s and 0-200 km/h in 7.0 s.

The mechanical layout adopted by the Maranello engineers has allowed them to further advance the car's dynamic control system. The latter, now referred to as the eSSC, verifies the car's dynamic status in real time. Based on that information,

it controls vehicle stability by delivering torque independently via the front electric engines to the inside and outside wheel (Torque Vectoring), significantly improving traction coming out of corners and making it much simpler and more intuitive to drive on the limit with confidence.

From an aerodynamic perspective, the result of the development process is an extreme design which, with a maximum of 390kg of downforce at 250km/h, sets the absolute benchmark in terms of both downforce and aerodynamic efficiency for the road cars in the range without aerodynamic ap-

pendages. The many innovative, patented solutions adopted include most notably the shut-off Gurney, an active system at the rear of the car which adapts to driving conditions, and the forged wheels with wing profiles which recall Ferrari's F1-derived blown geometry.

The starting point for the SF90 Spider design was to ensure it remained as faithful as possible to the SF90 Stradale's signature styling. The Ferrari Styling Centre's meticulous crafting of the tonneau area has integrated it seamlessly with the rest of the car, an achievement that is even more astonishing be-

cause the V8 is still clearly visible through the engine bay cover despite the inclusion of the RHT stowage. The V8 thus remains the star of the show and very much on display whether the RHT is deployed or retracted.

The track-derived "eyes on the road, hands on the steering wheel" philosophy, which drove the ergonomics and styling of the interior, has produced an innovative new HMI concept that includes a new steering wheel with a touchpad that allows drivers to control virtually every aspect of the car without moving their hands. The central instrument cluster is now entirely digital with

a 16" curved HD screen, which can be fully configured and controlled using the controls on the steering wheel. On the central tunnel, the automatic gearbox controls are now actioned by a grille-style feature that references Ferrari's glorious and iconic manual gearshift gate.

Like all Prancing Horse spiders, the SF90 Spider sports a retractable hard top, which guarantees optimal noise insulation and protection from the elements when deployed, does not deform at high speeds and provides exceptional occupant space and comfort. The RHT is so compact, simple and light, it

can be actioned in just 14 seconds and can be deployed when the car is on the move. The key to the success of the Ferrari RHT is that it takes up just 100lt of space rather than the 150-200 litres required by a traditional system. The use of aluminium in its construction also means that it is around 40kg lighter than a conventional retractable hard top. An adjustable electric rear window guarantees superb occupant comfort even at high speeds when the RHT is lowered.

As is the case with the SF90 Stradale, the SF90 Spider is also available with a dedicated specification for owners that want to push its track car vocation to the extreme. The Assetto Fiorano includes a list of exclusive upgrades that set it apart from the standard car, not least Multi-matic shock absorbers derived from the Prancing Horse's GT racing experience and optimised for track use.

Others include the adoption of high performance materials (such as carbon-fibre and titanium) that have shaved 21kg off the car's weight, a carbon-fibre rear spoiler and road-homologated Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres designed to improve track performance in the dry, thanks to a softer compound and fewer grooves. Lastly, the Assetto Fiorano offers an optional two-tone livery that further underscores the car's racing vocation.

The Genuine Maintenance Programme further extends the wide range of after-sales services offered by Ferrari to meet the needs of clients.

IBF appoints Saudi as Women in Sport Committee chair

Dr Razan Baker of Saudi Arabia has been appointed the chairperson of the International Bowling Federation's (IBF) Women in Sport Committee by IBF President Sheikh Talal Mohammed al Sabah.

Dr Razan currently serves on the Saudi Bowling Federation board whilst also being the director of International Communications for the Saudi Olympic Committee alongside working as a sports columnist for the *Arab News*. Growing up in a sports mad family, Dr Razan followed her dream to become a sports columnist for the *Arab News* publication, where she noticed the limited number of sporting role models that young women in



Saudi Arabia had to emulate. In order to combat this issue and together with the support of the president of the Saudi Bowling Federation, Bader al Alshaikh, she has played advocate to Saudi's women bowlers by working to further develop their sporting skills and play a role on the international sporting stage. A

breakthrough in this initiative came in 2019 when for the first time, the SBF sent a women's team to compete at the World Bowling Women's Championships in Las Vegas. Dr Razan served as their team manager.

Over the past two years, the SBF has more than quadrupled its athlete membership numbers. IBF president, Sheikh Talal Mohammed al Sabah said, "The Saudi Bowling Federation has already achieved so much to pioneer the sport of bowling amongst women within its country. Dr Baker has been a big part of this success and therefore her appointment to lead the IBF's Women in Sport Committee was not a difficult decision."

Madayn to hold a series of events as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn, represented by the National Business Centre (NBC), is all set to host a series of events in line with the Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) starting from Monday. This year, the GEW events in Oman will be held virtually in cooperation with the Public Authority for SMEs Development (Riyada) under the theme of 'Change Management'.

The GEW events in Oman, which are being held by NBC for the eighth consecutive year alongside 170 countries worldwide, will include a set of events that highlight risk management, project growth and sustainability in light of the current crises expe-



rienced by the SMEs worldwide, change management, and the significance of entrepreneurship. The events shall also focus on ways to help support youth in starting their businesses and encourage them to turn their business ideas into reality.

The virtual events will touch

upon several topics including project sustainability and risk management.

The GEW events will also feature SMEs Clinic, which will provide consultancy sessions in financial management, marketing, risk management, and project management for the

participants. On the final day of this year's events, ideas participating in the pre-incubation programme will be evaluated.

It is worthwhile to mention that GEW is a global event celebrated by 170 countries worldwide, and aims at connecting experts and entrepreneurs from various sectors under one platform to share their ideas and transform innovative ones into reality.

The events also aim to encourage Omani entrepreneurs to start their businesses, encourage the productivity of SMEs to be able to compete in local and global markets, and generate awareness on entrepreneurship and its importance.

OSN announces plan to transform region's entertainment landscape

OSN, the region's leading entertainment network, announced plans to double its investment into Arabic content in 2021 through the launch of OSN Originals, a new content umbrella dedicated wholly to regionally produced content. The launch of OSN Originals marks another milestone in the company's journey following a successful brand relaunch and Disney+ Originals partnership announcement back in April 2020.

The newly launched OSN Originals represents a new era of content resilience for OSN, serving the ever-evolving tastes of the people of the Middle East and North Africa. Under the OSN Originals umbrella sits the recently launched star-studded Season 3 of *A'adet Regala*, the comical food reality TV show *Yalla Neta'asha* and the gripping Syrian war drama, *No Man's Land* in partnership with Fremantle. OSN announced the latest addi-

tion to the OSN Originals roster, *Curfew*, a feature-length Egyptian film directed by one of the stalwarts of Egyptian cinema, Amir Ramses, which will be premiering at the Cairo Film Festival in December.

With over 1500 hours of Arabic-language content currently on the platform, OSN's vision for 2021 will focus heavily on Arabic content, split between acquisition and Original production. By the end of 2021, Arabic and Original productions will represent 25 per cent of all content on OSN.

"As one of the largest players in the regional entertainment industry, we bear a unique responsibility to give our audiences content that resonates and taps into their passions and aspirations. Audience demands have evolved, and OSN Originals was borne from the need to meet these demands. We truly believe in the



importance of local content and OSN Originals is further testament to our commitment to this. We have structured this as a long-term strategy and priority focus that will translate into a library of unique never-seen-before and never-told-before

stories from the region," said Patrick Tillieux, CEO, OSN.

"We are on a mission to bring content that is exciting, closer to home and has the power to move our audiences. The guiding principle of our content strategy is to be inclusive

enough to embrace the diversity of our audiences across the region. Whether it's a scripted or non-scripted piece of content, the story and its relevance to the region will determine its originality," added Rolla Karam, interim chief content officer, OSN.

Curfew was directed by Amir Ramses, a key creative partner of OSN Originals. Commenting on the launch, Ramses, director, *Curfew* and artistic director of El Gouna Film Festival said, "The time is now for our local stories to be celebrated. Middle East audiences have evolved, and so have their tastes and expectations for regional content. It's been an honor to be selected by OSN and in turn be provided with a platform of millions of viewers across the region. The soon to be launched *Curfew* will be showcased on OSN as the first feature-length film under the OSN Originals umbrella. There is a strong demand for Arabic content that provides quality production values, gripping storylines, and themes that reflect the world regional audiences experience today."

Set in the Middle East and mainly in Syria, *No Man's Land* focuses on the humanitarian as-

pects that people in the region can relate to, while shedding light on angles that have never previously been portrayed or told before on the big screen.

"We identified OSN as the right partner to take the gripping Syrian war drama *No Man's Land* to the region. Starring an international cast, *No Man's Land* is an emotional and fast-paced drama with a story that is very close to the hearts and minds of local audiences. We're proud of this unique collaboration with OSN which will bring this high-end production to the Middle East as an OSN Original series," said Amac Us, vice president, Sales, Middle East, Africa & South East Europe at Fremantle.

OSN's first Original production, season three of *A'adet Regala* was launched earlier this year, cementing OSN's mission to provide localised, tailored and culturally relevant Arabic content to the audience.

DAILY CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Some of Victoria's secrets?

5 Hoot or holler

10 ___ Christie

14 Gulf of Mex. state

17 Dodge City legend

18 The old man

19 W. India seaport city

20 Greenspan

21 Porthos and his friends

24 Elwood P. ___: Stewart's "Harvey" role

25 Memoranda

26 Outwits

27 High from wine, e.g.

28 One of a daily three

30 Covered with paint

31 Get a move on

32 Hearst protege Marion

33 Avoids

34 Fine quality

37 It's in the bag at Pebble Beach

38 Anticipates

39 Beam

41 Author Levin

43 Big cheese

44 Pepper pulverizer

45 Former Surgeon General

46 Madre's sisters

47 Differ ending

48 Disney movie

52 Sound of disapproval

53 Addicted

55 ___ my case!

56 French school

57 Diamond Jim Brady, say

59 Diarist An is ___

60 Small quakes

62 "Mr. Republican" and family

63 Aspect

65 Go on tour, e.g.

66 First name in folk music

67 Parts of a pirate treasure

70 One of IOU

73 Minute quantity

74 West of "Batman"

75 Second-hand

76 Aspen forecast

77 Can./ US canals

78 Minoans' home

79 "The Prince of Egypt"

81 Joyce's homeland

82 Tundra transport

84 I.Q. test creator

85 Touch lovingly

87 Oz., lb., etc.

88 Second-largest asteroid

90 Assault

91 Mudville slugger

94 Intellectual gatherings

95 Falcon feature

96 Hot spot?

97 Pearl Bailey hit

102 Commits perjury

103 ___ Dame

104 Start for spring?

105 Beloved

106 Emeril's meas.

107 Do the crawl

108 Oodles

109 Slack

DOWN

1 Casino action

2 Fan noise

3 ___ we having fun yet?

