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DHONI VOWS CHANGES AFTER SEASON OF IPL 'FAILURES'



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CREATING A WORLD RECORD IN CROCHET HISTORY



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LIBYA RESUMES OIL EXPORTS FROM KEY TERMINALS



OMAN

HM condolence cable to Brunei

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam on the death of his son Prince Haji Abdul Azim. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolence and sympathy to Brunei ruler, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed soul in peace and grant his family patience.

GDP to contract 4 per cent in 2020

BEIRUT: The low oil price environment, coupled with the effects of the pandemic, is expected to result in a 4 per cent contraction in real GDP in 2020, according to the Ministry of Finance. Exacerbating the fiscal situation for the Sultanate was a substantial decline in government revenues totalling in excess of RO 13 billion over the past five years. In a statement, the ministry attributed to sizable drop in international oil prices to the protracted effects of the pandemic, which have impacted the global demand for crude. In addition to the decline in government revenue from the oil price slump, earnings were also hit because of Oman's commitment to the OPEC+ agreement to curb output, it noted. DETAILS ON P15



RED TIDE WARNING FOR DHOFAR FISHERMEN

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has warned fishermen and sea-goers in the Dhofar Governorate about the phenomenon of red tides in the waters of the Arabian Sea. The ministry called on fishermen not to fish in areas where this phenomenon exists, and also not to consume fish and shellfish during this period. "At the same time, specialists are monitoring this phenomenon and evaluating the overall impact," a statement said. DETAILS ON P2

Sultanate to mark Omani Youth Day tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday will mark the Omani Youth Day which falls on October 26 each year. This year's celebrations come within the framework of the attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The Omani Youth Day was designated by the Royal blessings of late Sultan Qaboos, may Allah the Almighty have mercy on him.

An online event to mark the occasion will be held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. The event is aimed to highlight the Omani youths' achievements, support the needs of the youth sector as well as enhance the youths' abilities to contribute to development.

A total of 18 winners of the Youth Excellence Award for individuals and establishments, will be announced during the celebration. — ONA

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INSIDE



SOUTH KOREA STICKS TO FLU VACCINE PLAN AFTER DEATHS RISE P5



TRUMP LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN PUSH, BIDEN HAMMERS ON COVID P7

WEATHER TODAY

MUSCAT
MAX: 32°C
MIN: 20°C

SALALAH
MAX: 35°C
MIN: 22°C

NIZWA
MAX: 35°C
MIN: 18°C

SUNRISE 06.09 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR: 04:53

DHUHR: 11:56

ASR: 15:12

MAGHRIB: 17:38

ISHA: 18:49

No entry for new visa holders

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

People who have new visas are not allowed entry into the Sultanate. Entry of residents of the Sultanate currently away from the country has been limited to those who have a valid resident card, according to the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

"Based on the instructions of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19, entry to the Sultanate is restricted to residents who have a valid resident card," said a senior official from the ROP. There has been a flurry of queries from different quarters whose families are expected to travel to Oman on new residence visas, but



turned away from boarding at the airports. "As for holders of new visas, they are subject to the decisions of the Supreme Committee in view of the public interest to protect people from the pandemic."

"I got visas for my four-member family and tickets were confirmed for October 23. Now, with the new rule, I need to reschedule the travel," said Mohammed Jamsheer T K, who runs a car accessory shop in Al Amerat. "This is a small sacrifice which is nothing compared to those who sacrifice even their lives against the pandemic."

However, issuance of new visas will not be affected and sponsors can apply for visas for foreigners.

Beaches to remain out of bounds for visitors

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkutttyp

The decision to continue with the closure of beaches in Oman is seen as a major measure to clamp down on gatherings to stem the spread of coronavirus.

"Despite lifting of the lockdown and ban on night movement", clarified a Royal Oman Police official, "ban on gatherings in public places including beaches will continue to be in place".

The 14-day nationwide night movement ban ended on Saturday morning at 5 am.

On Friday, the Government Communication Centre announced that the decision banning the use of beaches will continue to be in effect till further notice.

During the period before October 9, people were flocking to beaches without following the COVID-19 precautions evoking sharp condemnation from the authorities.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while calling it dangerous, said: "Some people are too reckless, though they have been advised to avoid gatherings at homes and among families. There are those who play football on beaches and crowd commercial centres".

Commenting on the decision to keep the beaches closed, an official at Muscat Municipality said that the move was necessitated due to the "approach of the people who were not following social distancing and other measures".

The closure is aimed at preventing people from congregating and thus protecting their health, he said.

"Open beaches are crowd pullers. Families with even infants tend to visit beaches to have some kind of entertainment. Most of them do not wear masks or keep social distancing. So it is better to keep the beaches closed till we confirm decline in COVID-19 cases", he said.

Last week, the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 situation expressed extreme anxiety about the behaviour of some individuals who participate in gatherings and cause the spread of the virus.

A large number of people seemingly ignoring social distancing guidelines, even many without masks were, crowding on different beaches in the Sultanate during the coronavirus outbreak despite warnings from public health experts and authorities. "We are doing all we can to make people aware of what they need to do, now more than ever we need their cooperation — for their own and others' safety," the civic official said.



Egyptians vote for new parliament

CAIRO: Egyptians voted on Saturday in a parliamentary election in which there was little doubt of a sweeping victory for supporters of President Abdel Fattah al Sisi.

Some 63 million voters out of Egypt's more than 100 million people are eligible to elect 568 of the 596 lawmakers in the lower house, widely seen as a rubber-stamp body for executive policies. The remaining deputies will be appointed by President Sisi.

The elections will be held in two phases, with the first covering 14 provinces on Saturday and Sunday. The second, on November 7-8, will cover 13 provinces including the capital Cairo.

On Saturday morning, mini-buses were seen driving around parts of Giza province, south of Cairo, bearing photos and banners of some candidates to draw support as voters trickled into polling stations, an AFP reporter said.

Giant billboards and banners have sprung up across the bustling capital Cairo and elsewhere urging Egyptians to vote, while some candidates have released online music video clips to draw support.

Many of the candidates also stood for election five years ago in a political landscape marked by the presence of dozens of parties but with little weight and influence on the ground. The outgoing parliament, elected in 2015, was packed with Sisi supporters and featured only a small opposition bloc known as 25/30.

The new parliament will be the second to convene under Sisi, who took office in 2014. Run-offs will be held in November, and final results are to be announced in December.

SEE ALSO P5



HM’s directives on social security system hailed

MUSCAT: Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, valued the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the establishment of an integrated social assurance system to protect Social Security Scheme families and low-income families from any adverse impacts that might occur within the context of measures and procedures of the Fiscal Balance Plan.

The minister expressed her gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan for his constant keenness to place Omani human being on top of priorities of the modern renaissance and within the framework of the overall vision of national progress.

“The Royal directives underscore the attention accorded by His Majesty the Sultan to provide means of decent life for the Omani human being, considered the focus of development in Oman Vision 2040 and related developmental programmes,” said Al Najar.

— ONA

COVID situation likely to worsen with flu season: WHO regional director

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The COVID-19 situation in the Eastern Mediterranean region is grave and worrisome, especially in countries like Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Libya, a senior WHO official said recently.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said the onset of flu season will make the situation worse.

In seven days, 87 people died in Oman due to the virus, while the recovery rate dropped to 87.5 per cent.

The number of people in hospitals also increased after showing a small decline at the start of the last week.

“We expect the situation to worsen the coming months as the virus sees more opportunities for spread. The

flu season, which is set to start soon, is also likely to exacerbate the situation.

However, the current trend in the region indicates that what we have done so far has not been enough despite many wonderful efforts,” he said.

“While adhering to the behaviours that we know are working, the steps to limit the spread of the virus — especially the use of masks and physical distancing — is still insufficient, and this applies to many countries of the region,” he said.

This unprecedented increase is a stark reminder of the need for governments, communities and partners, including the World Health Organization, to do much more to change the course of the pandemic.

At the same time, populations are reaching higher levels of frustration and stress as the pandemic continues



Dr Ahmed al Mandhari

to devastate livelihoods and national economies.

As the number of infected people increases across the region, pressure will continue to mount on health systems and health workers as they struggle to meet the demand for COVID-19-related and non-related services.

“We need a more intensive and targeted approach to surveillance, testing and contact tracing. Communities must recognise the critical role they play in helping to stop the spread of the virus by adopting preventive behaviours,” Dr Al Mandhari said.

Nine months have passed since the outbreak of the pandemic and it is still too early to relax or return to normal work. The lives, livelihoods and well-being of millions of people are at risk, as are the lives of our families and loved ones.

“The choices that we will make in the coming days, weeks and months as individuals, societies and countries will ultimately determine whether this deadly pandemic will sweep us or whether we collectively overcome the virus and recover from it,” the WHO official said.

■ UK CHIEF OF AIR STAFF ARRIVES ON VISIT



MUSCAT: Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, Chief of Staff of the British Royal Air Force, and his accompanying delegation arrived in Muscat on Saturday on a several-day official visit to the Sultanate. The guest and his delegation were received by the commander of the Seeb Air Base and a number of senior officers from the Royal Air Force of Oman and the military attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

ILO regional office hails Sultanate’s social security system

BEIRUT: The International Labour Organisation, Regional Office for Arab States, praised the improvements witnessed by the social security system of the Sultanate which seeks to create adequate and comprehensive coverage for all workers and their families in various labour sectors in line with the international social security standards.

In a letter addressed to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), the organisation congratulated the Sultanate for setting up the Job Security System.

The organisation said that the job security system applied by PASI is really one of the major protection systems in the region noting that the technical support presented by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States has played a vital role in laying the foundation stone of the system.

The organisation commended PASI’s continued commitment to providing comprehensive improvements to the social protection system in line with the international social security standards besides the other improvements that fall within the Authority’s institutional framework in terms of social protection which, without a doubt, will help create comprehensive and adequate coverage for all workers.

The ILO valued the efforts aimed at activating social dialogue among the three production parties which will help create a solid ground for social security and serve as a foundation for more justice and flourishing in the Sultanate, reaffirming its commitment to providing technical support during the implementation stages of the system.

— ONA

No date set for reopening of mosques



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 24

The authorities have denied reports circulating about the opening of mosques in Oman in the middle of November.

“There is no truth to this news circulating about the opening of mosques in the Sultanate on the date indicated, and we call on everyone to obtain information from

official sources and to refrain from recirculating rumours,” a statement said.

Earlier, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has said it will take a suitable decision on the opening of mosques and areas of worship in the middle of November, depending on local indicators to be issued by the Supreme Committee on COVID-19.

The decision will also bear on

infection peak reports to be issued by the Supreme Committee, the ministry added.

The ministry reaffirmed its extreme keenness to resume the opening of mosques and places of worship.

The ministry explained that due to the impacts of the pandemic on public health, Sharia wisdom requires that precautionary measures have to be taken to protect life.

Stay away from red tides, fishermen told

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 24

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources warned fishermen and sea-goers in the Dhofar Governorate about the red tides in the waters of the Arabian Sea.

The ministry called on fishermen

not to fish in areas where the red tides exist and also not to consume fish and shellfish during this period. “At the same time, specialists are monitoring this phenomenon and evaluating the overall impact,” a statement said.

Red tide is caused by algal blooms during which algae become so

numerous that they discolour coastal waters (hence the name red tide). The algal bloom may also deplete oxygen in the waters and/or release toxins that may cause illness in humans and other animals. Red tides lead to clogging of fish gills, which causes suffocation and death, the statement said.

