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MUMBAI INDIANS BEAT DELHI CAPITALS TO LIFT 5TH IPL TITLE
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Mosques to reopen on November 15

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with monitoring the situation arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has decided to reopen mosques in the country on November 15. This was decided during a meeting held under the chairmanship of H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior and chairman of the committee, on Tuesday.

The committee stated that while only mosques with capacity of 400 worshippers will be allowed to open for daily prayers, Friday prayers are still not allowed. According to the decision, mosques must be opened at the time of the call to prayer and for a period not exceeding 25 minutes, which includes the call to prayer, prayer and leaving the mosque.

The committee has studied the issue of gradual reopening of mosques after their closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on proposals received by the committee from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, it decided to allow the reopening of mosques from Sunday as per the issued guidelines, the statement said.



GUIDELINES

- Don't go to mosques with symptoms of COVID-19 infection
- Face masks are mandatory
- Mosques will only be open for 25 minutes at the time of prayers
- Don't use Q'urans in mosques
- Mosque water coolers and toilets (including ablution areas) must be closed
- Worshippers must maintain a distance of no less than 1.5m during prayer
- Worshippers should bring their own prayer mats
- All worshippers must sanitise their hands regularly
- Mosque supervisors must ensure that all the above-mentioned guidelines are followed

Expat workers can leave without paying fines

Muscat - The Ministry of Labour announced on Tuesday that expatriate workers wishing to leave Oman and return to their country are allowed to do so with effect from November 15.

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has exempted employers and expatriate workers from all fees and fines registered against them for overstay as a result of expiry of resident cards and passports provided they leave the sultanate between November 15 and December 31.

According to the MoL, this is in line with a decision of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry informed that expatriate workers whose passports have expired can approach their respective embassies to renew their travel documents and then visit the MoL office in Muscat International Airport to finalise departure procedures. To expedite the process, they should carry their travel documents, tickets and certificates proving infection-free status. They should also meet the travel requirements of the country to which they are travelling.

The ministry added that employers must update their expat labour data and those who have any claims should approach the departments concerned within one week from the date of publication of 'Information On Expatriate Workers'. (The information is accessible on the ministry's website).



Seven days following the date of registration of their application, those expats wishing to leave should visit the MoL office in Muscat airport

MoL's statement stressed that expat workers who wish to leave have to make sure of the validity of their travel documents and submit an 'Application for Departure' via the ministry's website, Sanad offices or respective embassy.

Seven days following the date of registration of their application, those expats wishing to leave should visit the MoL office in Muscat International Airport seven hours prior to departure time. They should have a confirmed ticket, passport or valid travel document, as well as PCR test valid for 72 hours. ONA



RO5,000 fine, 3-year jail for unapproved chemicals: EA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has announced a fine of up to RO5,000 and jail term of up to three years for use of unapproved chemicals.

In a statement, the EA said, 'It is forbidden to import, export, transport, store or handle any chemical substance unless it is packed in special packages according to the specifications approved and recognised in the sultanate.'

The authority also confirmed that the user must get rid of chemicals waste, empty containers and violating materials at their own expense in accordance with the regulations in force.

The authority stated that anyone who violates the law on the use of unapproved chemicals will be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine not exceeding RO5,000, or one of these two punishments.

'Chemical substances that violate the law will also be confiscated and the penalty doubled for repeat violations,' the statement said.

Documentary on ardha and Omani riding skills to be released for Nov 18



(Supplied photos)



Our Correspondent
Muscat

To promote and preserve traditional practices, a group of filmmakers have come together to make a documentary on the popular horse and camel ardha. Simply called *Ardha*, it was filmed in 18 months and will be released on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day next week.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed Ali al Darwashi, director of the documentary, said filming started in January 2019 in several wilayats where ardha are popular, including Barka, Ibra, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hasan, Khabourah, Muscat, Nizwa, Saham, Sohar and Sur.

"The documentary features more than 50 riders. The 56-minute film showcases the traditional events, which are social occasions in Omani society held during religious and national celebrations. Ardha involve both men and women with both sexes riding animals and are an integral part of the culture not just in rural, but also urban areas," Darwashi said.