4 Kind of wheel

5 Treats maliciously

6 Big hit?

7 Numbered musical work

8 Bullish times

9 Deli food, e.g.

10 Napped leather

11 Cornered, in a way

12 Stapes places

13 High elev.

14 Lemon or turkey

15 Congressional output

16 Warhol

19 Vital nos.

20 Tati's ta ta

22 Actress Skye

23 Rogers's saddlemate

27 Mosaic part

28 He sang "Splish Splash"

29 Car purchaser's option

30 ___ out!: cool it

31 Answers an SOS

32 Water barrier

33 Rabbit food?

34 Singer Celine

35 USA original members

36 Pencil part

38 Less narrow

39 Snowboard alternative

40 Castle's defense

42 Donkeys

44 Jordan, to adoring fans

46 Spice rack label

48 Bottom fish

49 Chop finely

50 Ram on high

51 Fifty minutes after the hour

54 ___ of the world; elated

56 Jeans maker

57 S. African towns

58 Polly the pet

60 Has a go at

61 Foray

63 Accomplishment

64 Wile E. Coyote's supplier

65 Boob tube

67 Yosemite, et al.

68 Think tank output

69 Detonating devices

71 Booby prize winner

72 Certain black sheep

76 Court with song

78 ___ slicker: sophisticate

79 Pooh's creator

80 Aristotle ___

83 Track star Jesse

84 Chap

85 Black and blue

86 Thanks ___!

88 LaBelle or Lupone

89 Frighten

90 Wed

91 Young stud

92 Rara ___

93 Ooze

94 Put away

95 Brown of publishing

97 Prudential's product: abbr.

98 Corporate abbr.

99 DC artistic support

100 ___-guzzler

101 Beaver St.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Sunday's skies are undoubtedly lively. The moon departs from Scorpio and moves forward into Sagittarius, increasing your need for travel, adventure, and movement in one fell swoop. Getting out of your comfort zone is key to your sanity. Romantic Venus is met with intense confrontations from emotionally-heavy Pluto, helping you air out any hidden tensions on the relationship front.



LEO

JULY 23-AUGUST 22

What are you waiting for? Get on that stage and shine! The moon leaps into enthusiastic Sagittarius, gearing you up for creative activity, good times, and romantic escapades. While it feels like an ideal date day, watch out for some psychological snags. Lover Venus dukes it out with emotionally-healing Pluto this afternoon, stirring up unsettled sediment around matters of the heart.



SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The heaviness of recent days is beginning to change. The moon departs from Scorpio and enters your sign, returning a refreshed exuberance and a deeper awareness of your individual needs. Self-assertion and charismatic expression come easily. Keep an eye on the state of your goals, for they may come under fire today as value-defining Venus and heavy Pluto make sparks fly.



TAURUS

APRIL 20-MAY 20

A part of your heart is coming out that hasn't seen the light of day in quite some time. It's easy to tap into the intense undercurrent in Sunday's skies, as your ruler, Venus, falls under the heavy gaze of Pluto. Lean into the parts of you seeking radical change, as it's critical that you find new ways to break through outmoded defence mechanisms in real relating.



VIRGO

AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Telling a Virgo to take a break is similar to shouting into the void. Resting only ever happens on your own terms, but you'd be well advised to slow things down. The moon slides into Sagittarius, making you feel low-key, cozy, and attuned to your home and family life. Venus comes to issues with Pluto today, potentially stressing finances or creative ventures.



CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Sunday's skies have a definite mood to them. You're not likely to be interested in social outings or playful encounters, as the Sagittarius moon has you feeling withdrawn and hungry for alone time. Venus finds herself in a harsh square with heavy Pluto too—stressing tensions on the career and relationship front. Take it slow and air out any tensions seeking release.



GEMINI

MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your relationships are taking on a whole different tone. The moon catapults into Sagittarius, turning your attention to the current dynamics taking place in your love life. Venus finds herself ensnared in a frustrating trap with Pluto, prompting you to look beyond the surface, confront any hurts, and be raw and real about the state of your heart with the one who needs to hear it.



LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Sunday's skies approach you like a fresh block of ice in a sculpture contest. Parts of you are begging to be carved out and better defined, but that want requires some serious sacrifice and honesty. Your ruling planet, Venus, is entangled in a hard square with Pluto, helping you face certain confrontations in "me vs we" situations. Embrace the chipping on the surface.



AQUARIUS

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're in deep need of meaningful connections. The moon saunters into playful Sagittarius, encouraging you to reconnect with your cherished friends and blow off some steam. Venus dukes it out with emotionally potent Pluto, working to bring about a breakthrough in your belief system around love. Levity and humour with your pals can go a long way in light of this.



CANCER

JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today's skies push you to make Sunday more productive than usual. The moon bounces into Sagittarius, propelling you to tackle any looming errands or workloads. Yet, it may be hard to fully concentrate on taking care of the mundane, as Venus becomes entangled with heavy Pluto. This prompts confrontations in relationships that can stir up dust on the home front.



SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're no stranger to emotionally potent, powerful relationship encounters. Thus, you're well suited for Sunday's skies, as Venus squares off to Pluto. This pairing is liable to bring unspoken truths or dormant frustrations to the surface in romantic relations. Clearing the air and making sure everyone's on the same page does wonders for forward movement and a refreshed attitude!



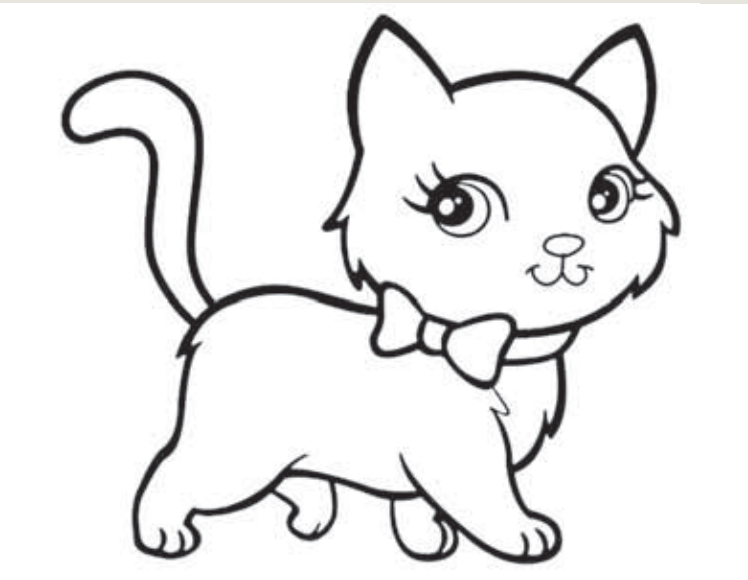
PISCES

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Don't rest on your laurels. The moon leaps into Sagittarius, putting you at peak career visibility in the coming days ahead. Its' easier than usual to implement important career changes or get support for the projects you're looking to share or develop. Intensity lurks deep in the heart of your connections, as bond-building Venus wrestles with truth-seeking Pluto.

Answers: 1: b 2: c 3: a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

1	4			3			5
	7			8			1 6
		6		5	3		
2			6				
	1 3	4	2	8	7	6	
			3				4
		8		1	6		
6	3			7			5
9			8				2 3

BOGGLER

D	E	S	U
B	A	T	E
H	Qu	E	K
A	E	A	C

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

8	2	1	9	4	8	7	5	6
8	5	7	2	7	6	1	8	9
7	6	9	5	1	8	8	2	4
4	8	2	1	8	5	6	9	7
6	9	7	8	2	4	8	1	5
1	8	5	6	9	7	4	1	8
2	4	8	7	5	1	9	6	8
9	1	6	4	8	2	5	7	3
5	7	8	6	9	2	4	1	7

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (NOVEMBER 12)



WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

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Argentina's players celebrate their victory over New Zealand during the 2020 Tri Nations match at Bankwest Stadium in Sydney, Australia, on Saturday

'Massive disappointment'

All Blacks coach Foster under the gun after shock loss to Argentina

TRI NATIONS RUGBY

Sydney, Australia - All Blacks coach Ian Foster denied on Saturday he was feeling extra pressure after New Zealand were shocked by Argentina in the Tri Nations, leaving him with just two wins from five since taking over.

The three-time world champions were widely expected to coast against a team they had not lost to once in their 29 previous encounters, but instead were embarrassed 25-15 in Sydney.

A gutsy Argentina pulled off one of rugby's biggest upsets, consigning an embarrassed New Zealand to their first back-to-back defeats since 2011 after slumping 24-22 against the Wallabies last week.

"This role always comes with pressure and what I feel now is massive disappointment that I haven't achieved what I wanted to achieve in the last two games," Foster said.

"We have a lot of good people in this group and we have shown we can perform at a high level and we need to go back and show we can do it again."

He took over from Steve Hansen following last year's World Cup in Japan but his reign so far has been littered with inconsistency. After a 16-16 draw against Australia in his opening game, he oversaw two wins against the Wallabies before the last two losses.

Foster admitted Argentina had more passion and were the better team, despite playing their



All Blacks coach Ian Foster

first Test since the World Cup and struggling through preparations disrupted by the coronavirus.

"We're all hurting in there. It's been a massively difficult year for everyone but when it comes to the game we prepared well, but were met by a team that had too much passion for us and we have got to sort that out," he said.

"There's no excuses. "We had two teams very similar but with contrasting build-ups... but it's an All Blacks jersey and we want to be at our best every time, but there were two contrasting intensity levels between the teams today."

The last time the All Blacks lost twice on the trot was in 2011, against South Africa and Australia.

Asked how he felt about overseeing the first side in nine years to chalk up back-to-back losses, Foster replied: "You can tell by my body language I'm not excited by it."

They face Argentina again

on November 28. Fly-half Nicolas Sanchez scored all the Pumas' points to hand them their maiden victory over the rugby powerhouse in the 30 Tests they have played.

"It's surreal what happened, not just the result but playing, getting on the field after everything that has happened this year," said Argentina coach Ledesma.

"Some of the boys haven't seen their families for four months but they have all been positive... they have been awesome.

"I think we will remember this for a long time, not only the game but because of the special situation," he added.

All Blacks were no match for a Pumas team helped by former Australian coach Michael Cheika.

Unlike Australia and New Zealand, Argentina did not have a Super Rugby competition to help them prepare. But after months of quarantine, they were chomping at the bit and took their frustrations out on a sloppy All Blacks in a dominant first-half.

With New Zealand struggling to create chances with poor kicking, ill-discipline and too many errors, they incredibly went to the break 16-3 in front.

New Zealand staged a second-half fightback, but with their eyes on a major upset, Argentina grimly resisted intense pressure to post their best-ever result.

AFP



Ireland's James Lowe celebrates with his teammates after his team beat Wales 32-9 in Dublin, Ireland, on Friday

Ireland pile pressure on Wales' Pivac with heavy defeat

Dublin, Ireland - Wales slipped to their sixth successive defeat on Friday as Ireland ran out convincing 32-9 winners in their opening Autumn Nations Cup clash at Lansdowne Road.

Ireland's New Zealand-born Test debutant James Lowe crowned an impressive performance by scoring the home side's final try in the dying seconds of a largely scrappy match held behind closed doors in Dublin.

Defeat will pile the pressure on Wales coach Wayne Pivac, who replaced

Warren Gatland after the World Cup last year with the Welsh the 2019 Six Nations Grand Slam champions. Although Johnny Sexton scored eight points to make him Ireland's highest scorer against the Welsh, his 100th Test appearance ended early as he limped off clutching his leg.

Coronavirus had overshadowed the tournament earlier in the day with the cancellation of Sunday's match between France and Fiji due to an outbreak of the virus in the Fijian camp.

AFP

Johnson, Smith, Thomas, Ancer share lead at Augusta Masters

Augusta, US - World No 1 Dustin Johnson and third-ranked Justin Thomas shared the second-round clubhouse lead on Friday at the Masters with two unexpected contenders, Australian Cameron Smith and Mexico's Abraham Ancer.

As rain-softened Augusta National surrendered unprecedented success, Thomas closed with back-to-back birdies to shoot a three-under 69 and US compatriot Johnson birdied his final hole to shoot 70 and join the lead pack on nine-under-par 135.

"I like my position going into the weekend," Johnson said. "Conditions are going to stay relatively the same. You are going to have to stay aggressive. You have to keep shooting well."

Smith closed with an eagle and three birdies to shoot 68 while Ancer, trying to become the first debut Masters winner in 41 years, birdied two of his last four holes to fire 67.