■ RAS AL HADD FORT RESTORATION



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has begun the restoration and maintenance work of the Ras Al Hadd Fort in the Wilayat of Sur. The maintenance work includes rehabilitation to display the holdings, works to remove Al Sarooj mortar and restoration work, treating cracks in the rest of the walls of the fort and the roofs of the western tower and rooms, water leakage works, paving the floor of the outer and inner walls of the fort with flat stones, painting and sanding all wooden materials such as doors and windows, the ministry said. — ONA

■ WOMEN STAFF HONOURED



In recognition of the efforts of Omani women and their pioneering and leadership roles in building society, the Diwan of the Royal Court honoured a number of its employees on Omani Women's Day. The celebration acknowledges the role played by these women in developing a work culture and contributed their skills and expertise in the various units of the Diwan in Muscat and Salalah.

Oman Air resumes flights to Kuwait, Bahrain, Colombo

MUSCAT: Oman Air will provide scheduled service to Kuwait, Bahrain and Colombo starting on Sunday, October 25.

The airline will operate 2 weekly flights to Kuwait, 2 to Bahrain and 2 to Colombo. Oman Air will also increase flight frequency to domestic destinations that include Salalah, with 3 daily round-trip flights; Khasab with 6 weekly and Duqm with 6 weekly flights.

Guests are encouraged to visit omanair.com, call the airline's Call Centre and offices or travel agents for additional information about these flights and related travel requirements.

Oman Air will maintain its comprehensive safety programme throughout all elements of the travel journey to ensure that guests fly confidently. Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports. Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day. Cabin crew all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety and a number of other steps have been taken to ensure



that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

Guests who are planning to travel to Muscat should visit the Civil Aviation Authority website, to ensure they are

prepared to comply with requirements to enter the Sultanate.

Guests departing from Oman should also ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements,

as well as requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com, and ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter their destination country. — ONA

Broad money supply rises

MUSCAT: Monetary aggregates data indicates narrow money (M1) at the end of August 2020 increased by 11.8 per cent to RO 5.7 billion on a year-on-year basis.

Likewise, quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits) registered a significant increase of 10.7 per cent during this period.

Broad money supply M2 (M1 plus quasi-money) grew by 11.0 per cent and stood at RO 19.1 billion.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits decreased marginally

from 1.954 per cent in August 2019 to 1.943 per cent in August 2020, and the weighted average RO lending rate increased from 5.435 per cent to 5.482 per cent during the same period.

Meanwhile, the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate fell significantly to 1.100 per cent in August 2020 from 2.736 per cent a year ago, reflecting transmission of policy rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The average Repos rate for liquidity injection by the CBO also stood lower at 0.5 per cent during August 2020 in comparison with 2.699 per cent in August 2019. — ONA

Mwasalat resumes regular schedules

MUSCAT: Mwasalat has announced the resumption of operating all its bus and ferry services as per their regular schedules from Sunday, October 25.

Based on the instructions issued by the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, Mwasalat said buses and ferries will resume operating its services through according to the usual timings.

The services include city operations in Muscat, intercity service to the various governorates, and route 100 Muscat-Salalah.



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WARY OF FLYING



PEOPLE ARE
POSTPONING
THEIR TRAVEL
PLANS DESPITE
CHEAP TICKETS

DUE TO
COVID-19

VINOD NAIR
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Regardless of age, travelling, or any kind of movement, is necessary to keep a person in good health and a fresh state of mind.

While movement restrictions have been eased in most parts of the world, including Oman, international travel is still a no-go due to COVID-19.

International air traffic is down 92 per cent this year as travellers worry about catching COVID-19 and government travel bans and quarantine rules makes planning difficult.

“Airlines are selling tickets at throw-away prices because people are not confident enough to travel. Senior citizens have been advised not to move

around if not necessary. Also, getting health insurance for senior citizens is difficult due to various conditions,” said a senior executive of an Indian airline in Muscat.

He added that the load factor on inbound flights to Oman is still not encouraging for airlines because new visas for tourists are not issued.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Airport Council International (ACI), COVID-19 testing before departure is the preferred option as it will create a clean environment throughout the travel. Testing on arrival affects passenger confidence with the potential for quarantine at the destination in the event of a positive result.

People have reworked their preferences as they prefer to travel alone or with the family instead of group.

During the recent survey conducted by IATA, 67 per cent of respondents said “they’d still keep their travel group small, either travelling within their family or quarantine pod.”

“I take a vacation every two years and due to this pandemic, it will be

over three years before I get to meet people back home. It is really very frustrating though my company has not sacked people or delayed our salaries. Governments should just allow travel with precautions like wearing masks all time and social distancing,” feels Rajesh Majumdar, an accounts manager.

Beyond the ability to talk to a person, travellers also listed flexibility and cleanliness standards as top priorities.

Systematic testing is vital to restoring the freedom of mobility across borders as it will give governments the confidence to open their borders without complicated risk models that see constant changes in the rules imposed on travel.

IATA does not see testing becoming a permanent fixture in the air travel experience, but it will likely be needed into the medium-term for air travel to re-establish itself.

With the global travel and industry in doldrums and millions of jobs already lost and several still at stake, the travel industry is calling for urgent measures to restore travel.

“The five-star hotel where I am employed has been closed since March this year. Most of the staff was asked to go on paid or unpaid and even sacked. I just hope that fear-free travel is back and we get our jobs,” said Murali Babu.

The global travel and tourism market is predicted to see a loss of 75.2 million jobs worldwide in 2020.

In brief

■ JAKARTA

INDONESIAN
UNIONS VOW
MASS PROTESTS

Indonesia's workers will stage further mass protests across the country if President Joko Widodo signs new jobs measures into law next week, the head of the main labour group said on Saturday.

"It is the exploitation of labour that we're against," said the head of the Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions, Said Iqbal. "We are ready for dialogue, even ready for a debate if necessary in an open, public hearing."

The government says the legislation will boost employment by cutting red tape, easing restrictions of foreign investment and improving labour market competitiveness.

■ MANILA

PHILIPPINE DEFENCE
CHIEF FOR END TO
COMMUNIST TAGGING

The Philippines' defence chief has urged security officials to be careful about tagging people as insurgents after an army general was slammed for issuing warnings against local celebrities for associating with leftist groups.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has called for a meeting with Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade Jr and other members of a national task force to end local communist armed conflict (NTF-ELCAC) to discuss the controversy, the defence department said Saturday.

■ KUALA LUMPUR

MALAYSIA'S KING
TO CONSULT
WITH RULERS

Malaysia's King Al Sultan Abdullah will consult with other rulers to discuss proposals by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, the palace said on Saturday, after sources told Reuters the premier had asked the king to declare a state of emergency.

Muhyiddin met with the king on Friday to present the emergency proposal that includes a suspension of parliament, sources said - a move that opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim denounced as an attempt by the premier to retain control amid a power struggle.

The proposal comes as Malaysia faces a resurgence in coronavirus cases.

Thai protest leader pledges to keep up campaign

BANGKOK: One of the most prominent leaders of more than three months of anti-government protests in Thailand was freed on bail on Friday and pledged to keep up the campaign to remove Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

Jatupat "Pai" Boonpattaraksa was arrested on October 13, when a few hundred protesters scuffled with police a day before a major demonstration that also called for reforms to the monarchy of King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

"We will continue to drive out Prayuth in any way we can... I want the people to come out to join us in changing the country," Jatupat said after his release on bail.

He faces multiple charges related to the protests. His time in jail "has just changed my hairstyle but not our spirit and our demands," Jatupat said, referring to the regulation buzz cut he was given in detention. Dozens of protesters have been arrested and several of the best-known leaders remain in detention.

Protesters have given Prayuth until Sunday to quit or face further action. They say Prayuth, a former military leader, engineered last year's election to hold onto power he first took in a 2014 coup.

He says the election was fair. A ban on protests on October 15 backfired when it drew tens of thousands of people onto the streets in anger.



Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida greets royalist supporters in Bangkok. — AFP

The emergency decree was lifted on Thursday.

Prayuth said he hoped it would "de-escalate" the situation. The protests since July have been the biggest challenge to Thailand's establishment in years and have also prompted unprecedented criticism of the monarchy - outraging Thai royalists.

Hundreds of Thai royalists wearing shirts in yellow - the king's colour - waited outside the Grand Palace to

receive him on a holiday marking the anniversary of the 1910 death of King Chulalongkorn, known as Rama V, who earned a reputation as a moderniser.

In a statement, government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri said people were invited to join a Buddhist chanting ceremony on Saturday for the well-being of the country. More than 90 per cent of Thais are Buddhists.

Meanwhile, Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn's praise for a man who held up a royal portrait at a protest site in Bangkok has drawn controversy in Thailand, winning acclaim from monarchists and scorn from protesters.

The king has not made any public comment on more than three months of protests, which have increasingly targeted the monarchy as well as the government.

— Reuters

Rohingya man dies as landmine explodes

DHAKA: A 23-year-old Rohingya man died when a landmine exploded near the "no-man's land" area of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, police said on Saturday.

Bangladesh paramilitary border troops took possession of the body from a group of Rohingya men who carried it back inside Bangladesh, officer Alamgir Hossain said. The explosion occurred on Myanmar territory on Friday night, he said.

The victim was a resident of Kutupalong refugee camp, one of the largest refugee settlements in the world, the officer said here on Saturday. The camp is located in south-eastern Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas sheltered after they fled persecution in Myanmar.

The victim, along with some other Rohingya men, crossed the border into what is officially Myanmar, but in effect acts as a buffer zone, in order to fish near an informal Rohingya settlement, an official with the BGB paramilitary troopers said on condition of anonymity as she is not authorised to speak to the media. He said Myanmar has planted landmines on its territory to prevent re-entry of the Rohingyas who were driven away from their homes in northern Rakhine state.

Bangladesh has been hosting more than 1 million Rohingyas after they were driven away from home.

Nearly 750,000 of them crossed the border after the Myanmar military launched a crackdown on the minority group in August 2017. — dpa

South Korea presses on with flu vaccination programme



A man gets an influenza vaccine at a branch of the Korea Association of Health Promotion in Seoul. — Reuters

SEOUL: The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said on Friday it would press on with a wide flu vaccination programme aimed at heading off complications from the coronavirus, after reviewing more than two dozen cases of deaths that have raised public concern.

A review had shown no direct link between the vaccination and 26 deaths that were investigated, the KDCA said in a statement, adding it planned to meet to review additional analysis.

The toll of deaths among people who have been vaccinated reached 36 on Friday, sparking calls from doctors and politicians for a halt to the programme, which aims to vaccinate about 30 million of the country's 52 million population. Some 20 initial autopsy results from the police and the National Forensic Service showed that 13 died of cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and other disorders not caused by the vaccination, while seven are undergoing additional examinations, KDCA said.

Both the forensic agency and police were not immediately reachable for comment. Prime Minister Chung

Sye-kyun expressed condolences to the families of those who died, calling for a thorough investigation to verify the exact cause of deaths.

"So far experts said there was low possibility that the shots and deaths were related but many citizens remain anxious," he told a meeting. The rising death toll has fuelled debate about whether the programme, which is free for some citizens, should be suspended.

The country's largest grouping of doctors called for a halt until the safety of the vaccines is confirmed, while a major vaccine society said inoculation should continue as no relation to the deaths have been found.

Some local governments and district offices around the country have voluntarily advised residents against taking a flu shot or are considering suspending the programme. The vaccine providers include domestic firms such as GC Pharma, SK Bioscience, Korea Vaccine and Boryung Biopharma Co Ltd, a unit of Boryung Pharm Co Ltd, along with France's Sanofi. They supply both the free programme and paid services.