At ardha events, enthusiastic audiences gather around the racecourse to watch horse and camel riding shows which showcase Omani equestrian and camel riding skills. "Traditional arts such as recitation of poems also accompany the riding shows. Ardha usually start with daredevil acts, such as riding horses in full gallop standing. Ardha has been added by the Unesco to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

Darwashi informed that filming was disrupted with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sultanate to celebrate world day for tolerance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The second edition of the Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values, which calls on the world to adopt an ethical order to promote mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence, will be held for two days on November 16 and 17.

The programme will be held to mark the International Day for Tolerance, celebrated every year on November 16.

This was declared during a press conference at W Muscat hotel on Tuesday.

Spearheaded by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA), the initiative is an important step towards defining shared beliefs and bridging cultural gaps to establish peace, security and development.

Based on three pillars - reason, justice and ethics - the initiative aims at providing the necessary framework for international cooperation to empower human beings and societies.

H E Mohammed bin Said al Ma'amari, Undersecretary in MARA, said, "The main motive



(L-R) H E Mohammed bin Said al Ma'amari and H E Ali al Jabri (Muscat Daily)

of this project is to resolve the troubles that we see in the world, including poverty, human rights issues, conflicts and wars, economic crises, as well as the fierce fight between capitalism, authoritarianism and democracy. Values and ethics are fast disappearing and it is our aim to regain those."

Oman will be observing the International Day for Tolerance with various ministries, including the Ministry of Information, For-

eign Ministry and Ministry of Health, collaborating.

Speaking at the press meet, H E Ali al Jabri, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Information, said, "The draft declaration outlines three dimensions necessary to restore balance in our world today. The first dimension is to improve human life by having the basic level of dignity and rights and preserving human unity. The second dimension is based on adopting an ethical global order

that pushes people forward to uniting their obligations and efforts, protecting mankind and earth, and achieving peace, coexistence and understanding.

"Religious, cultural and ideological differences should not come in the way of finding a common ground and united values.

"The third dimension is about nurturing the spiritual values of human beings through reason, logic, philosophy and theology."

MARA launches electronic system for mosques

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to facilitate services to the community, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has launched an electronic system for mosques that will ease the procedures for building new ones, besides the upkeep of existing ones.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at MARA said, "The electronic system for mosques provides a comprehensive package of digital services related to mosques in all parts of the sultanate, which focuses on simplifying procedures. The system provides 21 services such as permit to build or rebuild mosques, upgrade and expand facilities, dig water wells, water and electricity connection, services for their maintenance and furnishing, managing mosques and their needs."

The ministry will start receiving requests online for mosque services starting January 1, 2021.

"The electronic system will provide an interactive map, which will enable the user to identify the mosque nearest his/her location, in addition to providing him/her with various statistics related to mosques and prayer rooms. The ministry has worked on counting



According to the figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, there were 15,584 mosques in all at the end of 2019

and documenting the data of all mosques, as part of the objectives of the national project to invento-

rying mosques and endowment funds."

According to the figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), there were 15,584 mosques in all at the end of 2019.

There were 3,137 mosques in Dakhliyah governorate, followed by 2,092 in North Sharqiyah, 1,955 in South Batinah, 1,903 in North Batinah, 1,883 in Dhahirah, 1,468 in Muscat, 1,435 in South Sharqiyah, 716 in Dhofar, 475 in Buraimi, 279 in Al Wusta and 241 in Musandam.



Health Minister receives US ambassador

Muscat - H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Obaid al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, on Tuesday received in his office H E Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the United States of America to Oman.

The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and addressed aspects of cooperation between the two friendly countries in the health sector.

The meeting touched upon

the establishment of a regional hub of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Oman, which would serve 23 countries of Eastern Mediterranean region along with the sultanate.

PRAYER TIMINGS					
Fajr	5.01am	Duhr	11.56am	Maghrib	5.28pm
Sunrise	6.19am	Asr	3.06pm	Isha	6.41pm

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Rare surgery at SQUH saves mother

Muscat - A medical team from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) conducted a rare surgery to save the life of a young mother. The coronary peel surgery was performed on the woman who suffered peeling of the left coronary artery and capillaries veins feeding the heart. The surgery was conducted using advanced techniques reflecting the team's expertise, which resulted in the replacement of three damaged arteries and arterioles. The operation is being documented and published as a scholarly feat to be reported in an international scientific journal to benefit specialists in heart surgery around the world.