"It was a very up and down round, a little bit scrappy," Smith

said. "But hung in there and at the end, it was brilliant."

Im Sung-jae, a 22 year old South Korean also making his Masters debut, fired a 70 to share fifth with American Patrick Cantlay on 136.

Three Englishmen were another stroke adrift - reigning Olympic champion Justin Rose, 16th-ranked Tommy Fleetwood and 2016 Masters champion Danny Willett. World No 2 Jon Rahm of Spain and Japan's Hideki Matsuyama were both on eight-under, Rahm five-under on the round with six holes to play and Matsuyama four-under on the round with three holes remaining at sunset.

With a Thursday rain delay forcing a Friday first-round finish, golfers stung Augusta National for the lowest opening-round scoring average in Masters history, 71.43 strokes, with 53 players under par in round one and 24 scores in the 60s, both Masters round records.

AFP



I like my position going into the weekend, Conditions are going to stay relatively the same. You are going to have to stay aggressive. You have to keep shooting well.

DUSTIN JOHNSON

History for Langer

Germany's 63 year old Bernhard Langer became the oldest player to make the cut in Masters history on 141. An expected one-under cut line would be the lowest in Masters history. The low cut line could also spell trouble for Bryson DeChambeau.

The big-hitting American, who had been tipped to overpower the Augusta layout, is one over par with six holes of the second round left to play.

Four-time major winner

Rory McIlroy, seeking a green jacket to complete a career Grand Slam, completed a 75 in the storm-hit first round

Friday, then rebounded with a bogey-free 66 to revive his chances.

Defending champion Tiger Woods, who matched his best-ever Masters start with a 68, was on level par for the second round after ten holes, sharing 22nd place as he chases a 16th major title and sixth Masters victory.

AFP



Kashyap Kumar Prajapati of Muscat CT

Bilal, Mehta help Renaissance upset IT Works

LOCAL CRICKET

Mohammed Bilal's four for 22 and Yash Mehta's spell of two for 20 guided Renaissance CT to a shock five-wicket win over fancied IT Works in an Oman Cricket Premier Division T20 game at Al Amerat on Saturday.

IT Works were dismissed for a meagre 105 with national team allrounder Mohammad Nadeem topscoring with 26.

Renaissance, too, struggled in their chase and lost five wickets before reaching the target, thanks to knocks by Asif Khan (45), Faizal Jerome (32) and a quickfire 17 by Rafiullah.

Muscat stay unbeaten, Al Turki prevail

Earlier on Friday, table-toppers



Mohammed Bilal of Renaissance

Muscat CT stayed unbeaten with a thumping nine-wicket win over AER at the same venue.

AER were restricted to a disappointing 81 for nine. Kashyap Kumar Prajapati's breezy 56 not out off 36 balls and



Akshay Patel of Al Turki NMC

Ayaan Khan's 22 off 15 led Muscat to a thumping win.

In another low-scoring top-flight game, Al Turki NMC trounced Arm Alpha by eight wickets on Friday. Batting first, Alpha could manage only 98 for

the loss of seven wickets. Akshay Patel with an unbeaten 44 off 54 and captain Twinkal Bhandari's 28 guided Al Turki home with an over to spare.

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division: IT Works 105 in 19 overs (Nadeem 26; Bilal 4-22, Mehta 2-20) lost to Renaissance 107-5 in 19.3 overs (Khan 45, Jerome 32).

Premier Division: AER 81-9 (Ghazanfar Iqbal 19; Ayaan Khan 2-7, Siddharth Bukkapatnam 2-14, Sandeep Goud 2-14) lost to Muscat CT 84-1 in 11 overs (Prajapati 56, Ayaan 22 n.o.).

Premier Division: Arm Alpha 98-7 (Sanuth Ebrahim 21;

Hemalkumar Tandel 2-12, Mohit Patel 2-12, Jay Odedara 2-22) lost to Al Turki 100-2 in 18.2 overs (Patel 44, Bhandari 28, Nalinda Prasad 2-15).

F Division (T20): Team Coorg Muscat 103-9 (Milind Bhujwala 39; Gajendran Thathapillai 2-14) lost to Y Horizon 104-3 in 11.5 overs (Rajamani Riju 44, Jatin Patel 21; Arjan Halai 2-10).

F Division: Mazoon Dairy 207-6 (Syed Mohammed Ali 84, Shakil Khan 50 n.o., Shuaib 40; Adharsh Srinivasan 3-16, Prathiesh Ramesh 2-32) beat Muscat Young Stars 136-8 (Devansh Sampat 31, Roshan Kumar 26, Srinivasan 21; Ameer 2-8, Shakil Khan 2-18).

INDIA TOUR OF AUSTRALIA

Bring on the short stuff: Smith

Australian star batsman challenges lethal Indian fast bowling unit during the upcoming marquee Test series

Sydney, Australia - Steven Smith has challenged India's pace attack to bring on the short bowling during the Test series, believing if they focus on banging the ball in at him it will work in Australia's favour.

In Australia's most recent Test series, against New Zealand in the 2019-2020 season, Neil Wagner produced a sustained short-ball attack to Smith. The left-arm removed Smith four times with the short delivery - twice caught at square leg, once at leg gully, and once fending to the off-side gully - but Smith still averaged 42.80 in the three matches.

Though Smith did not score a century he soaked up a lot of pressure for his team-mates by wearing down the bowlers. Australia scored more than 400 in each of their first innings during the series. Smith's strike-rate in that series was 34.13, comfortably the lowest of his career, but he is more than happy to play a role for the team.

"It's no dramas for me. I just play the game and sum up the conditions, how they're trying to get me out and being able to counter that," Smith told News Corp. "I mean, a few different oppositions have tried it and they've certainly found it more difficult to [execute it] the way Wagner did. He's got an amazing skill set where his speeds go up and down...everything is be-



A file photo of Australia's Steven Smith swaying out of the way of a bouncer

tween your ribs and your head. "If teams are trying to get me out like that it's probably a big benefit for the team because it takes a lot out of people's bodies if you continually bowl short. I've faced a lot of short bowling in my life and I haven't had too many stresses with it. I suppose we'll just wait and see."

Smith was not part of the previous series between these teams as he was serving his suspension for the Newlands

ball-tampering scandal but on his return to Test cricket had a magnificent Ashes series despite missing one Test after being felled by a Jofra Archer bouncer at Lord's.

The match-ups between the two pace attacks is one of the most keenly awaited contests of the series. Australia will likely line-up with Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood while India will certainly have Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed

Shami and may be able to call on Ishant Sharma if he recovers from the side injury sustained at the IPL. Umesh Yadav and the highly-rated Navdeep Saini are also part of their Test squad.

In the series two years ago, Australia's pace attack faded in the latter two Tests as India won the series with a victory at the MCG and a draw at the SCG where they piled up more than 600, but coach Justin Langer has no doubt what they deliver this

time. "A world-class bowling attack. And two years better," he said. "I can't wait to see them go. And we've got good depth as well. James Pattinson who has come back from that back injury, we saw how powerful that was during the last Ashes in England. Michael Neser keeps playing well over and over again. And Sean Abbott, every Shield player I'm talking to they're all saying he is bowling fast."

Cricinfo

Indian players begin training in Sydney

Sydney, Australia - The India players who are on tour in Australia have begun training after the entire contingent tested negative for COVID-19.

On Saturday, two days after the arrival of India's touring party in Sydney, the BCCI tweeted photographs from the players' outdoor and gym sessions.

Though India have begun training, they will remain in quarantine for the first two weeks of their stay in Australia. The tour will begin with the white-ball leg - three ODIs and three T20s shared between Sydney and

Canberra - before proceeding to a four-Test series that begins with a day-night game in Adelaide from December 17-21.

The Test will be followed by the Boxing Day and New Year's Tests in Melbourne and Sydney respectively, and the final Test in Brisbane from January 15-19.

The Indians will also play two warm-up games in Sydney before the Test series - the first, which clashes with the T20I series, from December 6-8, and the second from December 11-13. Cricinfo



Virat Kohli (right) and Kuldeep Yadav at a training session (AFP)



Rohit Sharma, Mumbai Indians skipper and India batsman

Rohit is still only 70% fit, says Ganguly

Mumbai, India - Rohit Sharma may have returned to action and played three back-to-back matches for the Mumbai Indians as they marched to a record fifth IPL title earlier this week, but he is still only '70 per cent' fit, according to BCCI president Sourav Ganguly.

"Rohit is still 70 per cent [fit]," Ganguly said in an interview with *The Week* when asked about Rohit playing for his franchise not long after being left out of the India touring party for Australia on fitness grounds.

"Why don't you find out from Rohit himself? That is why he is still not picked for the ODIs and T20s down under. He has

been added to the Test squad." Rohit suffered a hamstring tear in his left leg on October 18 during the Mumbai Indians' match against the Kings XI Punjab in Dubai.

He missed the team's next four games, but came back for the last three, helping them seal the title with a half-century in the final against the Delhi Capitals.

Along the way, the BCCI selectors first left Rohit out of all three squads for Australia, and later added him to the Test squad.

It is expected that he would undergo rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru before joining the



Sourav Ganguly, BCCI chief

India squad in Australia ahead of the first Test in Adelaide, starting December 17, pending a fitness test. Rohit hasn't travelled to Australia with the rest of the

contingent from the UAE.

Wriddhiman Saha is another member of India's contingent recovering from a hamstring injury. The wicketkeeper-batsman, who is part of the Test squad but not the limited-overs teams, has flown to Australia with the rest of India's touring party after missing the Sunrisers Hyderabad's last two matches.

The BCCI's communication with the media with regards to player injuries has often been opaque, but Ganguly said Saha's situation - and the fitness of every player - was being closely monitored by the board and India's team management.

"Who should know [about

player injuries]? We know, the Indian physio knows, the NCA knows," Ganguly said.

"I think people don't know how the BCCI works. The BCCI trainers, physio and Wriddhi himself know that he has two hamstring issues. People don't understand injuries, that is why they talk rubbish.

"Wriddhi is travelling to Australia because he will be fit for Tests. He is not part of the shorter formats. For the entire duration of the IPL, Indian physios and trainers were in Dubai. [India physio] Dr Nitin Patel is managing injuries and monitoring it all." Cricinfo

Dravid supports cricket's inclusion in the Olympics

Sydney, Australia - Rahul Dravid has thrown his weight behind the idea of cricket's inclusion in the Olympics, suggesting it would be 'great for the game'.

While Dravid, the director of cricket operations at India's national academy, accepted the move had 'its challenges', he felt it would help the 'expansion' of the game and suggested 'cricket should endeavour to try and get into the Olympics'.

"I think it would be great for the game if the T20 format can become an Olympic sport," Dravid said at the virtual launch of *A New Innings*, a book written by Manoj Badale and Simon Hughes that investigates the business of sport through the lens of the IPL.

"There's cricket being played in so many countries. I'm certainly for the expansion of the T20 game."

The ICC recently provided a boost to the prospects of a return of the sport to the event - it was contested in the 1900 Paris Olympics - by asking members to report on the potential financial benefits of inclusion.



I think it would be great for the game if the T20 format can become an Olympic sport

RAHUL DRAVID

But while Dravid acknowledged there could be hurdles to overcome on issues such as pitch preparation and the already bursting cricket schedule, he was keen to press for the sport's inclusion.

"Obviously, it [Olympic inclusion] comes with its challenges," Dravid continued. "Not least of all cricket's a game that requires certain kinds of facilities for it to be successful. As we've just seen, the success

of the IPL was in a large part due to the quality of wickets that were put out for the teams. The Olympics is played in countries where cricket is not played.