— Reuters

CONDOLENCES

The Board Members,
Management and Staff of

Oiltanking Terminals & Co. LLC

express their deepest condolences to
all members of the bereaved family
on the sad demise of

MAJID NASSER ISSA AL AMRI

*May the Almighty grant eternal peace to the
departed soul and strength to the family to
endure the irreparable loss.*

Oiltanking



Trump votes in Florida before rallies as Biden heads to Pennsylvania



Democratic presidential nominee and former Vice President Joe Biden delivers remarks on COVID-19 in Delaware. – AFP

WEST PALM BEACH: President Donald Trump voted in his adopted home of Florida before hitting the campaign trail for rallies in three swing states on Saturday, joining more than 54 million Americans who have cast early ballots at a record-setting pace ahead of the November 3 election.

Trump voted at a library in West Palm Beach, near his Mar-a-Lago estate, after switching his permanent residence and voter registration last year from New York to Florida, a must-win battleground for his re-election bid.

“I voted for a guy named Trump,” he told reporters after casting his ballot.

Democratic rival Joe Biden and his wife Jill also hit the campaign trail on Saturday, traveling to the battleground of Pennsylvania for two events. Former President Barack Obama will campaign in Florida, making his second appearance on behalf of his former vice president after a stop in Pennsylvania on Wednesday.

With 10 days to go in the campaign, about 54.2 million Americans have already cast early ballots, a pace that could lead to

The rush to vote is a sign of the intense interest in the contest between Trump and Biden, as well as concerns about avoiding crowded polling places on Election Day and reducing the risk of exposure to the coronavirus, which has killed more than 224,000 Americans.

the highest voter turnout in more than a century, according to data from the US Elections Project.

The rush to vote is a sign of the intense interest in the contest between Trump and Biden, as well as concerns about avoiding crowded polling places on Election Day and reducing the risk of exposure to the coronavirus, which has killed more than 224,000 Americans.

The United States set a single-day record of more than 84,000 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, according to a Reuters tally, with the spike in infections hitting battlegrounds including Ohio, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Many states have expanded in-person early voting and mail-in ballots as a safer



US President Donald Trump at a campaign rally at Pensacola International Airport in Florida. – AFP

way to vote during the pandemic. Trump, who has regularly condemned mail-in voting without evidence as prone to fraud, even though experts say it is as safe as any other method, voted by mail in two elections since he switched his address to Florida, a presidential primary in March and a state election in August.

On the campaign trail on Friday, Biden and Trump renewed their battle over Trump’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Biden said Trump had given up on containing the virus, while Trump accused Biden of overstating the health crisis to scare Americans into voting for him. Opinion polls show Biden leading Trump nationally, but the race is much closer in the crucial battleground states that will decide

the election. Trump will head to three of those after voting, holding rallies in North Carolina, Ohio and Wisconsin. Biden will turn his attention to Pennsylvania, where polls show him narrowly leading Trump in a state crucial to both of their candidacies.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll released earlier this week showed Biden with a four percentage point advantage over Trump in the state, down from seven points the week before. Biden will hold drive-in rallies in Bucks County north of Philadelphia and Luzerne County near his birthplace of Scranton, where he will be joined by rocker Jon Bon Jovi. Trump handily won Luzerne County in 2016 over Democrat Hillary Clinton and barely lost to Clinton in Bucks County. Biden will get some help again on Saturday from Obama, who will hold a drive-in rally in Miami.

Obama, still popular in the party nearly four years after leaving office, delivered a blistering attack on Trump’s leadership when he made his 2020 campaign-trail debut in Pennsylvania on Wednesday.

— Reuters

New virus rules in Madrid as Spain mulls national emergency



A young boy gets his temperature checked while wearing a face mask to protect against the spread of the novel coronavirus ahead of a football match outside Madrid. – AFP

MADRID: New coronavirus restrictions were to take effect in Madrid on Saturday as the Spanish government weighed declaring a national state of emergency to allow curfews to be imposed.

Just days after Spain registered more than one million virus cases, the regions — responsible for managing public health care — have heaped pressure on the government to give them legal right to impose tighter restrictions.

In practice, that would involve the government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez declaring a national state of emergency which would enable the regions to impose a curfew — a measure increasingly applied across Europe.

So far, nine of Spain’s 17 autonomous regions have formally requested such a measure, with the government expected to decide at an extraordinary meeting on Sunday.

Although the government can impose an emergency for up to a fortnight, it would need parliamentary approval to extend it.

Spain used the powers in spring to enforce one of the world’s tightest lockdowns, and a similar measure has been in force in Madrid for the past fortnight — although only to impose movement restrictions on the capital and various nearby towns.

That measure draws to a close at 4:47 pm on Saturday when new restrictions drawn up by the regional authorities will come into force.

Central to the new rules is a ban on all gatherings, in public and private, of people who don’t live in the same household between midnight and 6 am.

Bars and restaurants must now close at midnight, compared with 11 pm under the state of emergency, and their indoor seating capacity will remain fixed at 50 per cent.

Elsewhere, the Castilla and Leon region announced its own curfew without waiting for a government declaration, banning movement between 10 pm and 6 am, with similar measures planned in the eastern region of Valencia and the southern city of Granada. On Wednesday, Spain became the sixth country in the world to pass a million confirmed cases and the first within the European Union, although on Friday Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the “real number” was more than three times higher.

The latest figures show the virus has claimed nearly 35,000 lives in Spain and infected 1,046,132 people, although antibody tests suggest a figure of more than three million.

— Agencies

Europe, WHO sound alarm over resurgent virus crisis

STOCKHOLM: The European Union’s disease control agency has joined frantic health workers to sound the alarm over a coronavirus surge across the continent, as the World Health Organization warned of an “exponential” rise in infections.

Even countries that avoided severe outbreaks during Europe’s first wave of contagion in the spring have watched their case numbers surge, with Germany’s death toll passing 10,000 on Saturday.

Governments have reintroduced containment measures to slow the renewed spread of the virus in nations that only weeks earlier believed they had triumphed over the crisis.

But populations weary of social isolation and economic hardship have pushed back against fresh restrictions, including overnight clashes in hard-hit Naples between Italian police and hundreds of protesters.

The continent was facing a major threat to public health and a “highly concerning epidemiological situation,” said Andrea Ammon, director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control



Demonstrators protesting against the measures taken to control the novel coronavirus pandemic face Italian anti-riot policemen in front of Campania region in Naples. – AFP

(ECDC).

The agency said all EU countries except Cyprus, Estonia, Finland and Greece fell into a “serious concern” category, as did the United Kingdom, up from just seven a month ago.

After Spain became the first European country to officially record a million COVID-19 cases earlier in the week, Prime

Minister Pedro Sanchez said Friday the real number of infections was likely more than triple that number.

France followed Spain past the million-case milestone on Friday while Germany hit a fresh daily record of nearly 15,000 new cases, with health authorities urging the public to follow social distancing measures.

Urgent new restrictions on daily life

have come into effect in several nations, with France extending a curfew to cover 46 million people.

Parts of Italy including the capital Rome went under curfew late Friday, prompting a call to protest on social media that saw hundreds of demonstrators in Naples throw objects at police and set rubbish bins on fire.

The country is reeling from its worst post-war recession after a gruelling two-month national lockdown prompted by one of Europe’s worst outbreaks, and authorities have so far been reluctant to repeat the drastic quarantine restrictions seen then.

Wales entered a full lockdown on Friday evening, a day after Ireland shut down, while Poland adopted a nationwide “red zone” lockdown mandating the partial closure of primary schools and restaurants.

Only Sweden, which famously refused to lock down earlier this year, continued to stick to its guns despite a rise in cases.

Across the planet, COVID-19 has now claimed the lives of 1.1 million people and infected close to 42 million, with the WHO warning the northern hemisphere was at a critical juncture. — AFP

WARSAW

Poland’s president tests positive for coronavirus

Poland’s President Andrzej Duda has tested positive for coronavirus, an aide said Saturday, as the EU country faces a record rise in cases and mass protests despite a ban on public gatherings intended to stem infections.

Duda is the latest in a string of leaders to have been diagnosed with the virus, including US President Donald Trump, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro. All have recovered and aside from the diagnosis, the 48-year-old Duda is believed to be in good general health.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, as rec-



ommended President @AndrzejDuda was tested yesterday for the presence of coronavirus. The result turned out to be positive. The president is fine,” Blazej Spychalski, secretary of state in the president’s office, said on Twitter.

CONAKRY

Guinea’s Conde wins presidency

Guinea’s President Alpha Conde won the October 18 election with 59.5 per cent of the vote, according to a full preliminary tally from the election commission on Saturday.

The victory, which requires confirmation by the Constitutional Court, gives a third term in office to the 82-year-old Conde after a bitterly fought election in which the opposition said he had no right to participate. Conde says a constitutional referendum in March reset his two-term limit, but opponents say he is breaking the law by holding onto power.

Results were announced in batches in recent days, and already showed Conde with an unassailable lead, sparking street protests in opposition strongholds in which at least 17 died.



ROME

Infections among Pope’s Swiss Guards rise to 13

The Vatican’s Swiss Guards, Pope Francis’ security corps, said that two more of their officers tested positive for the coronavirus, bringing the total infection tally to 13. None of the positive cases have required hospitalisation and only some developed symptoms like fever, coughing, loss of smell and pain in the joints, a statement said.

A coronavirus cluster among the Swiss Guards is a source of serious concern for the pope, given that part of their job is to be close to him. Francis is 83 and had part of a lung removed due to an illness in his20s,



so he would be a high-risk patient if he were to contract the virus.

On Saturday, the Vatican said a person who lives in the same Vatican residence as the pope tested positive for the coronavirus and was placed in isolation.

The ‘Tutorial’ landscape requires regulation to protect the unwary

COVID-19 continues to exert relentless chaos in, and create havoc over the lives of all of us, and it is so much worse because it is an invisible, insidious foe, but none are more disadvantaged than many parents and children.

Schoolchildren are missing out on their most influential years, as the most formative relationships of their entire lives are eked out in the classroom and schoolyard. Kathryn Wentzel, a Professor in Human Development writes that, “Relationships with peers are of central importance to children throughout childhood and adolescence. They provide a source of companionship and entertainment, help in solving problems, personal validation and emotional support.” She identifies their identity development, while noting they are more engaged in, and excel at academic tasks.

Now, pupil’s peer interactions and competency have always linked positively to academic achievement, where basically, “a happy child is an effective learner.” Wentzel’s life’s work has been to establish the links between personal, social and societal well-being, and academic achievement, and there has not, at least to my knowledge, been any research in rebuttal of that basic premise, and a logical extension is the absence of the schoolyard experience, and its influences, must adversely affect children’s learning.



Ray Petersen
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TUTORS
ADVERTISE
THROUGH
SOCIAL MEDIA
AND ARE
ACCEPTED AS
WHAT THEY SAY
THEY ARE, AND
WHILE PARENTS
MAY BE GULLIBLE
OR NAÏVE

Parents know and understand this, and many are seeking, currently, a compromise, or an accommodation, through which the lack of social interaction may be alleviated, or mitigated somewhat, by hiring ‘tutors’ for their children. I have a problem with the tutorial landscape here, in that there is no regulation, quality assurance, or ethical protection.

‘Tutors’ advertise through social media and are accepted as what they say they are, and while parents may be gullible or naïve, this is exactly when they are most vulnerable. ‘Tutors’ currently, are charging RO 10-15 per hour, and getting it! Yet, many are unqualified to tutor, or unqualified to tutor in their subjects.

Tales have emerged, anecdotally and on social media, of ‘tutors’ in their teens, of ‘tutors’ advertising as native speakers because they have Canada/NZ/Australian/SA/UK/USA passports, when they are not! Of ‘tutors’ without subject knowledge, and ‘tutors’ without teaching qualifications. Of course, they do get found out, but in the meantime have ‘ripped off’ their ‘pupils’ and the parents. Professionally, seeing teachers doing this ‘out of hours,’ is abhorrent, as they are probably the same ones who complain about workloads. Also, seeing ‘students teach,’ neither sounds right, nor is right!