The team that conducted the operation was headed by senior consultant cardiovascular surgeon Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, executive president of Oman Medical Specialty Board.

The team comprised Dr Adil bin Hashim al Kindi, senior consultant cardiovascular surgeon, Dr Dafron Maqdurov, senior cardiovascular surgeon, and other physicians and technicians. OMA



381 new COVID-19 cases, 6 deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday confirmed 381 new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), taking the total to 118,884. The number of deaths reported was six, while there were 362 recoveries in this period.

'The number of recoveries has increased to 109,330, while the number of deaths has reached 1,316,' an MoH statement said.

As of Tuesday, a total of 317 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 135 in ICUs.

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



Nizwa date complex eyes 30,000 tonne production

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, visited the Operations Centre of Nakheel Oman Development Company in the wilayat of Barka on Tuesday.

The centre is considered a modern site for processing and packaging dates in the sultanate with a production capacity of 6,000 tonnes per year. The visit also aimed to support the private sector, facilitate the business environment, and identify the projects implemented for the agricultural sector and the challenges of the construction and production stages.

Besides commercial production, the centre is used for manpower training and equipment testing.

The ministry confirmed that construction work continues in the Date Processing Complex in the wilayat of Nizwa, and it is expected to be completed next year. The ministry said that operations will start during the date harvest season in 2021, with an annual production capacity of 30,000 tonnes of table dates, in addition to manufacturing food products based on dates.

The Nakheel Oman Development Company recently signed a strategic financing deal worth RO10.4mn with Bank Nizwa to be used for the construction and

development of the date processing industrial complex in Nizwa.

In 2009, an announcement was made for planting 1mn date palm trees in Oman.

The Diwan of Royal Court initiated and now manages this project through the Directorate General of Million Date Palm Plantation Project.

Nakheel Oman Development Company was established by the Diwan of Royal Court represented by the Directorate General of Million Date Palm Plantation Project and Oman National Investments Development Company 'Tanmia' to invest in an array of endeavours related to date palm products and by-products.

be'ah treated 369 tonnes of COVID-19 healthcare waste

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, the healthcare waste team at be'ah is working closely with the Ministry of Health, ensuring the proper treatment of waste generated from several government and private healthcare institutions.

be'ah said it has received about 369 tonnes of healthcare waste resulting from COVID-19 from various institutional isolation centres and governmental and private healthcare institutions since the beginning of the spread of the virus to the end of September. Of this, 180 tonnes were generated from 57 institutional quarantine centres and 189 tonnes from government and private health institutions.

be'ah said it aims to ensure



safe management in dealing with the COVID-19 generated healthcare waste by collecting and transporting them in dedicated bins and trucks to be treated at be'ah's healthcare waste treatment facilities.

'Healthcare waste is treated immediately, either by incineration or by autoclave, according to accredited best global practices and standard,' be'ah said.

CASES FROM NOVEMBER 2-10	
Nov 2	418
Nov 3	376
Nov 4	319
Nov 5	320
Nov 6 to Nov 8 (Average - 324)	973
Nov 9	363
Nov 10	381

Announcement

2020 / 11 / 10

In implementation of the decisions of the Supreme Committee charged with examining the mechanism for dealing with developments resulting from the spread of coronavirus, and in order to facilitate to foreign workforce those who are wishing to return to their countries, the Ministry of Labor announces that they are allowed to leave off to their countries. Employers and foreign workers are exempted from all fees and fines arising from work permits for non-Omani manpower, provided that they leave the Sultanate for good, starting from 15/11/2020 until 31/12/2020.

Non-Omani workers who has expired passports must visit their countries' embassies in the Sultanate to renew their travel documents, then they should visit the Ministry of labor's office at Muscat International Airport to complete the departure procedures, taking their travel documents, travel tickets, and PCR certificate, as well as committing to the requierments of their destination country.

Employers sould update their data, whoever have any claims should provide evidence to the specialized authorities within a week from the date of publishing the data of foreign workers who are wishing to leave on the ministry's website.