"But if you can get a lot of that right and if it works in the schedule and if you can get the facilities in place, then why not? If it's possible, I think cricket should endeavour to try and get into the Olympics at some stage. It might take some time, but why not?" Andrew Wildblood, one of the

original architects of the IPL, and Badale, the owner of Rajasthan Royals, agreed with Dravid's assessment.

"Why wouldn't you want to be part of something that is part of arguably the biggest global sporting platform?" Wildblood asked rhetorically.

"Surely that has to be a positive if it grows the interest levels in cricket and grows the audience. It has to be good for the game. Why wouldn't you do that if you can?"

Badale said, "For me, the executive function of any sport should be to broaden the appeal. If you broaden its appeal, you broaden its reach. That means more kids get to experience what you and I think is the best game in the world. It means more people get to see what you and I think is the best game in the world.

"Success breeds success. We all live off the same ultimate source of income: media rights. So the bigger the audience is, the bigger the media rights are and the bigger the economy is."

Cricinfo

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Canadian driver Lance Stroll celebrates after the qualifying session at the Intercity Istanbul Park circuit, in Istanbul, Turkey, on Saturday

Stroll bags maiden pole

FORMULA ONE TURKISH GP

Istanbul, Turkey - Lance Stroll upstaged Formula One's title-chasing Lewis Hamilton on Saturday when he grabbed the first pole position of his career at the Turkish Grand Prix, the Canadian saying 'it feels really good right now'.

The 22 year old Racing Point driver made the most of drying conditions on a treacherous track to end Mercedes' 13-race domination of qualifying this year.

Stroll delivered a dazzling fastest lap in one minute and 47.765 seconds in the closing seconds to usurp his teammate Sergio Perez and then resist a last surge from Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

The disappointed Dutchman was second, three-tenths behind Stroll, but ahead of Mexican Perez who claimed his career-best starting position after finishing fourth nine times in the past.

Stroll was the first Canadian

to take pole since Jacques Villeneuve at the 1997 European Grand Prix at Jerez and it was the Silverstone-based Racing Point team's first pole since, racing as Jordan, they did so at the 2009 Belgian Grand Prix.

The outcome left Mercedes well-beaten on the weekend when Lewis Hamilton bids to seal a record-equalling seventh drivers' championship and draw level with seven-time champion Michael Schumacher.

The six-time champion wound up sixth behind Alex Albon in the second Red Bull and Renault's Daniel Ricciardo whose teammate Esteban Ocon qualified seventh.

"Yes, Yes, Yes boys," Stroll screamed on the team radio. "I can't really put it into words," he added. "I'm shocked. I didn't expect to be up here after FP3."

'Feels good right now'

"There were a lot of things we weren't sure about coming into qualifying. We didn't look that competitive in Q3."

His surprise qualifying per-



Racing Point's driver Lance Stroll drives during the qualifying session

formance comes after a difficult few weeks when he had to miss the Eifel Grand Prix, testing positive for coronavirus the next day.

"It has been a pretty rough ride for me so it feels good. Feels really good right now."

This is the first time this season that neither Hamilton (nine) nor Bottas (four) have topped qualifying.

Hamilton can seal a record-equalling seventh drivers' world title on Sunday if he prevents Bottas from outscoring him by eight points.

After Friday's ice rink

conditions on the resurfaced circuit, heavy rain ushered in even more treacherous challenges in which most of the drivers slithered and spun.

The Q1 session was interrupted twice for red flags, when Race Control declared the track was unsafe - firstly due to the conditions and then, secondly, when Romain Grosjean spun into a gravel trap in his Haas.

The interruptions added 50 minutes to the schedule as daylight receded in the appalling conditions, but the brilliant car control of Verstappen and his Red Bull teammate Albon was on

display as they topped the times, the Dutchman 1.9 seconds clear.

In the drama, Leclerc slithered through to Q2 while Hamilton, his best lap cancelled for exceeding track limits, struggled through in 14th place.

Grosjean was eliminated along with his Haas team-mate Kevin Magnussen, the two Williams of George Russell and Nicholas Latifi and Alpha Tauri's Daniil Kvyat.

In Q2, both Mercedes were clearly struggling to keep any heat in their tyres while Verstappen, oozing confidence, set the pace.

At the flag, the Dutchman was two seconds clear of Albon with Hamilton 2.4 down in third and Bottas seventh while both Ferraris failed to make the cut to the top-ten shootout.

In Q3 Verstappen went four seconds clear of nearest rival Bottas before Perez, on intermediates, re-set expectations by topping the Dutchman and prompting a switch of tyres for everyone else for the final surprising runs.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Brazil labour to victory over Venezuela without Neymar

WORLD CUP QUALIFIER

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Liverpool striker Roberto Firmino scored the crucial goal as Brazil laboured to a 1-0 win over a well organised but limited Venezuela in their World Cup South American qualifier on Friday.

Firmino broke the deadlock on 66 minutes in Sao Paulo, poaching a goal after Venezuelan defender Darwin Machis' attempt to clear an Everton Ribeiro cross fell to him a few yards out.

Firmino's 16th goal in 47

appearances for the Selecao was enough to maintain their 100 per cent record in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers. Brazil have already beaten Bolivia (5-0) and Peru (4-2) and top the South American qualifying table with Argentina second.

Venezuela, who lost their first two qualifiers, held the Brazilians scoreless at half time in the deserted Morumbi stadium.

The hosts missed the injured Neymar's creativity in midfield, but even with an attack sporting

Firmino, Gabriel Jesus and Richarlison, they could find no way through the mass Venezuelan defence in the first half.

Richarlison did have the ball in the net early on but the Everton striker's celebrations were cut short when Firmino was adjudged to have been offside.

For all Brazil's pressing, Wulker Farinez had little enough to do in the Venezuela goal, but the keeper made a flying save to beat away a bouncing shot from Firmino just before the half-hour,

the Liverpool striker heading the resulting corner well wide.

Venezuela's only threat came from a break up the left wing by Yeferson Soteldo, whose cross for Salomon Rondon was hacked away by Marquinhos.

Rondon, formerly of West Bromwich Albion and now plying his trade for Chinese Super League club Dalian Professional, otherwise cut an isolated figure when not busy with defensive duties. Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson, who hardly

touched the ball during the whole match, reacted quickly to scramble the ball away when Rondon briefly threatened the Brazil goal at the death.

A worried Brazilian coach Tite will have seen how sorely his side missed Neymar's invention.

The Paris Saint-Germain star, who suffered a thigh injury in a Champions League match last month, is also set to miss Tuesday's match with Uruguay in Montevideo.

AFP



Brazil's Roberto Firmino (left) celebrates with teammate Gabriel Jesus after scoring against Venezuela in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Friday

Sierra Leone stun Nigeria; Salah tests positive



Action during the Africa Cup of Nations match between Nigeria and Sierra Leone in Benin City on Friday

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Johannesburg, South Africa - Sierra Leone staged one of the greatest Africa Cup of Nations comebacks to draw 4-4 with hosts Nigeria in Benin City on Friday while struggling Egypt were dealt a huge blow as talisman Mohamed Salah tested positive for coronavirus.

Nigeria appeared to have three 2021 qualifying points in

the bag when they built a four-goal lead after 31 minutes at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium in Benin City against opponents 88 places below them in the world rankings. But a sensational fightback that began just before half-time as Kwame Quee scored reached a climax five minutes from time when Al-Hadji Kamara equalised.

It was the greatest Cup of

Nations comeback since the 2010 finals when Mali drew 4-4 with hosts Angola in the tournament opener after trailing by four goals 12 minutes from time in Luanda.

Record seven-time African champions Egypt are only third in another section following draws with Kenya and the Comoros, and were hoping Liverpool star Salah could lead them to home

and away victories over Togo.

But instead of playing for the Pharaohs in Cairo Saturday and in Lome Tuesday, Salah spent Friday isolated in a Cairo hotel room after testing positive for COVID-19 despite showing no symptoms.

The 2017 and 2018 African Footballer of the Year will undergo further tests, an Egyptian Football Association official said.

Senegalese Sadio Mane and Guinean Naby Keita, two Liverpool teammates of Salah, have recovered after contracting COVID-19.

Nigeria have seven points, Benin three, Sierra Leone two and Lesotho one with the second and fourth-place teams due to meet in Porto-Novo on Saturday.

Meanwhile, South Africa needed a Bongani Zungu goal on 90 minutes in Durban to seal a laboured 2-0 win over minnows Sao Tome e Principe despite 110 places dividing them in the world rankings.

Percy Tau put Bafana Bafana (The Boys) ahead on 55 minutes from the penalty spot after he

was fouled and Zungu nodded a corner past substitute goalkeeper Nilson Taty.

Ghana lead Group C with a maximum nine points, South Africa have six, Sudan three and Sao Tome are pointless.

Morocco were the most impressive of the five winning nations on Friday, hammering the Central African Republic 4-1 in Rabat with Chelsea midfielder Hakim Ziyech bagging a brace.

The triumph under Bosnia & Herzegovina-born coach Vahid Halilhodzic enabled Morocco to replace Mauritania as Group E frontrunners.

Tunisia and Mali, both top-ten ranked countries in Africa, would have expected to win more convincingly than 1-0 at home to Tanzania and Namibia respectively.

Tunisia top Group J with nine points, six more than Equatorial Guinea, Libya and Tanzania, and Mali share first place in Group A with Guinea on seven points followed by Namibia with three while Chad have none.

AFP





TENCENT Q3 REVENUE CLIMBS
Chinese Internet giant Tencent said its revenue climbed 29 per cent to US\$18.9bn in the third quarter of this year as coronavirus lockdowns keep users indoors and online

BUSINESS

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OQ's revenues drop in 2019 on tough market conditions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ, Oman's global integrated energy company, reported significant declines in its consolidated revenues and net profit for the year 2019, mainly due to unfavourable market conditions for the downstream and trading business in a lower price environment.

In its first-ever sustainability report released on Tuesday, OQ said the group realised lower consolidated revenues of around US\$19.036bn in 2019 compared to US\$23.026bn in 2018, a decline of more than 17 per cent.

In late 2019, OQ Group successfully merged its nine legacy companies to form a stronger, united and more efficient consolidated entity to become a global player and integrated energy brand offering end-to-end products, services and solutions in upstream and downstream.

Despite all the transformational changes in 2019, OQ continued its profitable operations. OQ's realised net profit in 2019 stood at US\$597mn which is lower than the net profits realised in 2018 of US\$649mn.

'This drop is driven by unfavourable market conditions for downstream and trading that pulled profits down through lower product prices,' OQ said.



OQ at present is a US\$28bn worth company operating in 13 countries across the globe

As per the sustainability report, OQ Group's consolidated assets were valued at US\$29.478bn as of December 31, 2019, which was in line with 2018 total assets. Plant, property and equipment remained the dominant portion of the gross assets by 45 per cent followed by oil and gas exploration, production and development assets with a share of 11 per cent of the gross assets.

OQ's consolidated outstanding debt as of December 31, 2019 was US\$12.881bn compared to US\$11.853bn a year ago. The future principal and interest pay-

ments, OQ said, will be met by internally generated cash and the priority funding strategies.

At present, OQ is a US\$28bn worth company operating in 13 countries across the globe. The group covers the entire value chain in the hydrocarbon sector from exploration and production, to marketing and distribution of end-user products.

OQ Group's fuels and chemicals are sold in over 60 countries worldwide, making it a prominent player in the energy sector.

For the period from 2020 to 2024, OQ expects to be in a transformative phase charac-

terised by integration, growth and new business development, such as alternative energy, retail and the gas business.

'This growth and development path ultimately aims to transform OQ into a global energy company, that delivers sustainability and business excellence,' OQ said in its sustainability report.