And then, of course, there are the legalities involved in, well, let us call

it what it is, black market education! Most ‘tutors’ are working as sole traders, not affiliated to educational institutions, in terms of their ‘tutorials,’ are therefore working outside the terms of their visas. As such, they are also not paying taxes! Most distressing, however, is the fact that there are no protections in place, either for the ‘tutors’ or the children.

There is no ‘safety in numbers’ that exist in a school environment, and there is absolutely no ethical basis for teaching in one’s own home if it is not certified as an educational establishment. Don’t think for a moment that I think all ‘tutors’ are a risk to your children. No! But educational principals and safeguards are in place to protect educators and learners alike, and one of the very first things taught in the education sector is to leave your office door open. If, as a parent, you must ask why, that naivety I referred to earlier, is alive and well.

My observation, is that to protect parents and children, ‘tutors’ must be regulated by the authorities concerned, and include an authority/ institutional identity card issued by an institution, or through registration as a sole-trader/cooperative business. That way qualifications, subject competency, quality assurance and ethics can all be assured. Let us protect the children first, the parents second, and the quality of their educational experiences.

MIXED FEELINGS

Libyans voice hope, doubts over ceasefire deal

RIM TAHER AND PAUL RAYMOND

Libyans have reacted with a mix of hope and scepticism after the signing of a nationwide ceasefire deal intended to pave the way towards a political solution to the country’s grinding conflict.

While observers have welcomed the UN-backed deal, few are under any illusions about the difficulties of turning it into lasting peace on the ground.

“We’ve seen a lot of deals in the past,” said Hassan Mahmud al Obeydi, a 40-year-old secondary schoolteacher from the eastern city of Benghazi.

“What’s important is the implementation.” Last Friday’s deal was signed in Geneva by military delegates from the two main warring parties in the North African country, which plunged into violence in 2011 with the Nato-backed revolt that toppled veteran leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The Tripoli-based unity government and rival forces led by eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar agreed to withdraw from front lines, start demobilising armed groups and set about integrating them into the state.

Crucially, the deal also calls for the departure of all foreign forces from Libyan soil within three months.

“It’s good that the two sides have been prepared to compromise, but the devil is in the detail,” said Peter Millett, a former British ambassador to Libya.

“There are an awful lot of questions. A key one is: will countries that

have been sponsors of military forces in Libya support this compromise?”

Both major camps in Libya’s complex war have received extensive backing from foreign powers.

Last Friday’s deal comes four months after Haftar’s Russian — and other forces gave up their year-long attempt to seize the capital Tripoli, a battle that killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands.

In June, Haftar withdrew from western Libya in the face of a blistering counterattack by forces supporting the Government of National Accord — backed by Turkey.

The battle had further deepened the bitter mistrust between the rival political camps and their military allies, as well as ordinary Libyans.

“The war caused terrible social divisions,” said Obeydi. “Work is needed immediately, right now, to rebuild and to heal the deep wounds in Libyan society.”

In the capital Tripoli a 1,000-km drive west, pro-GNA fighter Salim Atouch voiced doubts the ceasefire would hold.

“We have experience with a previous agreement, which was five days before Haftar’s attack on Tripoli, during which he destroyed the capital’s infrastructure and killed many people,” Atouch said.

“I hope this won’t be like previous agreements, meaning we go back to war again. We will abide by it, but we are ready to react at any moment if it’s violated.”

The Geneva talks were the military part of a process led by the UN’s Libya mission UNSMIL.

Separate political talks that start on Monday aim to create a new governing body and prepare for elections. — AFP

BATTLEGROUND STATES

Trump launches intense campaign push, Biden hammers him on COVID

JEROME CARTILLIER

Donald Trump launched an intense last-ditch reelection push on Friday in Florida, insisting that COVID-19 is disappearing, while frontrunner Joe Biden hammered his message that the president had abdicated responsibility for a pandemic that is actually surging.

With 50 million people having already cast early ballots, Biden has a firm lead in national polls, as well as in most of the battleground states like Florida that typically decide the winner of US presidential elections. The drama of the final Trump-Biden televised debate on Thursday was thought unlikely to move the needle significantly.

But Trump pulled off a stunning upset when he defeated the favourite Hillary Clinton in 2016 and he will now make a gruelling series of campaign stops through the battlegrounds to try and repeat that feat.

Targeting the politically powerful seniors’ vote in Florida, Trump began with a rally in the famous retirement community The Villages, where he told a large crowd that all Biden talks about is “Covid, Covid, Covid” to try and “scare people.”

“We’re going to quickly end this pandemic, this horrible plague,”



US President Donald Trump holds a campaign rally at Pensacola International Airport in Pensacola, Florida, on Friday. — Reuters

TRUMP SAID WE’RE
NOT ENTERING
A DARK WINTER.
WE’RE ENTERING
THE FINAL TURN
AND APPROACHING
THE LIGHT AT THE
END OF THE TUNNEL

he said, underlining his consistent message that the virus is on a rapid decline, when in fact case numbers are spiralling upward again, with more than 220,000 Americans already dead.

Referring to Biden’s warning of a “dark winter” ahead, Trump countered: “We’re not entering a dark winter. We’re entering the final turn and approaching the light at the end of the tunnel.”

He then pivoted to his own scare

tactics, claiming that Biden would let in hordes of illegal immigrants that he said were comprised of “criminals and rapists and even murderers.”

“Joe Biden cares more about illegal aliens than he does about senior citizens,” he said.

Trump finished his day with a rally in Pensacola, Florida, where he told the cheering crowd that “11 days from now, we’re going to win my home state of Florida.”

— Reuters

sport



SEEB INCH CLOSER TO HISTORIC OMANTEL LEAGUE TITLE



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCTOBER 24

League leaders, Seeb inched closer to the historic title as they defeated Oman club 1-0 at the ROP Stadium in Al Wattiyah to continue to the top of the table in the 24th week of Omantel League.

With this victory, Seeb moved confidently to the first title as they reached 53 points while Oman went into the drop zone at the second place from bottom with 26 points.

The Muscat-based team will need one more victory in the forthcoming rounds to clinch the shield of the league. Saud al Farsi struck the only goal coming for the Seeb side in the second half.

Salalah giant Dhofar maintained a margin of five points with the league topper after they registered a comfortable 4-0 win over Muscat at the newly re-opened Al Saada Sports Complex.

The 11-times winner has to win both the coming rounds and await for Seeb struggling to come into breakeven. The national experienced coach Rasheed Jaber affirmed to the media centre of Dhofar that the win is essential for the team and came after a long break. “after securing the victory, we gave the chance for the youth faces to play in the match. This step was aimed to adapt the young players with the expected pressure in the last league rounds,” he said.

Fanja and Al Rustaq confirmed their presence at the top-tier league after they registered crucial wins in this week. The former national team player, Badar al Maimani, lead his team Fanja to a 1-0 victory over Al Nahdha to remain in mid-table. Fanja raised its credit to 33 points at the fifth position while Al Nahdha remained at the third place with 34.



Al Rustaq recorded a crucial 2-0 win against Al Nasr. The victory has put them in the comfort zone as they secured their attendance in the top domestic league for the next season.

The national team player Khalid al Hajri stole the limelight in this week of the league as he slammed a super hat-trick and supported his team to thump Mirbat 7-0 to improve the chances of the team at the top-local division league.

Bahla climbed to ninth spot with 31 points while Mirbat who confirmed the relegation were positioned in the last position of the table with 12 points.

The northern Batinah derby ended in a goalless draw and the one-point gap is still the difference between the teams. Saham is in the fifth position with 33 points while Sohar at eighth place with 32.

Al Oruba registered a clinical 1-0 victory over Al Suwaiq which dropped into the danger zone with 29 points at the fourth position from bottom.

OLYMPIC CHIEF SAYS GAMES CANNOT BE 'MARKETPLACE OF DEMONSTRATIONS'



The athletes personify the values of excellence, solidarity and peace. They express this inclusiveness and mutual respect also by being politically neutral on the field of play and during the ceremonies, At times, this focus on sport needs to be reconciled with the freedom of speech that all athletes also enjoy at the Olympic Games. This is the reason there are rules for the field of play and the ceremonies protecting this spirit of sport.

THOMAS BACH
IOC President

LONDON: Olympic chief Thomas Bach warned against allowing the Games to “descend into a marketplace of demonstrations” on Saturday after criticism of a rule banning protests by athletes.

The International Olympic Committee president has come under fire for the ruling, announced in a year which has seen widespread support by athletes for the Black Lives Matter movement.

But Bach, who won a team fencing gold medal at the 1976 Olympics, said he had learned

first-hand about the “political impotence of sport” when West Germany boycotted the 1980 Games over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

“The athletes personify the values of excellence, solidarity and peace. They express this inclusiveness and mutual respect also by being politically neutral on the field of play and during the ceremonies,” Bach wrote in British newspaper *The Guardian*.

“At times, this focus on sport needs to be reconciled with the freedom of speech that all athletes also enjoy at the Olympic Games.

This is the reason there are rules for the field of play and the ceremonies protecting this spirit of sport.

“The unifying power of the Games can only unfold if everyone shows respect for and solidarity to one another. Otherwise, the Games will descend into a marketplace of demonstrations of all kinds, dividing and not uniting the world.”

Earlier this month, World Athletics chief and newly enshrined IOC member Sebastian Coe backed athletes’ right to “take the knee” on the Olympic

podium, as long as it was done with “complete respect” for other competitors.

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick made headlines when he began kneeling during the US national anthem in 2016 to protest police brutality against Black Americans and other minorities.

He was ostracised by the league and criticised by US President Donald Trump, but in June the NFL sanctioned “peaceful protests” and world football’s governing body FIFA has urged leagues to use “common sense” when deciding whether to

discipline political activism.

In June, US athletes and 1968 Mexico Games icon John Carlos, famously kicked out of the event for raising his fist in a black power salute, called on the IOC to scrap the ban on protests.

“Athletes will no longer be silenced,” they wrote.

Last month, hundreds of human rights and civil society groups urged the IOC to strip China of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics following its clampdown in Hong Kong and mass internment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

— Reuters

Solskjaer says Cavani primed for Man Utd debut against Chelsea



LONDON: Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said he is impressed by new signing Edinson Cavani’s meticulous approach to training and the Uruguay international is in line to make his debut for the club in Saturday’s Premier League clash against Chelsea.

Cavani, who joined the Red Devils on a free transfer this month after his Paris St Germain contract expired last season, had to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival in the United Kingdom.

The 33-year-old was ruled out of the 4-1 league victory over Newcastle United and missed the 2-1 Champions League win at his former club on Tuesday, but has worked on his fitness levels to come into contention for his first game since March.



“Of course, he’s been away from football for so long, he needed a pre-season,” Solskjaer told reporters on Friday. “He’s naturally fit and he’s been looking after himself... now he’s getting more training sessions individualised so he feels

ready to train with the team and play with the team. “He’s been very meticulous and methodical in his training and his preparation. He didn’t feel ready for the PSG game... he hadn’t done enough sharpness work, but he’s managed to do that this

week. Let’s see if that means he’s ready for Chelsea.” Solskjaer’s side are 15th in the Premier League table with six points from four matches, while Chelsea are ninth with eight points but have played one game more.

— Reuters



DHONI VOWS CHANGES AFTER SEASON OF IPL ‘FAILURES’



“Whenever you’re not doing well, there can be a hundred reasons, but one of the main things you ask yourself is whether you’ve played to the potential you’ve got, no matter the conditions. And this year we haven’t. Cumulatively there have been batting failures.”

MS DHONI
CSK captain

DUBAI: Three-time Indian Premier League champions Chennai Super Kings will be forced into major changes after a humiliating defeat to their arch-rivals Mumbai Indians, their veteran captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said.