Allah grants success

labour_OMAN

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Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

BMW SERVICE CAMPAIGN

BMW X5 & X6 - Model Year 2010 - 2013

Date of Campaign : 11/11/2020
Recall Segment : Checking the Front propeller shaft
Recall Type : Performance Action
Product Description : 2010-2013 BMW X5 & X6

Year	Make	Model	Affected vehicle VIN/Chassis range	No. of affected vehicles
2010 To 2013	BMW	X5	0E55849-0E56435	16
		X5	L393101-LY62780	312
		X6	L286811-L964457	177

Description of Defect: There is a possible interruption in the universal joint of the front driving shaft which might cause noise.

Procedure Check : Checking the flexible disc could possibly break. Normally, damage to the propeller shaft is signaled by acoustic abnormalities.

For More Information: Customers of affected vehicles may please contact AL Jenaibi Automobiles LLC for further Details/booking appointments from 11/11/2020 onwards.

Contact Details: Toll free no. 80050008 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 8.00 A.M-5.30 P.M



SHOWCASING HERITAGE

DEVELOPMENT

The sultanate's tourism sector contributes significantly to the national economy

Our Correspondent Muscat

The dramatic transformation of Oman's tourism facilities and offerings in the last 50 years is a reflection of the changes in the country. The quality of hotels and tourism amenities spread across the sultanate is indicative of the development of the country as a whole.

The tourism sector has seen remarkable achievements, the most prominent of these being the expansion of tourism facilities providing specialised services in all governorates. These developments have contributed to increasing the national income of the sultanate. In fact, the tourism sector has played a significant role in increasing the national economy according to the latest statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

NCSI figures show that there were 3.9mn hotel guests in 2019 compared to 3.6mn in 2018, a growth rate of 10.1 per cent. There were 3.8mn hotel overnight stays in 2019. Muscat accounted for 54.6 per cent of the total guests in the country, with Omanis topping guests' list and hotel nights (38.9 per cent and 32.8 per cent respectively), followed by Europeans (25.5 per cent and 28.9 per cent respectively), followed by Asian guests (16.8 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

Forts and castles – star attractions

As many as 426,500 people visited forts and castles in the country in 2019, registering an increase of 16.4 per cent compared to 2018, according to the NCSI.

Of the total visitors, 251,080 were foreign tourists, according to statistics of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, which continues to restore and maintain these historical structures that are distinguished by architectural diversity.

NCSI said in 2018, close to 366,360 people visited forts and castles, compared to 319,163 in 2017, accounting for an increase of 14.8 per cent.



NO. OF HOTELS IN 2019: 491

Muscat	South Sharqiyah	Dakhliyah	Dhofar	North Sharqiyah	North Batinah
179	65	56	33	33	32
Buraimi	South Batinah	Al Wusta	Musandam	Dhahirah	
30	30	13	10	10	

Tourism revenue

In 2019, the total revenue generated from hotel activities accounted for RO276.6mn, which was a growth of 6.5 per cent over 2018. Of that total, 47.5 per cent of the revenue generated came from five-star hotels, 25 per cent from four-star hotels, 8.7 per cent from three-star hotels, 4.4 per cent from two-star hotels and 14.3 per cent from other hotel classifications.

The total number of visitors during the Salalah tourism season was 766,800 in 2019, accounting for RO78mn in tourism spend,

In 2019, the total revenue generated from hotel activities accounted for RO276.6mn, which was a growth of 6.5 per cent over 2018. Of that total, 47.5 per cent of the revenue generated came from five-star hotels

which was 1.4 per cent more 2018 (RO 76.9mn). In 2019, Oman's total tourism revenue was RO1.3bn, of which RO684.7mn or 52.9 per cent was generated from inbound tourists. Domestic tourism accounted from the remaining RO608.7mn or 47.1 per cent.

Hotels for all pocket sizes

In 2019, there were a total 491 hotels in the country, including 26 five-star hotels, 24 four-star, 38 three-star, 55 two-star and 348 units classifieds as 'others'. This category of accommodation includes one-star hotels, un-

classified hotels, guesthouses and hotel apartments.

Since 2015, the number of five-star hotels has increased from 11 to 26, while one more four-star hotel was added to the list of 23. The number of three-star hotels grew from 27 to 38, while other accommodations categories increased from 186 to 348. These numbers represent a move towards greater diversification in the hotel sector.