OQ has further committed to its energy transition with the publication of its first-ever sustainability report, examining and documenting the group's progress towards a greener future.

SPMP names Montgomery as CEO; eyes full capacity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The board of directors of Strategic & Precious Metals Processing (SPMP) has announced the appointment of Joel Montgomery as the new chief executive officer of the company.

Chief operating officer and executive committee member since September 2018, Montgomery has been acting CEO of SPMP since February 2020 following the departure of the previous CEO.

The SPMP plant in Sohar has recently reached several important milestones, including the successful production and sale of 500 tonnes of antimony and gold doré.

In a press statement, Sheikh Nasser al Harthy, chair of the



Joel Montgomery

SPMP board, said, "On behalf of the board, I salute the work accomplished by Montgomery and the team at SPMP over this difficult period to position the business for success. We wish Montgomery all the best in his new role."

The appointment marks a

new chapter for SPMP as it embarks on an ambitious production ramp-up programme. SPMP has recently completed the restructuring of its long-term debt and secured the additional shareholder funding required to achieve full capacity at its Sohar facility. With the appointment of Montgomery, the board confirmed the company's strategic ambition of becoming a leader in antimony production.

Montgomery is a seasoned mining professional with 23 years of experience in the mineral processing and manufacturing industries. A Canadian trained mechanical engineer with a master's degree from Queen's University, he has held various senior operational, maintenance and engineering roles throughout his career.

Ahli Bank plans RO30mn rights issue

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ahli Bank is planning a rights issue of worth RO30mn, according to an initial disclosure submitted by the bank to the Muscat Securities Market.

'The board of directors of Ahli Bank at its meeting held on November 12, 2020 approved a rights issue of an amount of

RO30mn,' the bank said.

Ahli Bank said that further details of the rights issue will be disclosed at a later stage after obtaining the approval of the Central Bank of Oman and other regulatory approvals.

Ahli Bank recently reported a 16 per cent decline in its net profit for the nine months period ended September 30, 2020. The bank's net profit decreased to

RO19.15mn for the January-September period of 2020 compared with RO22.79mn in the same period of last year.

However, the bank recorded a 4.8 per cent growth in its net loans, advances and financing which reached to RO2.159bn as of September 30, 2020 compared to RO2.06bn a year ago. Total assets grew by 3 per cent to RO2.592bn.



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IEA cuts 2020 oil demand forecasts on virus surge



OPEC expects global demand for crude oil to decline by 9.8mn bpd in 2020

Paris, France - The International Energy Agency (IEA) cut its 2020 global oil demand forecast, citing a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, with vaccines unlikely to have much of an impact until well into next year.

The IEA said that as a result of fresh restrictions imposed by governments in an effort to curb the disease, it expected full-year 2020 global oil demand to come in at 91.3mn barrels per day (bpd) - down by 8.8mn bpd compared with the drop of

The IEA expected full-year 2020 global oil demand to come in at 91.3mn barrels per day (bpd) - down by 8.8mn bpd compared with the drop of 8.4mn bpd given in last month's regular report

8.4mn bpd given in last month's regular report.

The rebound next year will be slightly better, however, with an increase of 5.8mn bpd, up from last month's 5.5mn bpd.

'Vaccines are unlikely to significantly boost demand until

well into next year,' the IEA cautioned.

It noted that reports of progress in the search for a vaccine had caused 'considerable excitement,' giving oil prices - and the financial markets generally - a massive boost.

'However, it is far too early to know how and when vaccines will allow normal life to resume. For now, our forecasts do not anticipate a significant impact in the first half of 2021,' it said.

'In the here and now we continue to see surging caseloads,

particularly in Europe and the United States,' it added.

The IEA, set up by the developed economies after the oil price and supply shocks of the early 1970s, said oil output rose slightly to 91.2mn bpd in October as OPEC and major non-OPEC countries stuck by a deal to cut production.

'Production from countries participating in the OPEC+ agreement held largely steady,' it noted.

OPEC itself revised down its forecasts for global oil demand this year and next due to the economic disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

OPEC expects global demand for crude oil to decline by 9.8mn bpd in 2020, compared with its previous forecast for a drop of 9.5mn bpd.

For 2021, OPEC expected a rebound of 6.2mn bpd but this represented a cut of 300,000 bpd on its previous estimate, leaving global demand at 96.3mn bpd.

Under the terms of the deal between OPEC and non-cartel producers, principally Russia agreed in April, the so-called OPEC+ group pledged to cut output by 9.7mn bpd from May 1 until the end of June. The cuts were then to be gradually eased from July, to 7.7mn bpd through to December and then 5.8mn bpd from January.

AFF



Jerome Powell

Too soon to gauge vaccine impact on economy: Powell

Frankfurt, Germany - US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell said that it is 'too soon to assess' the potential impact of a coronavirus vaccine on the economy in 2021, despite recent announcements that have stoked hopes.

'This is certainly good and welcome news for the medium term,' Powell told a virtual conference organised by the European Central Bank (ECB).

However, 'significant challenges and uncertainty remain about timing, production, distribution and the efficacy for different groups' of a vaccine, he added.

'It's too soon to assess with any confidence the implications of the news for the path of the economy especially in the near term'.

The appearance was Powell's first in public since US pharma giant Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech announced promising results in trials of their potential

vaccine showing efficacy of around 90 per cent, prompting a rapturous response on financial markets.

Playing down the immediate optimism, Powell warned that 'with the virus spreading the next months could be challenging'.

ECB President Christine Lagarde cautioned against 'exuberant' hopes for the vaccine's economic impact, also highlighting the likely logistical challenges.

And Bank of England head Andrew Bailey said he hoped the positive news would reduce uncertainty over the economic outlook, but 'we're not there yet'.

Even with a vaccine on the cards, the euro area's economic recovery is likely to be 'unsteady', Lagarde had said as she opened the conference, with support from central banks needed well into the foreseeable future.

AFF

India to boost manufacturing, jobs after recession warning

Mumbai, India - India's government has announced new measures to support the manufacturing sector and create jobs after the central bank said the country was set to enter a recession with estimates of another quarterly contraction.

India - Asia's third-largest economy and home to 1.3bn people - has seen its economy badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic, with growth shrinking by a record 23.9 per cent between April and June.

'India has entered a technical recession in the first half of 2020-21 for the first time in its history,' the Reserve Bank of India said.

The economy was estimated to contract by 8.6 per cent in the quarter ending September, resulting in a 'technical recession' which occurs with two consecutive quarters of negative growth, the RBI said in its report.

The International Monetary Fund said last month that India's economy would contract by 10.3 per cent for the year.

But Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the economy was now recovering strongly, pointing to global ratings agency



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

Moody's revision of India's calendar year contraction to -8.9 per cent from its previous -9.6 percent estimate.

'[It is] indicative of corrections happening in a positive direction,' she said in New Delhi.

The Reserve Bank also added in that the 'contraction is ebbing with gradual normalisation in activities and expected to be short-lived'.

The official GDP figures for July-September will be published on November 27.

Even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a strict lockdown in late March,

India's economy was already sluggish - weighed down by record unemployment and a flurry of bad loans that made banks reluctant to lend.

Sitharaman announced some US\$27bn in fresh measures to support the manufacturing sector and create jobs. They include incentives to produce goods and services locally, as well as benefits for foreign firms that invest in Indian firms.

They come on top of the US\$266bn package announced by Prime Minister Modi in May to revive the stuttering economy.

AFF

UK economy rebounds 15.5% in Q3

London, UK - Britain's economy rebounded by 15.5 per cent in the third quarter, emerging from a historic recession as initial coronavirus lockdown measures were relaxed, official data showed.

'UK gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have grown by a record 15.5 per cent in July to September... as lockdown measures were eased,' the Office for National Statistics said.

The economy, however, was still 9.7 per cent smaller than before this year's coronavirus-induced recession after a massive contraction in the second quarter.

Output in services, the production and construction sectors increased by record amounts in the third quarter, but the ONS cautioned that they were still below their pre-pandemic levels seen late last year.

The nation entered a painful recession after shrinking by a record 19.8 per cent in the second quarter after 2.5 per cent in

the first, the ONS confirmed.

The technical definition of a recession is two quarterly contractions in a row.

The GDP numbers do not yet reflect the impact of England's second round of stay-at-home lockdown restrictions that were imposed last week to curb soaring infection and death rates.

The data was published one day after Britain passed the grim milestone of 50,000 people who have died from the pandemic.

AFF

Pfizer: The firm making major progress towards COVID vaccine

By Juliette Michel

Pfizer, in partnership with German company BioNTech, announced last week major progress in its quest to release a vaccine against COVID-19.

Here are some key questions and answers about the US firm and its long history:

How did the company begin?

It was created by two cousins originally from Germany - chemist Charles Pfizer and confectioner Charles Erhart - in a red-brick building in Brooklyn, New York in 1849. Pfizer began with an almond-scented antiparasitic drug.

It doubled its revenue by taking advantage of the demand for disinfectants and anti-pain medicine during the Civil War (1861-1865).

A manufacturer of both chemical products and drugs, Pfizer later developed techniques to mass manufacture citric acid, used particularly in soft drinks, then penicillin during World War II.

It sold its first drug under the Pfizer brand in 1950 - the broad spectrum antibiotic Terramycin - before expanding in the following years internationally and in the animal drugs sector.

Viagra, the drug released in 1998 to treat impotence, is arguably the company's best-known product along with the anti-anxiety medicine Xanax and anti-cholesterol treatment Lipitor.

It offers remedies intended to treat cancer as well as cardiovascular and neurological diseases, both to individuals and to hospitals.

Among its current drugs earning over US\$1bn a year are



Pfizer Inc headquarters in New York City, US (AFP)

the anti-coagulant Eliquis, cancer treatments Ibrance and Xtandi, pneumococcal infection vaccine Prevnar 13/Prevenar 13, and those used in particular in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, Xeljanz and Enbrel.

How profitable is the company?

Over the course of the last decade, Pfizer has consistently generated annual sales of more than US\$50bn, though without a significant breakthrough involving a new miracle drug to further boost sales. Its profit last year was US\$16.3bn.

The company spent some US\$8.7bn in 2019 on research and development, but regularly acquires or approaches other firms to add to its portfolio.

In 2019, for example, it announced a merger of its non-patented medicines activity with the pharmaceutical group Mylan to create a global giant in the generics

Pfizer plans to produce 50mn doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of the year and 1.3bn in 2021

sector.

The company employs some 88,000 worldwide and sells its products in 125 countries.

It sold its first shares to the public in 1942 and is currently valued at US\$214bn on Wall Street.

It is one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies.

What is the latest with its COVID-19 vaccine?

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading, the company in mid-March formed a partner-

ship with German firm BioNTech to develop a vaccine based on new genetic technology. The first tests began quickly in April.

With the product selected - a two-dose vaccine given over the course of three weeks - a large clinical trial began in July involving more than 40,000 participants.

Pfizer announced last week that the vaccine candidate was 90 per cent effective in trials so far.

'I believe this is likely the most significant medical advance in the last 100 years,' Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla told American network CNBC.

If trials continue successfully, Pfizer plans to request authorisation with US drug agency the FDA by the end of the month.

The US-based company plans to produce 50mn doses by the end of the year and 1.3bn in 2021.

AFF

Villagers burn Karabakh houses ahead of Azerbaijan takeover

Charektar, Azerbaijan - Villagers in Nagorno-Karabakh set their houses on fire Saturday before fleeing to Armenia ahead of a weekend deadline that will see parts of the territory handed over to Azerbaijan as part of a peace agreement.