Dhoni’s team suffered a crushing 10-wicket loss in Friday’s clash that is widely considered Indian cricket’s El Clasico drawing a huge TV audience.

Mumbai and Chennai, both huge spenders on international stars, are now at opposite ends of the eight team table. Mumbai are strong candidates for a fifth title while Dhoni’s side are virtually certain to miss the playoffs. And he admitted after an eighth defeat in 11 games that this “hurt”.

Chennai could manage only 114 for nine, a total four-time champions Mumbai chased down in 12.2 overs without losing a wicket.

“Whenever you’re not doing well, there can be a hundred reasons, but one of the main things you ask yourself is whether you’ve played to the potential you’ve got, no matter the conditions,” Dhoni said.



“And this year we haven’t. Cumulatively there have been batting failures.”

Chennai have been dubbed “Dad’s Army” by the media because of their use of over-35 players including Dhoni, Shane Watson and Faf du

Plessis. That will now change.

RUSTY DHONI

Dhoni, 39, who retired from international cricket in August, said young players will be blooded for the remaining three games.

“I think it’s important for us to have a clear picture of next year. There are lots of ifs and buts — the auction, where the venues will be. The coming three games will be an ideal opportunity to give platforms,” said Dhoni.

“See some of the youngsters in

preparation for next year, see who will bat and who bowls at the death and soaks the pressure. A few more who are on the bench will get games in the coming three games.”

Watson was dropped for the Mumbai game but South African

Imran Tahir, 41, played his first match of the season.

“We had a problem of balance all the way through” with the spin bowling “ineffective”, said coach Stephen Fleming explaining the introduction of the IPL’s oldest player.

“We have got to find a way to win the next three games and give guys opportunities to press case for retention next year or for opportunities for other teams.”

Dhoni, once one of the game’s best finishers but who took more than a year off after India’s elimination from the World Cup, has been slammed for his go-slow approach this season.

Chennai “are looking like an ageing boxer in the ring against younger fighters who are throwing more punches than he can handle,” veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle wrote on Twitter.

“In my opinion, the break from the World Cup in 2019 to this IPL allowed some rustiness to creep in,” former India captain Kris Srikkanth wrote in *The Times of India* newspaper, calling for the legendary wicketkeeper-batsman to go back to his traditional “fearless and attacking” tactics. — **AFP**

Kohli ‘most complete player’ around, says England’s Root



NEW DELHI: England’s Test captain Joe Root considers India’s Virat Kohli as currently the most complete player around and said he expects England team-mate Jos Buttler to soon replicate his limited-overs dominance in Test cricket.

Root himself is considered one of the four best batsmen in contemporary cricket, alongside the prolific Kohli, Australian run-machine Steve Smith and New Zealand captain Kane Williamson.

“You’re looking at three of the greatest players the game has seen,” Root told The Analyst’s Virtual Cricket Club. “They’re three brilliant people to watch play and learn from. I’m not sure I’d put myself in their bracket, to be honest.”

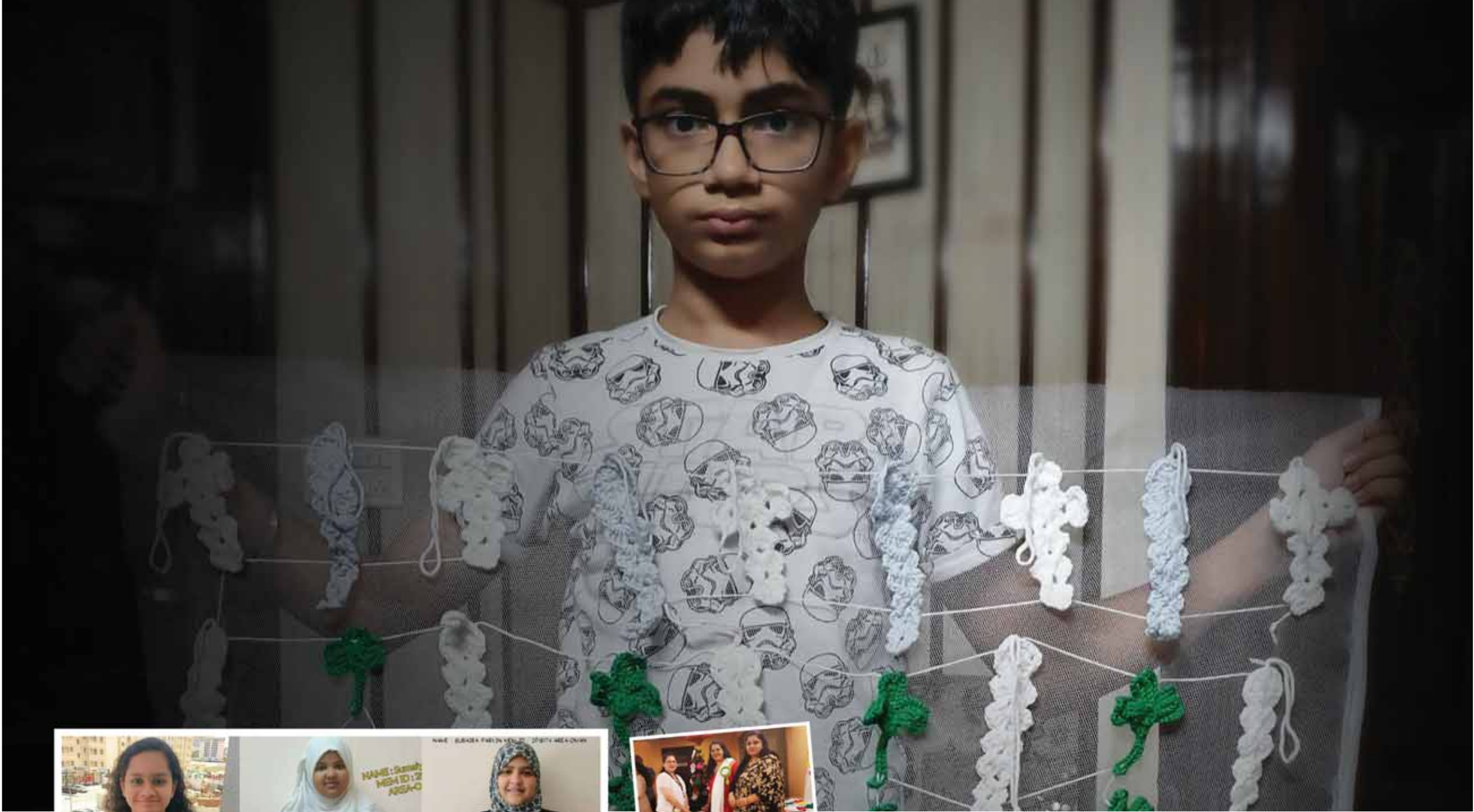
While he admired Smith’s hunger for big scores and Williamson’s all-surface defence, Root was particularly impressed by Kohli’s versatility. “Virat is probably

the most complete player out of the three of them across formats. His ability to chase things down in the limited-overs format and to pace it as well as he does as often as he does and be not out at the end is extraordinary. “He’s got a very good all-round game but you wouldn’t say he’s weaker against spin or pace.” Root, meanwhile, has high expectations from England’s limited-overs stalwarts Buttler who is yet to reach the same high in test cricket.

“Jos has been the most complete white-ball batsman we’ve had ever,” Root said. “I think he’s a phenomenal player and I still don’t think we’ve seen the best of him yet. Hopefully this summer in test cricket can unlock doors for him. “I saw a piece about (South Africa great) AB de Villiers and he said it took him 50 tests to work out his test game. I think it’s very similar to Jos, to be honest.” — **Reuters**

features

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Creating a world record in crochet history

BY LIJU CHERIAN

Crochet is a unique art form. Not only it creates beautiful pieces of garments, toys and accessories but is a great therapy for treating many ailments. This intricate works with a needle and a hook used to pull the yarn and make patterns. The stitches that make up a pattern in crochets require a lot of patience. The Sultanate has seen diaspora ladies in plenty engaged in crocheting and using their spare time profitably. Kiranpreet Sahni Nair is one such who got into this art by accident. As leader of the Goodwill Ambassador of Mother India Crochet Queen (MICQ) Oman chapter since 2015, it is time for her to bid adieu to Oman after over 8 years. As she recollects her achievements, it was without doubt the Guinness World Records (GWR) which she notched up for 4 consecutive years creating a record in crochet history and the only group to do so. Other than her achievements which received wide acclaim, she took initiative towards initiating young boys and girls to join this art. Karthik Harish Nair, her 14-year-old

son, won 3 Guinness which in itself is an achievement and collectively both mom and son bagged about 7 GWRs between them. It was solely due to Kiranpreet's efforts that MICQ now has 27 kids from various Indian schools of Oman joining the art. She initiated this beautiful art with no gender specifics. "Boys and girls both started learning stitch by stitch, chain by chain and each one was taught to make scarves, sculptures and Christmas decorations for all the four GRWs," explains Kiranpreet. On September 15, 2019, MICQ bagged the 4th Guinness World Record for its largest display of crocheted Christmas decorations. 36 Indian women and kids from the Sultanate were among the proud winners. The record attempt was held at SRM University in Chennai, India, for the largest display of crocheted Christmas decorations in which MICQ made a record of 66,158 decorations. Previous MICQ Guinness World Record Awards were for world's largest crocheted blanket in 2016 and longest crocheted scarf in 2017 and for the largest display of crochet sculptures in 2018. Recollects Kiranpreet about the Guinness Record for the fourth time. "There was an ocean of Christmas decorations spread out at the SRM University hall. The participants were allotted items with specific

instructions, taking help from YouTube and crochet books." The proceeds from their works have been donated to cancer survivors and needy namely around 300 lapghans to the blind and handicapped children in Delhi, 3,600 sets of caps and cowls at Ahmedabad and thanks giving to the Indian Army's Brave Brothers in Arms. They also initiated projects like Crochet A Long (CAL) wherein one can

learn online step-by-step processes and crochet a variety of works. Their future plans include projects for the soldiers and scarves for brothers in Ladakh and Leh, Kashmir. Kiranpreet's biggest moment came when she displayed her 4th GWR certificate along with Karthik who won the 3rd Guinness World Record Certificate. "The greatest moment was holding the certificates along with my son who made me feel happy and on top of the world. It is always a great feeling when you share your success with family," she recollects. "The victories gave birth to a whole new concept and went for a cause. This made life more meaningful which will leave a legacy for generations to come," adds Kiranpreet. She also thanks MICQ founder Subashri Natarajan, called the 'Crochet Queen', for providing her the opportunity to showcase her talents. Says a delighted Karthik, a class 8th student of Indian School Al Wadi Kabir (ISWK), who expresses his thanks to parents Kiranpreet and Harish Nair for continuously inspiring him to learn an art which was more popular with women. "My parents encouraged me to break the gender specific thought and helped me learn the art from my mom so I could perform a hatrick." Subaira Parvin, senior area coordinator, MICQ Oman, says crochet gifts are made with love, creativity and dedication. They help

relieve depression, build self-esteem and community. MICQ has provided an excellent opportunity to exhibit our crochet talents." Her daughter, S Sumaiya Fathima, is also active in knitting and is delighted to be part of MICQ. "Kiranpreet was an inspiration who motivated me to take part in GWR that enabled me to make crochet dolls and creative works of art," she says. Christina Aldrene Pereira, a finance expert and senior member, says the best outcome of crocheting is it reduces stress levels providing her with positive energy. "Colourful threads really add beauty and meaning to our lives. My happiness was through hand work I could reach out to many people from every walks of life which enabled me to win 3 Guinness with MICQ." Another senior member, Nirupa D'Cruz, who works as Assistant Manager, says crochets helped her to learn new craft and believes that the art brings out the creativity in an individual. "The things that you can create with just a needle and yarn is just amazing and endless. The art is a perfect stress buster in my busy schedule. Both my two daughters have also been participating in the competitions so far," she adds. The works done by MICQ members have been donated to charity organisations for cancer and the blind in the Sultanate.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Mesmerizing Tuna Tartar



SUMPTUOUS FOOD

W Muscat has some of Oman's best places for dining and offers the most sumptuous of food available in this part of the world. The chefs of W Muscat will be taking centre stage in the next two weeks offering some of the hotel's best creations. As a bonus, this month has seen the launching of Ba Ban, the newest addition to its fine restaurants that offer the spirit of 1920s and 30s Shanghai and life around the Bund, a by-gone era of entertainment and charm. Reservations are mandatory at Ba Ban which is open for lunch Tuesdays – Saturdays from 12 PM – 430PM. For today's recipe, Chef Darel Bazerque is presenting this specialty of Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar.