Omanisation

Tourism development has created many opportunities for job seekers, according to NCSI figures that show that the number of hotel employees increased by 7.7 per cent to 20,057 in 2019 compared to 18,627 in 2018.

Of the 20,057 workers, 7,790 of them work in hotels in Muscat, constituting 38.8 of the total, while 4,070, accounting for 20.3 per cent of the total were employed in North Sharqiyah, 2,559 in Dakhliyah and 2,352 in Dhofar.

The percentage of employees in other governorates engaged in hotel activities accounted for 16.4 per cent of the total of 20,057.

Omanis constituted 31.7 per cent of the total number of employees, accounting from 6,364 workers, an increase of 10.6 per cent compared to 2018. The number of expatriate hotel workers was 13,692 or 68.3 per cent of the total number in 2019.

The annual growth rate of employees engaged in hotel activities in the past four years is 16.1 per cent.

Tourist projects currently underway

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, it is focused on the implementation of a number of programmes and initiatives of the Omani Tourism Strategy (2016-2040), including the development of 14 tourist projects across various governorates which take into account the elements of sustainability, empowerment of local communities, and enhancing their role in protecting their cultural heritage and customs for posterity.

MAFWR, Dar al Atta'a sign pact to support apiculture projects

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has signed a cooperation agreement with Dar al Atta'a to implement a honey bee breeding project for low-income and social security families.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Maryam bint Issa al Zedjali, Member of the State Council, and chairperson of Dar al Atta'a.

The project aims to empower women from low-income and social security families and those looking for work opportunities from the governorates of North Batinah, South Batinah and the wilayat of Quriyat in the Governorate of Muscat. The beneficiaries will undergo technical training at the beginning of the apiculture project.

The agreement stipulates that Dar al Atta'a will provide financial support of RO43,000 to the



beneficiaries of the project to enable them to start apiaries and to provide support in marketing and promoting products under the Min Beiti (From My home) project marketing umbrella. The

ministry will provide all possible support to achieve the goals of the project.

The project is part of Min Beiti supported by Dar al Atta'a. It aims to economically em-

power women from low-income and social security families to enter the labour market in projects in the field of producing honey which brings a financial source of income for their

families. Min Beiti implemented by Dar al Atta'a aims to support Omani women to manage their home projects with efficiency. ONA

Art symposium, expo to mark National Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A cultural, artistic and tourism project in the historic Imty village, in cooperation with the Arab Association for Arts, is organising a virtual international art symposium called 'Beyond Imty' on the occasion of Oman's 50th National Day.

The Beyond Imty symposium is being held until November 18 and a virtual art exhibition will start on November 30.

The symposium explores artistic partnership to create concepts inspired by the heritage of Imty village.

As per the organisers, the symposium is limited to small artistic works specifically for members of the association while the idea of the painting should be inspired by the features of Imty village.

The participating artists who are members of the association can view some pictures of Imty village in videos by logging onto

The Beyond Imty symposium is being held until Nov 18 and a Virtual Art Exhibition will start on Nov 30

the project account @maryams_art on Instagram.

Participants can take part with only one artwork in one of the fields - drawing, sculpture, Arabic calligraphy and formations.

The artwork size should not exceed 30x30cm.

An electronic certificate will be given to the artist in appreciation and gratitude from the management.

Artists are requested to submit a high resolution image of their art work with all the details (name, size, title and materials) before November 18 on the association's official website or through email - maryamalzadjali1@gmail.com



Omani-Dutch business meeting held

Muscat - The first investment and trade meeting of 2020 between Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands was held on Monday under the patronage of H E Aseela bint Salem al Samami, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. The virtual meeting included Omani and Dutch companies.

The meeting discussed several trade and economic issues, and cooperation in the fields of

agriculture, fisheries, logistics, machinery and pest control, among others.

During the meeting, representatives of the Omani and Dutch companies exchanged views on joint cooperation and reviewed activities of their companies. Both sides expressed keenness to improve trade exchange and create investment opportunities.