Residents of the Kalbajar district in Azerbaijan that was controlled by Armenian separatists for decades began a mass exodus this week after it was announced Azerbaijan would regain control on Sunday.

Fighting between the separatists backed by Armenian troops and the Azerbaijan army erupted in late September and raged for six weeks, leaving more than 1,400 dead and forcing thousands to flee their homes.

In the village of Charektar, on the border with the neighbouring district of Martakert which is to remain under Armenian control, at least six houses were on fire Saturday morning with thick plumes of gray smoke rising over the valley, an AFP journalist saw. "This is my house, I can't leave it to the Turks," as Azerbaijanis are often called by Armenians, said one resident as he



A man looks on as a house burns in the village of Charektar outside the town of Kalbajar on November 14 (AFP)

threw burning wooden planks and rags soaked in gasoline into a completely empty house.

"Everybody is going to burn down their house today... We were given until midnight to

leave," he said.

On Friday at least 10 houses were burned in and around Charektar.

The ex-Soviet rivals agreed to end hostilities earlier this week

after previous efforts by Russia, France and the United States to get a ceasefire fell through.

A key part of the peace deal includes Armenia's return of Kalbajar, as well as the Aghdam

district by November 20 and the Lachin district by December 1, which have been held by Armenians since a devastating war in the 1990s. AFP

Armenia says 2,317 soldiers dead in Karabakh conflict

Yerevan, Armenia - Armenia on Saturday said that more than 2,000 fighters were killed in six weeks of clashes with Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"To date, our forensic service has examined the corpses of 2,317 dead servicemen, including unidentified ones," Armenian health ministry spokeswoman Alina Nikoghosyan wrote on Facebook.

The updated death toll from the Armenian side pushes its fatalities up by nearly 1,000 compared to the last confirmed toll among Armenian fighters.

Nearly two months of fierce clashes between the ex-Soviet rivals ended this week with a Russian-brokered peace accord that sees Armenia cede swathes of territory captured by Azerbaijan's forces.

Baku's army has never revealed details of its military fa-

talities, but the overall human cost of the fighting is expected to be much higher than reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday that the number of fatalities in the conflict was higher than 4,000 and that some 8,000 people had been left injured.

At least 143 civilians have been confirmed dead in the fighting. Putin said that tens of thousands of people had been displaced by the heavy clashes that also left "civilian infrastructure and numerous cultural sites" destroyed.

The peace deal stipulates that Azerbaijan's forces will retain control over areas seized in the fighting, including the second-largest town of Shusha, while Armenia agreed to a timetable to withdraw from large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions. AFP

Iran dismisses US media report Al-Qaeda No 2 killed in Tehran

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Saturday dismissed a US newspaper report that Al-Qaeda's second-in-command was killed in Tehran by Israeli agents as "made-up information" and denied the presence of any of the Sunni jihadist group's members in the Islamic republic.

The *New York Times* said Abdullah Ahmad Abdullah, indicted in the United States for 1998 bombings of its embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, was secretly shot and killed in Tehran by Israeli operatives on a motorcycle at Washington's behest.

The senior Al-Qaeda leader, whose *nom de guerre* was Abu Muhammad al Masri, was killed along with his daughter, Miriam, the widow of Osama bin Laden's son Hamza, the *Times* reported Friday, citing intelligence sources.

The attack took place on August 7 on the anniversary of the Africa bombings, according to the paper.

Iran's foes, the United States and Israel, "try to shift the responsibility for the criminal acts of (Al-Qaeda) and other terrorist groups in the region and link Iran to such groups with lies and by leaking made-up information to



Saeed Khatibzadeh

They try to shift the responsibility for the criminal acts of (Al-Qaeda) and other terrorist groups and link Iran to such groups with lies and by leaking made-up information

SAEED KHATIBZADEH

the media", foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

Khatibzadeh accused the US itself and "its allies in the region" of having created Al-Qaeda through their "wrong policies" and advised US media to "not fall

into the trap of American and Zionist officials' Hollywood scenarios".

American intelligence officials told the *Times* that Abdullah had been in Iran's "custody" since 2003, but he had been living freely in the Pasdaran district of

Tehran, an upscale suburb, since at least 2015.

On August 7, he was driving a white Renault L90 sedan with his daughter near his home when two gunmen on a motorbike shot five times at them with a pistol fitted with a silencer, it said.

Iran's state news IRNA and Mehr news agency at the time reported a similar incident and identified the victims as Habib Dawoud, a 58 year old Lebanese history teacher, and his daughter Maryam, 27, without giving further details.

They said the "individual on the motorbike shot from the sidewalk and fled" the scene and that police investigations were ongoing. There have since been no updates.

'Most experienced' planner

US federal authorities have offered a US\$10mn reward for information leading to Abdullah's capture.

He was the "most experienced and capable operational planner not in US or allied custody", according to a highly classified document provided by the US National Counterterrorism Center in 2008, the *Times* said. AFP

UN's former envoy to Libya 'very optimistic' for peace

Tunis, Tunisia - The UN's former envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, says he has higher hopes than ever of seeing an end to a decade of violence in the North African country.

"I'm very optimistic," the Lebanese diplomat said. "What we've seen in the past two months is an accumulation of positive factors."

Salame spoke in an interview with AFP a day after rival military delegations concluded their latest UN-led meetings inside Libya to fill in the details of a landmark October ceasefire deal.

Meanwhile political talks, also led by the world body, were underway in Tunisia aimed at appointing an interim government to organise elections and govern a country battered by conflict, economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic.

On Friday evening the UN announced that delegates in Tunisia had agreed that national polls should be held on December 24 next year.

Libya, which sits atop Africa's largest proven crude oil reserves, plunged into violence after a 2011 NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi.



In this file photo taken on Febr 18, 2020, then UN envoy for Libya Salame holds a press briefing during UN-brokered talks in Geneva (AFP)

Today it is dominated by two competing administrations and an array of militias, including many foreign fighters, as well as being an arena for global rivalries.

Salame resigned in March citing health reasons and stress, but was the architect of the UN's current Libya peace efforts and has stayed closely involved.

Speaking from his home in Paris, he warned that "a war that has been raging for one decade cannot be solved in a day".

But after months of relative calm and a string of positive steps, the 69 year old said Libyans had shown "a truly re-

newed interest" in dialogue.

'Stabbed in the back'

Salame, a former Lebanese culture minister and professor of international relations, was appointed UN envoy in June 2017 and struggled to mediate between a Tripoli-based unity government and eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar.

In April 2019, Haftar launched a surprise attack on Tripoli, just days ahead of a round of peace talks. Salame later said he had been "stabbed in the back" by UN Security Council members who had supported Haftar. AFP

Iraq shuts last 'safe haven' camps for vulnerable families, exposing needy

Habbaniyah Tourist Camp, Iraq - Shredded tarp flutters from the metal frames of what were once thousands of tent homes. After five years hosting displaced Iraqis, the vast camp was emptied in under 48 hours.

The Habbaniyah Tourist Camp, a former luxury resort used to house Iraqis fleeing the Islamic State group, closed this week as part of a sudden government push to shutter dozens of displacement camps by the end of the year.

Iraqi authorities say the campaign will ensure people finally go back home -- but non-governmental groups and the displaced

themselves fear the hasty returns will expose families to danger.

"I'm scared for my children and husband," said mother-of-six Zainab, who was among dozens aboard one of a convoy of buses ferrying them away from the site, known as the HTC, 80 kilometres (50 miles) west of Baghdad.

Zainab said her family would have to move to another camp because her tribe in western Anbar province had accused her family, falsely, of allegiance to IS.

"We can't go back home," she said. "I'm afraid they'll detain and massacre us."

Three years after Iraq de-



An Iraqi boy walks at a displaced persons camp in Habbaniyah in Iraq's Anbar province on November 10, 2020 (AFP)

clared IS defeated by a gruelling military campaign, nearly 1.3mn people remain displaced, one-

fifth of them in camps.

Rapid camp closures could leave 100,000 Iraqis in limbo,

just ahead of winter and amid the coronavirus pandemic, warned the Norwegian Refugee Council aid group.

The migration ministry's top Anbar province official, Mustafa Serhan, told AFP that authorities had coordinated with the military and tribes to ensure HTC's residents could return home safely.

"There is no speedy or forced return for these families," he insisted. "Anbar's camps are five, six or seven years old. What's fast about that?"

But Iraqis leaving HTC this week contradicted this.

One of them, who gave his name as Ali, told AFP he

would be forced to rent an apartment in his hometown of Qaim because his house was destroyed years ago.

'Safe haven is gone'

While HTC residents had one month's notice the camp would be shuttered, those living in Hammam al Alii, the largest camp in Iraq's northern province of Nineweh, had even less.

"First they said there was no way the camp would close. Then they said 2021. Then they said one week!" said Saada, a 36 year old mother of seven living there.

Al-Qahera, her home village in the mountainous enclave of Sin-

jar, remains heavily damaged and lacks public services.

"After all this, I'll kill myself -- I'm tired of life, of this cold, rainy world," she said.

"This camp was a safe haven for us, and now that safe haven is gone."

Starting November 5, more than 7,000 of Hammam al-Alii's 8,000 residents had been bussed out, either to ruined homes or other camps yet to be shut, said camp officials.

Iraq has been open about its intention to close the camps for years but went into overdrive last month. AFP



At least 22 people were killed and another 27 wounded when three gunmen rampaged through the university on November 2 (AFP)

‘Mastermind’ of the Kabul university attack captured

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan forces have captured the ‘mastermind’ of a brutal attack on Kabul University when militants stormed classrooms and gunned down dozens of students earlier this month, a top official said on Saturday.

At least 22 people were killed and another 27 wounded when three gunmen rampaged through the university on November 2, spraying classrooms with bullets for several hours.

The brazen daylight assault came amid surging violence across the country that has only worsened in recent months de-

The attack was carried out to defame and make the government look weak. Adil had been missing for three years amid rumours that he had gone to receive training

AMRULLAH SALEH

spite the government holding peace talks with the Taliban in Qatar.

“The mastermind behind Kabul University attack has been arrested,” vice president Amrullah Saleh announced on his Facebook page.

The attack, which had ended

after the three attackers were killed in fighting, was planned by a militant called Adil, Saleh said.

Adil was recruited by the Haqqani network, Saleh said giving only one name of the arrested man.

“The attack was carried out to pressure, defame and make the

government look weak in front of the people,” Saleh said.

Adil, who had been a student of the Islamic sharia’a law, hailed from the province of Panjshir but his family lived on the outskirts of Kabul, he said.

“Adil had been missing for three years amid rumours that he had gone to receive training in war and fighting,” Saleh said.

During his questioning, Adil revealed that he had received weapons from Haqqani network to carry out the attack, Saleh added.

The shadowy Haqqani network, an affiliate of the Taliban,

has long been accused of carrying out brutal assaults of Western forces and civilians, and has been branded a terrorist group by Washington.

Soon after the attack, Saleh and other top officials had blamed the Taliban for the university attack. However, the attack was claimed by the Islamic State group.

Days before the university attack, IS had claimed another deadly suicide bombing near an educational centre in a western district of Kabul that killed 24 people.

AFP

Trump says of his future: ‘Who knows’



US President Donald Trump looks on after delivering an update on ‘Operation Warp Speed’ in the Rose Garden of the White House (AFP)

Washington, US - Donald Trump said Friday that “time will tell” if he remains president, in a momentary slip of his unprecedented refusal to concede his election defeat and help Democrat Joe Biden prepare to take power.

Trump broke his silence after a week without on-camera comments, speaking at a Rose Garden event to herald the imminent authorization of a coronavirus vaccine.

During a short speech about the vaccine work, Trump insisted that he would never again call for a lockdown to curb the virus’ spread.