PREPARATION METHOD

In a small pan, add the olive oil, onion and salt let it cook at very low heat until onion becomes translucent. Turn off the heat and set onions aside in a bowl to cool.

In a medium bowl, mix together tuna, cooked onion, lemon juice and olive oil.

Add black olives and fresh basil. Mix and adjust seasoning to liking.

Using a 60 cm diameter ring mold, spoon mix into center of plate and garnish with seasoned rocket leaves and cherry tomato wedges.

CHEF TIP:

Adding salt to onions while frying will allow the onions to cook without developing a strong color.

Tear fresh basil with your hands to avoid leaving flavor on the knife and chopping board.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF DAREL BAZERQUE

Head Chef
Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar
W Muscat Hotel

Hailing from the luxurious beaches of Mauritius, Darel joined W Muscat in 2019 as Chef de Cuisine at Siddharta Lounge by Buddha-Bar. Taking inspiration from the panoramic ocean views and abundance of fresh seafood, Darel has mastered the rooftop restaurant's Asian-Mediterranean menu and offers up the freshest of local produce.

Darel joined W Muscat from Dubai, where he worked in multiple 5-star hotels earning his way up through the ranks from Junior Sous Chef. With fifteen years of experience in tourism and hospitality kitchens across Africa and the Middle East, he has worked with Michelin starred chefs in some of the world's grandest restaurants.

Darel is perfectly at home in his beachfront location and loves nothing more than enjoying fresh seafood on the beach with friends and family. Of course, as might be expected from an Islander, he can never pass down adding a little extra spice, and a little extra coconut to his meals!

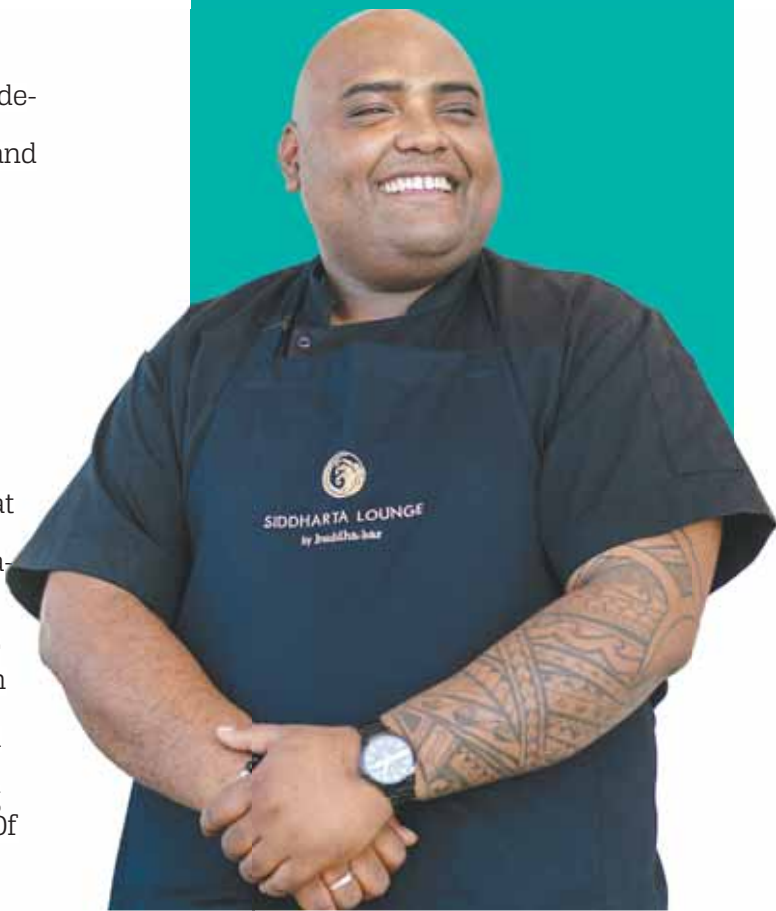


INGREDIENTS:

SERVES: 2 PEOPLE



- 100 gr tuna, cut into small cubes, approx. 1cm x 1cm
- 10 gr red onion, cut into small cubes, approx. 0.5cm x 0.5cm
- 5 gr fresh basil, torn into small pieces
- 5 ml olive oil
- 5 ml lemon juice
- 20gr black olives, chopped small
- 10 gr salt
- Rocket leaves for garnish, seasoned with olive oil and salt
- 4-5 cherry tomatoes for garnish



HUMAN INTEREST

Croatia's Istria region producing some of the world's best olive oil, say experts



BALE, CROATIA: In just 15 years, Croatia's Istrian peninsula in the northern Adriatic has become one of the world's best producers of olive oil, decorated with top industry awards.

In 2020, Istria won the Flos Olei guide's best region in the world award for extra virgin olive oil for a 6th consecutive year. The guide is compiled by expert tasters.

owner of an olive oil mill in the town of Bale, said the quality of the oil is based on the work of small family producers.

"The olive harvest is done manually, they are processed immediately and the quantity produced is relatively small."

Miroslav Pliso, a lawyer who started his small olive oil business some 20 years ago, said that a focus on quality



"Some 15 years ago there were practically no producers of bottled olive oil in Istria and there was no expert verification of its quality," said Denis Ivosevic from the Istrian Tourist Board.

"Now Istria has become a region where guests come also because they know what kind of olive oil they can buy."

Some 70 small producers from Istria are assessed by the Flos Olei guide.

Manuel Grubic, the

production and the industry awards had put Istria on the map with tourists seeking good local gastronomy.

He said his output is some 2,000 litres of top quality olive oil a year.

"The price of our oil is quite high in comparison to the price of an average good quality oil which costs around 100-120 kuna per litre. We bottle the oil in the quantity of 0.25 litres and the price per litre is around 600 kuna," he said. —Reuters



From zero to hero selling online (Part 3)

In this last part of the article I want to conclude by disclosing how I decided to stop selling ketogenic snacks online, despite quickly climbing from zero to 44 orders a day in only 3 weeks. On day 21 the first complaint came in.

I realised that if I shipped the chips on Friday after 2 pm for orders received on Thursday night, then the mailman would have picked up the parcel only on Monday. The post office was in a mall with air conditioning on during the day, but at night it would have gone warm and humid. Hence the chips became saggy and lost the characteristic

crispiness.

My products were home cooked with no nutritional table, no expiry date and no list of ingredients printed on the box. Besides being unprofessional, it could have been dangerous. So I immediately made an appointment with a central kitchen and enquired about moving my production over there. Not only my oven was at full capacity, but also I needed to be on the safe side of food regulations.

There was a process available that could have extended the shelf life of the product up to 75 days, but guess what? I needed to wait 75 days. That would have meant two and a half months with no snacks being



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USE MARKETPLACES. THERE IS NO NEED TO HAVE YOUR OWN ONLINE STORE IF YOU CAN RIDE QUICKLY ON AN EXISTING MARKETPLACE.

produced and sold. Also, the central kitchen was Halal certified, and my ingredients needed to get the Halal approval before they could be used in the kitchen.

Moreover, the kitchen would not have just cooked whatever recipe I provided, but they demanded that their chefs validated my recipe before cooking it. Lastly, the nutrition table could have been done at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

All together I calculated the cost of halting production for 2 and a half months plus all the costs involved with the processes required, and added to it the cost of hiring a person to cook and pack the chips. It summed up to approximately \$25k.

The products were sold at an average price of \$4.

I realised that I could have invested the \$25k but it would have taken me quite a while to get my money back. On top of that I would have needed to invest more money in marketing to start selling on other platforms, but the main problem was not money. It was time.

I was full time employed in my own startup and my schedule was getting really packed. There was no room for me to play around with a hobby turned to business. So I decided to drop the whole project. I therefore set all the inventory to zero and ceased operations.

Overall I have learned the

following lessons:

Lesson 1: Get things right first. I should have been in compliance with the food regulations from the very beginning. The whole experience to me was just a test, but I ended up being overwhelmed by the speed of the success.

Lesson 2: Use marketplaces. There is no need to have your own online store if you can ride quickly on an existing marketplace.

Lesson 3: Don't spread too thinly. My resources (such as time and oven space) were at 100 per cent capacity within three weeks. I should have planned bigger from the beginning.

[Stefano Virgilli is a member of the International Press Association]

New guidelines issued for promotional offers

FROM PAGE 20

A list of the number, types of prizes, their winners, gifts, location, date of draw, lot or automatic draw, invoices of purchase should also be attached with the application.

The licensee must also commit in a promotional offer that the commodity should have the validity period suitable for use, the price of the commodity or service should not exceed more than its original price and all the raffle coupons should be collected in the box specially designated for this purpose.

These rules also prohibit holding of promotional shows and offers for tobacco, its products or its derivatives, directly or indirectly. The Ministry can bar anyone who violates the provisions of these regulations from conducting promotional offers for a year, starting from the date the violation is proven.

The violator has the right to appeal against the decision to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 60 days from the date on which he was given notice of the violation, and the grievance must be decided within 30 days from the date of the application, and failure to decide during this period shall be deemed a rejection of the grievance.

The Ministry also issued decision No 185/2020 amending some provisions of the rules for sales at reduced prices, based on the Commercial Registry Law 3/74, and the Commercial Law under the Royal Decree No 55/90, and to the regulation for selling at reduced prices issued by decision No 129/2015.

Article 1 allowed commercial establishment management to submit application for the permit or licence with the aim of establishing collective discounts in the shops located in it, for a period of three days and only once.

It also makes it clear that the rebate should not be more than 30 per cent and the decision will be published in the Official Gazette. These rules will come into effect from tomorrow, Monday.



A general view of pipelines at an oil terminal is seen in Zueitina, Libya. — Reuters

Libya resumes oil exports from key terminals

TRIPOLI: Libya's National Oil Corporation announced the resumption of oil exports from two key terminals in the east of the conflict-strewn country, as rival administrations struck a ceasefire deal. "Force majeure is being lifted from Ras Lanuf and Al Sidra starting on Friday," the state oil company said in a statement.

"The National Oil Corporation has received confirmations that the foreign forces had left the ports' area which will enable it to perform its oil operations and resume exports," it said.

Force majeure refers to external unforeseen elements that prevent a

party from fulfilling a contract.

The North African state has been in chaos since a 2011 uprising that toppled and killed Moamer Kadhafi.

Libya, which sits atop Africa's largest proven crude oil reserves, has been torn between the rival powers of the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and Khalifa Haftar who backs a rival administration in the east.

The two warring factions signed a "permanent ceasefire" after five days of talks at the UN. Ras Lanuf and Al Sidra are among the conduits for much of the crude, gas and petrochemical sales that form the lifeblood of Libya's economy. — AFP

China's purchases of US farm goods at 71% of target under trade deal

WASHINGTON: China has substantially increased purchases of US farm goods and implemented 50 of 57 technical commitments aimed at lowering structural barriers to US imports since the two nations signed a trade deal in January, the US government said.

In a joint statement, the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said China had bought over \$23 billion in US agricultural goods to date, or about 71 per cent of the target set under the so-called Phase 1 deal.

"Since the Agreement entered into force eight months ago, we have seen remarkable improvements in our agricultural trade relationship with China, which will benefit our farmers and ranchers for years to come," US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said in a statement.

The deal defused a bitter trade war between the world's two largest economies, but disputes over human rights, the COVID-19 crisis and technology have strained ties between Washington and Beijing, raising doubts about



A farmer holds soybeans, that are for exports, in Wilton, Iowa. — Reuters

the prospects for deepening the agreement in a second phase.

Agriculture is one of the four areas where China pledged to increase its purchases of US goods and services.

Many experts question whether China will meet its overall targets this year given lockdowns imposed earlier this year to contain the virus.

The report showed outstanding sales of US corn to China were at an all-time high of 8.7 million tons, while US soybeans sales for

marketing year 2021 to China were at double the levels seen in 2017.

US exports of sorghum to China from January to August 2020 totalled \$617 million, up from \$561 million for the same period in 2017, it said.

US meat exports to China hit an all-time record in just the first five months of 2020, and US beef and beef products exports to China through August 2020 are already more than triple the total for 2017, it said. — Reuters

■ TREASURY HOLDINGS

Threats to Treasury market liquidity still exist, US Federal Reserve says

NEW YORK: The US Treasury market still runs the risk of abrupt freezes in liquidity like the one seen in March and April, as the COVID-19 pandemic roiled the financial system, a member of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Market Committee said.

The market shock in March, which helped drive yields across maturities to all-time lows, was "truly an exceptional event," Lorie Logan said in a speech to the Brookings-Chicago Booth Task Force on Financial Stability.

"However, while it is tempting to dismiss it as a once-in-a-lifetime shock, it is important to take time to reflect and assess if lessons can be learned that could make the Treasury market even more resilient to future shocks."

The Treasury market is the deepest and most liquid in the world. Nevertheless, at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, a large number of investors tried to sell off their Treasury holdings only to find a limited number of buyers.

The major sellers were mutual funds, which sold off more than \$200 billion of their Treasury holdings in the first quarter, foreign accounts,

The major sellers were mutual funds, which sold off more than

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billion of their Treasury holdings in the first quarter, foreign accounts, which sold off roughly \$161 billion between February and April, and hedge funds.

which sold off roughly \$161 billion between February and April, and hedge funds.

The buyers, Treasury market primary dealers, reported that customer transaction volumes increased from \$400 billion a day in February to \$650 billion a day in mid-March.

In the market for buying and selling all Treasuries save for the most recently issued, the spread



A man walks past the logo of US Federal Reserve in Washington. — Reuters

between the prices asked and those bid rose to an all-time high, nearly 30 times their normal level.

Primary dealers were prior to the selloff holding historically high volumes of Treasury debt, and were therefore unable to take on more, explained Logan. The Fed stepped in and began purchasing Treasury debt, which returned liquidity to the market.

But primary dealers currently hold even more Treasury debt than they did at the beginning of the pandemic, and could, in the event of another bout of forced selling, face

the same problem absorbing all the Treasury supply on offer.

To pay for the stimulus package passed by Congress earlier this year — among other government-funded programmes — the Treasury Department has issued a record \$15.5 trillion through the end of September. Issuance could rise in the coming months if a fresh round of stimulus funding is passed.

"Ongoing increases in the stock of Treasuries may result in greater peaks in the demand for intermediation," said Logan.

— Reuters

US judge denies bid to remove China's WeChat from US app stores

CALIFORNIA: A US judge in San Francisco rejected a Justice Department request to reverse a decision that allowed Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google to continue to offer Chinese-owned WeChat for download in US app stores.

US Magistrate Judge Laurel Beeler said the government's new evidence did not change her opinion about the Tencent app. As it has with Chinese video app TikTok, the Justice Department has argued WeChat threatens national security.

WeChat has an average of 19 million daily active users in the United States. It is popular among Chinese students, Americans living in China and some Americans who have personal or business relationships in China.

WeChat is an all-in-one mobile app that combines services similar to Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Venmo. The app is an essential part of daily life for many in China and boasts more than 1 billion users.

The Justice Department has appealed Beeler's decision permitting the continued use of the Chinese mobile app, but no ruling is likely before December. — Reuters

Oman's real GDP to contract 4 per cent in 2020 due to low oil prices, pandemic: MoF

FISCAL MEASURES: The Sultanate's public debt, which constituted 5 per cent of the GDP in 2014, increased to more than RO 17 billion in 2019, representing more than 60 per cent of the GDP.

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The low oil price environment, coupled with the effects of the pandemic, is expected to result in a 4-per cent contraction in Oman's real GDP in 2020, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Exacerbating the fiscal situation for the Sultanate was a substantial drop in government revenues totalling in excess of RO 13 billion over the past five years — a decline that prompted various international ratings agencies to lower Oman's credit ratings by two notches this year, it said.

In interactions with local media, Ministry officials attributed the sizable drop in international oil prices to the protracted effects of the pandemic, which have impacted the global demand for crude.

In addition to the decline in government revenue from the oil price slump, earnings were also hit because of Oman's commitment to the Opec+ agreement to curb



output, they noted.

Against this backdrop, the government has taken several measures to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and the oil price downturn, said the Ministry.

This includes a 10-per cent cut in the expenditures of all government departments, and a reduction in development spending and subsidies to government companies. On the other hand, the government revenues were boosted via the introduction of Selective Tax (Excise Tax) last year, as well as the partial

From 2014 to 2019, financial adjustments contributed in achieving an increase in non-oil revenues by 3.2 per cent per year as a result of the application of selective tax, amendment of the corporate tax and a modest increase in government service fees

privatisation of the state-owned electricity transmission company.

These measures, the Ministry stressed, have helped to somewhat ease the difficult fiscal situation for Oman. Nevertheless, the Sultanate is expected to continue to record

an annual deficit over the medium term of not less than RO 5 billion annually, representing at least 16 per cent of the GDP. This will result in public debt projected to reach 130 per cent of GDP in 2025.

During the past decade,

Credit Rating Scales by Agency, Long-Term

Moodys	ISDP	Fitch	Prime
Aaa	AAA	AAA	High grade
Aa1	A++	A++	
Aa2	A+	A+	
Aa3	A	A	
A1	A-	A-	Upper medium grade
A2	A-	A-	
Baa1	BAA+	BAA+	Lower medium grade
Baa2	BAA	BAA	
Baa3	BAA-	BAA-	
B1	B+	B+	Non-investment grade
B2	B	B	
B3	B-	B-	
B4	B-	B-	Highly speculative
B5	B-	B-	
Caa1	CCC+	CCC	Substantial risk
Caa2	CCC	CCC	Extremely speculative
Caa3	CCC-	CCC-	Default imminent with little prospect for recovery
C1	C	C	
C2	C-	C-	
C3	C-	C-	In default

government expenditures increased by 90 per cent during the period from 2010 to 2014, dominated by current expenditures, the majority of which constitute staff wages, allocations towards job creation, and disbursements towards salary increases during this period. This is in addition to development expenditures, most of which were for infrastructure projects.

In response to the decline in international oil prices, which began in mid-2014 and continued for the next six years, the Omani government resorted to a number of measures to alleviate the impact of the crisis.

But it avoided any steps that would adversely impact the living standards of citizens. From 2014 to 2019, financial adjustments contributed in achieving an increase in non-oil revenues by 3.2 per cent per year as a result of the application

of selective tax, amendment of the corporate tax and a modest increase in government service fees.

These measures also contributed to a 13-per cent reduction in the expenditures of government units, mostly through curbs on purchases and curtailment of contracts. Investment expenditure was cut by 25.4 per cent during this period, following a review of all new projects before their approval and inclusion in the state's general budget.

The Ministry of Finance noted that the measures were not adequate to curb the annual deficit, which cumulatively totalled over RO 20 billion from 2014 to 2019.

The deficit hit a peak of RO 3 billion in 2016.

Moreover, the public debt, which constituted 5 per cent of the GDP in 2014, increased to more than RO 17 billion in 2019. And for the first time, the public debt has now reached more than 60 per cent of the GDP.

The cost of public debt (interests on loans) jumped from about RO 35 million in 2015 to RO 684 million in 2019, resulting in the lowering of Oman's credit rating by several notches during this period.

The Sultanate's financial position also slumped from sixth in the world in 2011 to 113 in 2016 out of 114 countries ranked by the International Monetary Fund, the Ministry added.

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

HUAWEI UNVEILS THE MOST POWERFUL MATE LINE-UP EVER



Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) bolstered its product line-up with the advanced Huawei Mate 40 Series, the latest revolutionary flagship smartphones that empower users to leap further ahead. Showcasing the pinnacle of Huawei technology, the new Series reinforces Huawei's dedication to innovation and its unrelenting determination to create the best Mate ever.

The Huawei Mate 40 Series has the Mate Series DNA at its core. Over the last eight years, there have been 10 outstanding generations of Mate Series devices

and now the latest flagship smartphones take Mate to new heights with the best technology in the industry. From powerful performance to unique user interactions, everything about the Huawei Mate 40 Series has been fine-tuned to provide the most exciting smartphone experience possible.

Huawei Mate 40 Pro and Huawei Mate 40 Pro+ incorporate the world's first 5 nanometre 5G SoC, Ultra Vision Cine Camera system and the iconic Space Ring Design, as well as a smarter, more attentive digital experience.

MEETHAQ HOLDS SPECIAL HIBATI DRAW TO CELEBRATE OMANI WOMEN'S DAY



On the occasion of the Omani Women's Day, and in line with its commitment to celebrating special events of national importance, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat conducted a special Hibati cash prize draw recently. Meethaq honoured the achievements of Omani women by conducting the special draw which was livestreamed for the first time on the bank's official social media accounts on Twitter and Instagram.

They were conducted in the presence of Fahad al Gharibi, Head of National Sales, Meethaq, and Ibtisam al Yahyai, Branch Manager – 18th November Street, Meethaq. Ten lucky winners walked away with prizes of RO 1,000 each, with a total of RO 10,000 being given away on the occasion.

MAISARAH ISLAMIC BANKING SERVICES CELEBRATES OMANI WOMEN'S DAY WITH LADIES PRIZE DRAW

As a tribute

to women,

Maisarah

Islamic

Banking

Services

conducted a

special draw

on Omani

Women's

Day, observed annually on October

17. Intending to thank and show

appreciation to all women in Oman

for their contributions to the

society, the Prize Account Scheme

picked 10 women winners, one per

branch, who took home RO 1,000

each.

Nasser al Bahantah

(pictured), Chief Retail Banking

Officer at Maisarah Islamic

Banking Services, said: "We

conducted a segment prize

draw under the Maisarah Prize

Account Scheme dedicated to

women. We want to honour

women who contribute so much

to our community. Women in

Oman have made a difference in

almost every area of life and this

is our tribute to them."



LEXUS UNVEILS EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS ACROSS THE RANGE

Lexus is offering luxury automotive enthusiasts the opportunity to get closer to a Lexus and experience exceptional luxury, through a range of benefits.

Right from exceptional craftsmanship to keen attention to details, Lexus vehicles have consistently heightened customer experiences.

Owning a Lexus is much more than owning a luxury vehicle. It is delighting in an ownership experience, that is truly rewarding.

Lexus in Oman is offering exclusive benefits across the range.

They include free service 4 years or 40,000 kilometres and free first year registration. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

The Lexus range includes the LS, ES, IS, LX, GX, RX, NX, UX and RC.