Then he added: “Hopefully, the, the whatever happens in the future, who knows which administration it will be, I guess time will tell.”

The hint of doubt in Trump’s mind came despite him continuing to push a conspiracy theory that mass fraud -- for which no evidence exists -- robbed him of victory in the November 3 election.

On Friday, Trump tweeted thanks to supporters backing his claim that the “Election was Rigged” and said he might “stop by and say hello” at rallies planned in Washington on Saturday.

A number of groups under the

banners of “Stop The Steal”, “Million MAGA March” and “Women for America First” have planned rallies for the day.

Speakers are reportedly to include prominent Trump supporters, including US Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who has promoted the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory.

QAnon adherents claim Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

Trump continues to block Biden’s ability to prepare his transition ahead of inauguration on January 20 and he has filed numerous lawsuits -- unsuccessfully -- to challenge vote counts around the country.

On Friday, a judge in Michigan issued another rejection of Republican claims of fraud.

Trump was speaking just after television networks projected results in the final two undeclared states -- Biden winning the former Republican stronghold of Georgia in an extremely close race, and Trump getting North Carolina.

Those last tallies gave Biden a solid overall final win in the state-by-state Electoral College that decides the presidency with 306 votes against Trump’s 232.

AFP

Egypt finds treasure trove of sarcophagi

Saqqara, Egypt - Egypt announced on Saturday the discovery of an ancient treasure trove of more than a 100 intact sarcophagi, the largest such find this year.

The sealed wooden coffins, unveiled on site amid fanfare, belonged to top officials of the Late Period and the Ptolemaic period of ancient Egypt.

They were found in three burial shafts at depths of 12 metres (40 feet) in the sweeping Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo.

Archaeologists opened one coffin to reveal a mummy wrapped in a burial shroud adorned with brightly coloured hieroglyphic pictorials.

Saqqara is the burial site of the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis, a Unesco World Heritage Site.

The huge find came just over a month after archaeologists in the area found 59 other well-preserved and sealed wooden coffins dating back more than 2,500 years ago.

“Saqqara has yet to reveal all of its contents. It is a treasure,” Antiquities and Tourism Minister Khaled al-Anany said.

AFP

Thousands flee as Typhoon Vamco nears Vietnam

Hanoi, Vietnam - Thousands of people fled their homes in Vietnam on Saturday as Typhoon Vamco barreled towards central regions already pummelled by weeks of successive storms.

Airports have been shut, beaches closed and a fishing ban put in place, as the country braces for winds of up to 100km (60 miles) per hour when the typhoon makes landfall on Sunday, likely close to Hue.

Thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes in four central provinces, according to the disaster management authority, while state media said hundreds of thousands more may have to flee.

A series of storms have hit central Vietnam over the past six weeks, causing flooding and landslides that have killed at least



Rescuers pull a rubber boat carrying residents through a flooded street after Typhoon Vamco hit in Marikina City, suburban Manila on November 12 (AFP)

159 people, authorities said, while 70 others are missing.

The severe weather has also damaged or destroyed more than 400,000 homes, according to the International Federation of

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Roads and bridges have been washed away, power sup-

There has been no respite for more than 8mn people in central Vietnam. Each time they start rebuilding, they are pummelled by yet another storm

NGUYEN THI XUAN THU

plies disrupted, and crucial food crops destroyed, leaving at least 150,000 people at immediate risk of food shortages, it added.

“There has been no respite for more than eight million people living in central Vietnam,” said Nguyen Thi Xuan Thu, Vietnam

Red Cross Society President.

“Each time they start rebuilding their lives and livelihoods, they are pummelled by yet another storm.”

Typhoon Vamco has already caused devastation in the Philippines. Emergency response teams were dispatched to the northeast on Saturday where more than 340,000 people have been affected by severe flooding following Vamco that killed at least 33 people across the country, disaster agencies said.

Twenty of the deaths were recorded in the provinces of Cagayan, Isabela and Nueva Vizcaya, which have become the focus of rescue efforts. Hundreds of people were trapped on rooftops in the hardest hit areas along the Cagayan river.

AFP

Bangladeshi teen wins children’s peace prize for online fight

The Hague, Netherlands - A Bangladeshi teenager made an impassioned plea on Friday for stronger global action against cyberbullying and online crime involving children as he received a prestigious global children’s award.

Sadat Rahman, 17, won the 2020 KidsRights International Children’s Peace Prize for developing a mobile app to help teenagers report cyberbullying and cyber crime in his western district of Narail in Bangladesh.

Previous winners of the prize include Nobel laureate and Pak-



Sadat Rahman celebrates with his trophy (AFP)

istani education campaigner Malala Yousafzai and environmental activist Greta Thunberg.

“Serious action needs to be taken right now. Teenagers continue to remain vulnerable to online crime and cyberbullying, particularly in the times we live in,” Rahman told AFP in a remote interview.

Rahman was awarded the prize, which is run by the Netherlands-based KidsRights foundation, in a ceremony streamed online due to coronavirus restrictions. He beat two other finalists - Mexican girl Ivanna Ortega Ser-

ret, 12, who fought water pollution, and Irish 18 year old Siena Castellon, who created a website to help pupils with autism and severe learning disabilities.

Rahman’s “Cyber Teens” mobile app puts children in touch with a team of youngsters including Rahman, who call themselves the Narail Volunteers.

The Narail Volunteers then liaised with local police and social workers to help teens too scared or embarrassed to report acts of cyberbullying and cyber crime.

The app also gives helpful hints and tips about online be-

haviour and how to avoid sexual predators.

Downloaded around 1,800 times, the app has helped to resolve more than 60 complaints so far -- and has led to the arrest of eight suspected online criminals, including adults who have been sexually harassing children.

“The idea started after a 15-year-old girl committed suicide because of online bullying. I decided that teenagers needed help and that we should take action to try to avoid other children facing the same tragedy,” Rahman said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

'Trust in vaccines vital to halting pandemic'

Goal is every country should be able to immunise 20% of their population by end of 2021: WHO expert

Geneva, Switzerland - As the world celebrates advances in vaccines against the novel coronavirus, a top WHO expert warned in an interview with AFP that public distrust risked rendering even the most effective treatments useless against the pandemic.

"A vaccine that sits in a freezer or in a refrigerator or on a shelf and doesn't get used is doing nothing to help shorten this pandemic," said Kate O'Brien, director of the WHO's immunisation department.

US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech announced earlier this week that their prospective vaccine had proven 90 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19 infections in ongoing final phase trials involving more than 40,000 people.

O'Brien hailed the interim results as 'extremely important', and voiced hope that preliminary data from a handful of other candidate vaccines in similarly advanced trials would come through soon.

"If the complete data show that 'one or more of these vaccines has very, very substantial efficacy, that is really good news for putting another tool in the toolbox' for fighting the pandemic," she said.

But with the pandemic continuing to surge after already claiming some 1.3mn lives, she voiced deep concern at growing signs of vaccine hes-



A researcher at the Institute of Molecular Biology and Genetics (IBGM) of the University of Valladolid works on searching a vaccine against COVID-19, at a laboratory in Valladolid (AFP)

itancy, with misinformation and mistrust colouring people's acceptance of scientific advances.

"We are not going to be successful as a world in controlling the pandemic with the use of vaccines as one of the tools unless people are willing to get vaccinated," O'Brien said. "More needed to be done to

boost public confidence in the fact that the vaccines that WHO is involved in evaluating, we will not be compromising on safety or efficacy," she said.

Questions remain

O'Brien acknowledged that there were a number of outstanding questions about

the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine candidate and its peers, including how long protection against the virus would last.

And while the vaccine candidates are being tested for how effectively and safely they protect people from developing the disease, it remains unclear whether they actually avert

asymptomatic infection and transmission of the virus. A big question, she said, is: "Does it change your likelihood of transmitting to anybody else?"

Despite the remaining questions, the WHO is betting on one or more vaccines winning approval soon, followed by a rapid scale-up of production

and distribution. Anticipating the huge demand for any approved vaccine, the UN health agency has helped create the so-called Covax facility to ensure equitable distribution.

It will take a while before there are enough doses for everyone, and the WHO has set

out guidelines for how to prioritise the distribution.

"The goal here is that every country should be able to immunise 20 per cent of their population by the end of 2021," O'Brien said. That, she said, would go a long way to providing protection to health-care workers and the most vulnerable populations.

After that, how quickly everyone else could access a vaccine would largely depend on which country they live in,

Developing a safe and effective vaccine is like establishing base camp at Everest. But actually getting to the impact of vaccines is (like) having to climb Everest

KATE O'BRIEN



Pandemic casts shadow over India's festival of lights

New Delhi, India - Fear of the coronavirus, mixed with chronic pollution, has spoiled the party for hundreds of millions of Indians celebrating the biggest Hindu festival of the year on Saturday.

Diwali is meant to be the festival of lights, but the pandemic has clouded the future for many in the country of 1.3bn.

The smog-shrouded capital New Delhi has banned firecrackers because of sky-high pollution levels and, while people still thronged markets, traders said COVID-19 had scared them off spending.

With 8.7mn cases, India has the world's second-highest coronavirus infection count behind the United States. About 130,000 people have died from COVID-19 in India since February and Delhi is going through a new surge with nearly 8,000 new cases a day.

Experts have blamed the rise on Diwali crowds, and - although traditional revelry was muted - there was no sign that



People buy flowers for Diwali from a vendor in a market area in New Delhi on Saturday (AFP)

people were staying at home.

However, the crowds are being selective. Cinemas are open but remain empty. Restaurants say they are struggling to get people to come in.

Lights off

Mahinder Kumar, who sells flowers outside the Jhandewala temple, one of the oldest in Delhi, said that normally there are huge queues for Diwali.

"This year it's nothing - almost empty. Our business has been affected badly. We have hardly sold any flowers this year."

The eight weeks up to Diwali can account for 40 per cent of some traders' annual business and it is considered an auspicious time to buy gold.

But the lights were off at Vineet Garg's gold and jewellery store near the central Connaught Place in Delhi, despite an

'open' sign on display. "It is a waste of electricity to put the lights on," he said. "People are not buying in shops. The business I am doing is online. They are too worried to have fun."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and most of his ministers put out traditional Diwali greetings. "May everyone be prosperous and healthy," Modi told his 63.5mn Twitter followers.

AFP

New York battles to fend off second wave of infections

New York, US - New York battled to fend off a second wave of coronavirus infections with new restrictions on bars and restaurants Friday, as Donald Trump said the first Americans would start receiving a vaccine in 'a matter of weeks'.

In his first public address since being declared the loser of the November 3 election, the US president touted medical breakthroughs that happened under his watch but said he remained firmly against new lockdowns. He predicted a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech, which the companies have said is 90 per cent effective in trials so far, would receive emergency approval 'extremely soon'.

"The vaccine will be distributed to frontline workers, the elderly, and high-risk Americans immediately, it will be a matter of weeks," Trump told reporters at the White House, adding it would be available to the 'entire general



A COVID-19 patient is transported outside of Tisch Hospital in New York, US, on Friday (AFP)

population' as soon as April.

Cases are surging throughout America and Europe, with governments forced to take more drastic action despite fears about the devastation inflicted on their economies.

The disease has claimed almost 1.3mn lives worldwide and infected close to 53mn people since it first emerged in China in December.

In New York, the epicenter of the US's spring outbreak but which has so far resisted a major resurgence, Governor

Andrew Cuomo ordered all establishments licensed to sell alcohol to close at 10 pm.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio warned he may follow other major US cities and move schools to online only teaching from as early as Monday because the daily infection rate was approaching three percent after months hovering around one percent.

Rates are even higher in many other cities and parts of the United States and Europe.

AFP

German school finds DIY answer to anti-virus ventilation

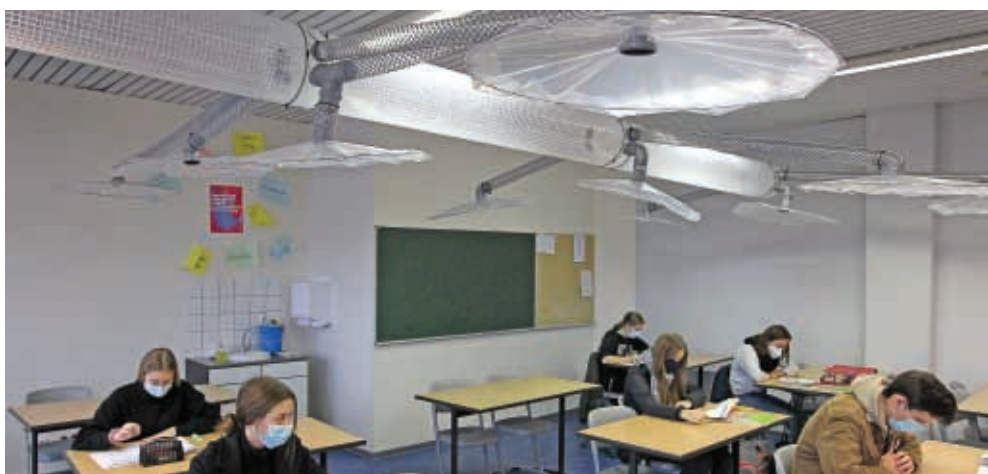
Mainz-Bretzenheim, Germany - Keeping the windows open to combat COVID-19 is easier said than done as winter approaches.

One German school believes it has found a cheap and simple solution with a DIY ventilation system designed by a teacher's scientist husband. "It works like a kitchen extractor fan," said inventor Frank Helleis, standing in a classroom at the IGS Mainz-Bretzenheim secondary school.

Above every desk hangs a clear plastic funnel attached to

a narrow pipe, with all the pipes in turn connected to one wide pipe leading to a fan that directs the air outside through a tilted window. Warm breath exhaled by the pupils, potentially carrying virus-laden tiny particles known as aerosols, rises up overhead and is sucked through the tubes and pushed outside before it can spread through the room.

Another window is kept ajar to allow in fresh air. Tests carried out by the prestigious Max Planck Institute for Chem-



A ventilation system installed in a classroom is pictured at the IGS school in Mainz, western Germany (AFP)

istry, where Helleis works, have shown the system manages to remove over 90 per cent of aerosols from the room, on par with the most high-tech air filtration units on the market.

The difference is that Helleis' light-weight contraption can be built from materials from the do-it-yourself store for around US\$235. A handful of volunteers put it together in half a day, he said, and the Max Planck Institute has shared the assembly instructions online for anyone who wants to copy the idea.

Extra sweater

The timing could scarcely be better. Germany's coronavirus numbers have been climbing at an alarming rate and regularly airing out classrooms is considered key to keeping schools open - regardless of the weather outside. Sophia Wettig, 18, keeps an extra jumper in her locker. She said she finds it hard to concentrate in the cold and it was 'pretty cool' her school had come up with a warmer solution.

AFP



MODERN HERITAGE: RETROSPECTIVE

HUES OF HERITAGE

A unique project on art heritage is currently underway at Stal Gallery involving some seasoned Omani and international artists who have demonstrated old techniques via new media for students of art, budding artists and

art lovers to understand the evolution of art. 'Modern heritage: retrospective', is a project of commemoration, initiated by Stal Gallery, in which artists use the lens of history, reflecting on memories from past - old artistic traditions - as a means of assessing today's highly digi-

tised society. The artists have developed their own vision of this modern movement, creating contextual art variations. This cross-medium selection of artworks represents a wide range of approaches to the cultural flux that have shaped the current art scene in Oman.

The Stal Gallery project on modern heritage aims to develop conceptual thinking on the significance of heritage, within the framework of the established Omani and international artists who facilitate studies on modern heritage. It includes works from artists like Adnan al Raisi, Anwar Sonya, Nasser Palangi,

Juma al Harthy, Farideh Zariv, Moosa Omar, and Idris Al Hooti. The project begins today and will run till December 15 during which limited viewing will be allowed with prior booking. For study purposes, the display can also be viewed on the Stal Gallery website (www.stalgallery.com).

Travel through time



My paintings embody the Omani woman, wearing Lawatia outfit, one of the most famous Omani costumes in Wilayat of Muttrah. This costume is usually characterised by bright colours inlaid with golden strings.”

ENAAM AHMED



My paintings reflect my childhood memories of cities I visited in Oman, including Muscat, Nizwa, Seeb, and I have carefully recorded their appearance today. The collages of landscape, calligraphy, traditional Omani cloth in the centre, reveal my observations.”

IDRIS AL HOOTI



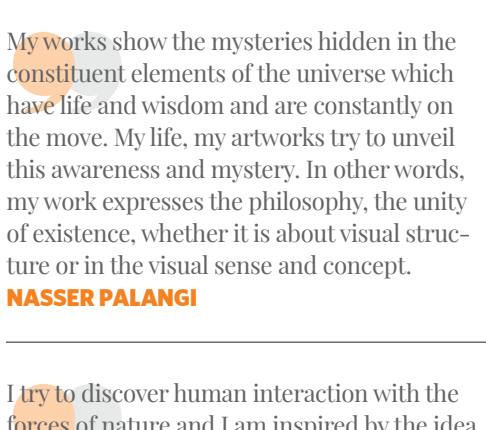
I'm inspired by the mystical Dhofar region, my homeland.”

ANWAR SONYA



My artworks talk about hope. After any sad day in our life, there is always hope for all things to get happier and beautiful.

ADNAN AL RAISI



My works show the mysteries hidden in the constituent elements of the universe which have life and wisdom and are constantly on the move. My life, my artworks try to unveil this awareness and mystery. In other words, my work expresses the philosophy, the unity of existence, whether it is about visual structure or in the visual sense and concept.

NASSER PALANGI

I try to discover human interaction with the forces of nature and I am inspired by the idea of clean and free energy. My credibility as the main driver of this series of work is researching what I thought was the key to discovering the secrets of energy, frequency and vibration. The symbols of my work come from my senses and that is important to me – a feeling that emerges from an inner need.”

FARIDEH ZARIV



Through symbols, icons, Arabic fonts, and decorative elements, I have brought the past back to life in the present using a subtractive method to establish rhythm and decorative space. It invites viewers to travel in time and space with renewed exchanges through multiple dimensions.

JUMA AL HARTHY



My works reflect elements and stories from daily life and mirror my traditional Omani roots. I use symbols and motifs, colours and textures to produce my own distinct narrative.”

MOOSA OMAR



The two sculptural canvases depicting HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Late HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said are reflective of the theme - Hope and Memories

HOPE AND MEMORIES

The exhibition is a link between the past and the future

Living with Art

Hubert Vaz

On the occasion of the 50th National Day, Lucia Oliva, an Italian artist who is extremely in love with Oman, will hold a special solo exhibition titled ‘Hope and Memories’ at the Art & Soul Gallery in Water Front hotel at Shatti al Qurm.

The exhibition, to be inaugurated by H H Sayyida Basma al Said, founder-proprietor of Whispers of Serenity Clinic, on November 17, comprises two unique, celebrative artworks consisting of sculptural solid canvases portraying portraits of the Late HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the current Sultan of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. It will be open for the public from November 18 till December 4.

‘Hope’ is a sculptural canvas (mixed media on canvas and marble - 210cm x 200cm). The artwork shows up as a celebrative sculptural canvas with a distinctly innovative concept. His Majesty’s portrait is the focus of a sort of contemporary style draped tapestry that emphasises the importance of the royal subject. This style plunges its roots into classical art and reaches its apex in the Baroque era, which boasts many pictorial and sculptural examples

with high and low-reliefs. A quote from the Holy Quran, part of verse 59, Surat An Nisaa’ completes the portrait. Moreover, a few symbols and suggestions find place in it, both for the texture of the background as well as for its colours. The artist freely took inspiration from some engraved motifs on the wall behind the throne in Qasr Al Alam Palace and other royal halls, in shades of light

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LUCIA OLIVA

blue and turquoise, together with burgundy and purple, which recall the colours of the royal musarr. Lucia explains, that for some aspects the artwork also evokes the ancient precious tradition of Arabian and Persian carpets. Thus, ‘Hope’ presents itself as a Lucia personal re-interpretation and fu-

sion of these various traditions, creating a bridge between western art and culture with Arabian ones. The 24k gold, brass and copper leaf give light to the work and offer the viewer ever changing effects depending on the position of the light source: homage to the royal aura of the subject. The structure of the artwork is slightly asymmetric to highlight the natural movement effect of the drapery. Stucco and other materials give solidity to the canvas and create bas-reliefs effects that recall the patterns, texture and thickness of brocades and damasks.

Where frequently ‘putti’ is used to hold the drapery (both in frescos, paintings, sculptures and high or bas-reliefs), the artist placed irregularly shaped slabs of recycled marble, transforming them into precious details: this as a small but significant symbol of her strong passion and commitment to environmental protection as a philosophy of life. Nature, to her, is a gift of God and we need to respect and protect it. ‘MEMORIES’ was conceived as a natural cross out of Oliva’s previous artwork (‘Friends of all, enemy to none’) portraying the Late HM Sultan Qaboos, in which he is depicted as if he were hand-

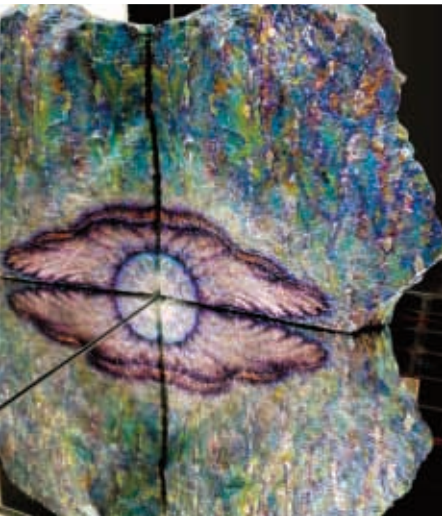
ing over the country to his successor, a sort of message of hope and continuity, a link between past and future and an invitation to keep going with hope and faith. Both the artworks express the same unique artistic concept created by the artist, to give them a special effect of lightness. The ex-

hibition also offers the viewer the opportunity to admire other new artworks created during the current year, as well as previous ones belonging to the recent past career of the artist in the Gulf, a testimony to different moments where her sensitivity encountered the Omani and Arabic culture.



Lucia Oliva is a self-taught artist, who grew up loving music, dance, sculpting, painting, literature and drama. After graduating in law and teaching for a few years at Genoa University, she decided to devote herself entirely to art. She also likes to write poems. After an early award-winning debut as a young painter, she went back to figurative arts in 2013, to further her long international career in the world of art as choreographer, dancer and event organiser. Sculpting with colour on stone, metal, wood, canvas and other materials, Oliva creates subjects embodied in artworks, rich in harmony and movement, that highlight an idea of pure lightness. Playing with mirrors and other accessories she recently invented her unique concept which creates a sort of contemporary ‘trompe l’oeil’ effect, with original scenic set-ups that are a combination of sculpture, painting, installation and theatre. Oliva’s unique art has been granted an immediate and ever growing success in many solo, group exhibitions and art symposiums all around the world. Her works are owned by private collectors in Europe as well as in the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the Philippines and other countries.

DEVOTED TO ART



Other artworks on display at the exhibition