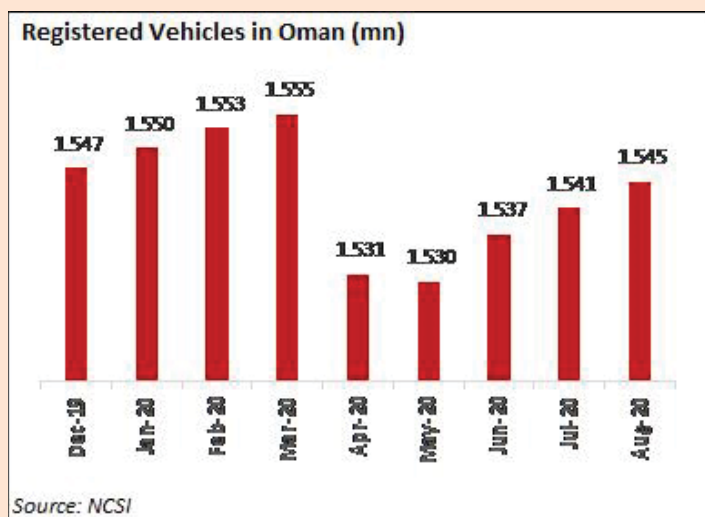
MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

MSM declines led by selling in financial sector

The MSM30 Index ended the week lower by 1.01 per cent. Financial Index was down 2.03 per cent while Industrial Index declined by 1.27 per cent. Services Index was higher by 1.08 per cent. Shariah Index was up by 0.49 per cent.

A first-of-its-kind Unemployment Insurance Scheme, due to be launched next month on the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will help encourage Omanis to strongly consider risk-free employment in the private sector. The initiative, also known as the Employment Security Scheme, seeks to initially provide a safety net to Omanis being laid off amid the ongoing economic downturn triggered by low international oil prices and aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic. In the second stage of its implementation, the scope of the scheme will be expanded to cover Omani job-seekers in general. Instituted by Royal Decree on August 17, 2020, the Employment Security Scheme was established with an initial grant of RO 10 million by His Majesty the Sultan. Further contributions will come from public and private sector employees who will be required to pitch in one per cent of their monthly income effective from January 1, 2021.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced a major decision, which will boost the real estate sector in the Sultanate. As per the decision, No 357/2020, non-Omanis can purchase units in multi-storied commercial and residential buildings under the usufruct



system. "There was a need to introduce a new product or policy to compensate for the decline that the real estate has been witnessing compared to last year," the under-secretary at the ministry said. In the first phase, the decision is applicable to certain locations in Muscat, namely Bausher, Al Amerat and Al Seeb. The places which are open for non-Omanis to buy properties are Bausher (1-3), Al Khuwair (2), Ghala Heights (1-2), Wattayah (1-2), Misfah (2), Al Amerat, Hashiya (1), Mahajj (1), Madinat al Nahdah (2-5), Seeb (South Mawaleh 5), Al Khoud (2) and Mabelah South (7).

Oman has exempted 5 per cent to some key sectors such as healthcare, education and finance from the value-added tax which will be levied over the next six months. In addition to financial services, provisions of healthcare and education and their related goods and services, other exemptions are undeveloped lands (bare lands); resale of residential properties; local passenger transport; and renting real estate for residential purposes. Import of investment

gold, silver and platinum, supplies of international goods and passenger transport and related services; supply of rescue aircrafts, boats and auxiliary ships; supply of crude oil and its oil derivatives and natural gas; import of maritime, air and land transport vehicles for transport of goods for commercial purposes as well as import of related services; and supplies for the disabled and charity organisation have been designated as zero rated.

Supply of foodstuffs, medicines and medical equipment to be determined by the decision of the President, after coordination with the competent authorities. Some of the basic foodstuff will also be exempted from 5 per cent VAT.

As per NCSI, total registered vehicles in Oman increased to 1.545 million in August 2020 compared to 1.541 million in July 2020. Private vehicles increased in registration whereby commercial vehicles witnessed a decline in registration during the month of August. Private vehicles registered stood at 78.32 per cent of the total followed by commercial vehicles at 15.6 per cent.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

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BankDhofar

New guidelines issued for promotional offers

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued Ministerial Decree 184/2020 amending certain provisions of the rules for organising promotional offers on the basis of Commercial Registry Law 3/74 and the Trade Law issued vide Royal Decree 55 / 90, and related rules issued under its decision 239/2013.

Article 1 of the ministerial decision has allowed commercial centres to hold group promotional exhibitions for the stores located there, for a period of three days and once in a year. The decision is being published in the Official Gazette and will come into effect from the next day from the date of its publication, which is tomorrow Monday.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion started receiving applications for promotional offers and discounts. It is based on the approval of the Supreme Committee in charge of finding mechanisms for dealing with developments emanating from the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). These promotional offers were stopped as part of the measures taken to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

It is worth mentioning that the rule of promotional offers issued under the Ministerial Decision 239/2013 is meant for all types of promotional offers given by commercial, industrial and services establishments, except those related events held by fast-food restaurants throughout the year and commercial centres offers and the gifts given along with commodities as part of a

SPECIAL OFFERS

KEY FEATURE: The Ministerial Decision allows shopping malls to hold group promotional exhibitions for the stores located there, for a period of three days and once in a year.

package. This is if advertisements and posters of these offers are approved by the ministry before starting them. The promotional offers at commercial centres on the occasion of festivals, or those held by commercial, industrial and service establishments on the occasion of the opening of a new branch for a period of one day are exempted from these rules on the condition that the ministry approves them.

The ministry has said that it is not allowed for commercial, industrial and service establishments to hold or advertise any promotional offers without obtaining the necessary permit from the ministry. The application for obtaining a permit or a licence to hold a promotional offer must be submitted at least 15 days before starting of the offer. The application should clearly mention its type, method, periods and places.

TURN TO PAGE 18

Oman's economy poised to grow 4 per cent in 2021-22: WB

KEY FACTORS: Inflation is likely to pick up to around 3 per cent in 2021 on the back of an uptick in domestic demand, coupled with the introduction of VAT.

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After a significant contraction in 2020, the Sultanate's economy is anticipated to make a positive recovery over the next two years, buoyed by an uptick in local consumption and the roll-out of Value-Added Tax (VAT), according to the World Bank.

The US headquartered financial institution said in its latest update that Oman's economy is expected to eke out an average four per cent of growth over the 2021-2022 timeframe, if an anticipated recovery gets under way. It partly credited this positive outlook to new natural gas volumes from the newly launched Ghazeer gas field in central Oman, which is expected to sustain strong energy demand and potentially fuel new investments as well.

"If conditions ease, growth in Oman is projected to gradually pick up to an average of 4 per cent in 2021-22, but very backloaded to 2022, partly due to a spike from the second phase of the Khazzan field," said the World Bank in its update for October 2020. "Gas field development has been critical to meet growing domestic and global demand, but it is not on a scale that is transformative in its own right," it noted however.

Earlier this month, energy major BP brought into operation the Ghazeer gas field, representing the second phase of its signature Khazzan development in Block 61.

Ghazeer's operationalisation, well ahead of its scheduled launch in



Oman plans \$2 billion international bond sale

MUSCAT: As part of the government's approved plan to finance the projected deficit for the current year 2020, Oman is returning to the global debt market with the planned sale of an international bond aimed at raising \$2 billion in two tranches with maturities of 7 years and 12 years.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Finance via ONA, the offer has been well-received by interested investors, which attests to market confidence in the government's actions and measures to achieve financial stability and sustainability.

early 2021, underscores the Omani government's efforts to ensure a sustainable supply of energy for the country's power sector, as well as its rapidly expanding industrial sector — which are key to achieving Oman's economic diversification goals.

Total production capacity from Block 61, comprising both Khazzan

and Ghazeer, is expected to rise to 1.5 billion cubic feet (bcf) of gas a day and more than 65,000 barrels a day of associated condensate.

With an estimated 10.5 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of recoverable gas resources, the block has the capacity to deliver approximately 35 per cent of Oman's total gas demand,

according to BP.

Significantly, inflation is likely to pick up to around 3 per cent in 2021, the World Bank report noted, citing an anticipated recovery in domestic demand, coupled with the introduction of VAT.

Economists estimate revenue from VAT to range from RO 300–400 million in a fiscal year, helping offset the sharp decline in oil and gas export revenues while easing the annual budget deficit.

Auguring well for Oman's economic recovery is a far-reaching fiscal strategy unveiled by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday. The five-year roadmap, dubbed the 'Medium Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020–2024)', provides a blueprint for achieving fiscal sustainability during this timeframe, notably by paring debt, prioritising spending towards strategic national objectives, conserving and boosting State reserves, and monetising government assets, among other goals.

SV Pittie Training Centre, ITQAN resumes training
First Batch of 315 Omani Women to complete Training Program soon

SV Pittie Sohar Textile, one of the leading global textile manufacturers of compact and carded yarn, has announced the commencement of its dedicated Training Centre which is set up in Sohar.

The Company together with National Training Fund and Ministry of Manpower had selected 1000 Omani for a specialized 14 month training program at their dedicated Training Centre in 2019. After the permission to reopen the Training Centre was given by the Authorities, the trainees returned with zeal to complete the remaining 6 weeks program which was put on hold due to the COVID 19 in early March. The first batch of 315 nos. Omani women are undergoing their final semester of 'On Job Training' and will become a part of the workforce by year end.

Mr Vinod Pittie, Group Chairman of SV Pittie Group in his statement mentioned "The final semester of the training program which the Women are undertaking in the plant is crucial and important. This apprenticeship is of vital experience as they are working

on the machines and the yarn produced is exported." The plant and machinery is of the latest generation and world class. Upon the successful completion and certification they will join as full time employees. The first batch is scheduled to complete the training in December 2020.

The Sohar facility in addition to Yarn manufacturing has also set up downstream facility for Knitting, Weaving and Garmenting thereby creating value addition and additional employment opportunities. The company has already pledged employment to 1,000 Omani women who are undergoing their training program currently. It will be a pride and honor to make Textile products "Made by Omani Women in Oman for the World" said Group Chairman.

SV Pittie Group aims to establish an Integrated Textile Cluster, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a global textile hub creating enormous job opportunities, empowering local entrepreneurship and creating a new industry sector.

SV Pittie Sohar Textiles

CUSTOMS DUTIES

Omani aluminium coil exports attract US anti-dumping duty

BUSINESS REPORTER
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The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has clarified that the fees imposed for aluminium coil products in the United States are anti-dumping duties and not additional customs duties.

This clarification came after messages went viral on social media regarding the United States imposing new duties on aluminium coil products. US authorities led by the Department of Commerce began an anti-dumping investigation against imports of aluminium from 18 countries, including Oman, in March 2020.

This is in accordance with the procedures of the World Trade Organization agreement. The probe would continue for 12 months and can be extended up to 18 months

so that all aspects of the issue are probed. The outcome of the probe will be issued in two phases: the first phase includes the preliminary investigation results, while the second phase covers the final investigation results. It is expected in April 2021.

US authorities announced the results of the preliminary investigation, which included imposing customs (anti-dumping) duties in the form of cash deposits. This is in accordance with the margin of dumping which was

proven against the concerned parties during the investigation.

With regard to the Sultanate's exports, the preliminary investigation proved the dumping margin of 3.53 per cent on Omani aluminium coil sales in the American markets. The deposits will be made accordingly if confirmed in the final report.

This is not the first-time anti-dumping duties are imposed against the Sultanate's exports. Previously anti-dumping duties were imposed on some other products in other countries.

These policies adopted by countries are a legitimate right in accordance with their internal legislation and under the World Trade Organization agreements. Dumping, subsidy and increase in imports are considered harmful practices in international trade.