The meeting was attended by H E Sheikh Dr Abdullah bin Salem al Harthy, the sultanate's ambassador to The Hague, H E

Laetitia van Asch, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Oman, Eng Redha bin Juma al Salih, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and Salim Rabbani, chairman of the Netherlands-Middle East Business Council. It was also attended by a number CEOs and senior officials of several Omani and Dutch companies and institutions, as well as representatives of the government sector in the sultanate. ONA

Mazoon Electricity working to renew coastal area networks

Muscat - With an intention to boost efficiency, enhance reliability and expand serving capability, Mazoon Electricity Company is executing a project for renovation of the distribution networks in the coastal areas of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Sharqiyah governorate.

While Mazoon Electricity has been carrying out extensive works in the area to regenerate the network, the company has been implementing the projects by following all safety procedures. These projects are expected to add value and will contribute to enhancing its overall capacity.

These projects are in line with expectations of Oman Vision 2040 that lays down the foundations "to build national capabilities and achieve economic growth and social well-being".

At the core of Oman Vision 2040 are policies characterised by the sultanate's encouraging development story and excellent



The project is worth RO15mn (Supplied photo)

infrastructure that is providing stronger economic growth together with better sharing of the benefits of increased prosperity among communities. Mazoon Electricity aims to contribute to this progress journey.

By taking up these coastal projects, Mazoon Electricity has ensured its commitment to enhancing the reliability and quality of electricity for customers in its distribution area. The project is

being executed through different phases, for a period of five years with a total budget of over RO15mn.

Eng Majid Nasser al Busaidi, chief operations officer - distribution, Mazoon Electricity, said, "The renovation of the electrical network in the coastal areas of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Sharqiyah governorate is one of the most vital projects being implemented by Mazoon Electricity.

We will continue to invest in enhancing customer experience and improving efficiencies."

The electrical network has been affected in the coastal areas due to external factors such as high humidity, high salinity and wind loaded with salt grains. These factors have caused the deterioration of the conductors, corrosion of external steel parts and damage of LV cabinets, transformer conservators and radiators, leading to frequent power outages in these areas.

Networks particularly in between Al Ashkharah and Ras al Hadd in South Sharqiyah governorate have been suffering from severe corrosion problem at all voltage levels leading to equipment failure.

Eng Busaidi added, "Renewing the distribution networks in the coastal areas will improve customers' quality of life, enhance community services, and enable businesses to carry out activities in the respective areas."



Urgent call to donate two blood types

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) has appealed to people with O+ and A+ blood types to donate urgently due a severe shortage of blood stocks.

A statement issued by DBBS said, 'If your blood group is O+ or

A+, we appeal to you to donate blood at the Central Blood Bank (Bausher) as there is an urgent need for blood.'

People can donate blood from 8am to 8pm from Saturday to Thursday, and from 3pm to 8pm on Friday. Appointments can be made through WhatsApp (94555648), or by dialling 24591255 or 2494255.

HOTLINES

24-hour pharmacies
Scientific Pharmacy: Qurm 24566601, Ruwi 24702850
Muscat Pharmacy: Ruwi 24702542, Salalah 23291635
Al Hashar Pharmacy: Ruwi 24783334

Hospitals and Clinics
Al Hayat International Hospital, Al Ghubra- 22004000, 94267068 / 97049520
94442000 (Emergency)
Al Raffah Hospital: Muscat - 24618900/1/2/3
Sohar - 26704639/49/50
Apollo Hospital Muscat, Hamriya: 24787766
Abeer Hospital, Ruwi, Muscat 24770800, 90999334
Starcare Hospital: 24557200
Emergency number: 24558333
Dr Harub's Clinic: 24563217, 2456381, 99254940 (Emergency)
Emirates Medical Center: 24604540
KIMS Oman Hospital: 24760105
Lama Polyclinic: CBD 24799077, 24788881, 24788577, 24707566, 24799655, Al Khuwair 24478817, 24478818, Sohar 26751128
Muscat Municipality: 80077222

SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health, represented by Ibri Hospital, invite companies and individuals to participate in the two bids listed below:-

NO	SUBJECT OF BID	THROUGH	DEADLINE FOR OBTAINING BID DOCUMENTS	DATE OF SUBMISSION OF BIDS	TYPE OF COMPANIES	VALUE OF DOCUMENTS (NON REFUNDABLE)
03/2020	Providing car cleaning services in Ibri hospital	sealed envelopes	10/12/2020	Before 12:00p.m on Sunday 24/12/2020	Companies and individuals	25 OMR

- The bid documents available in (Financial Affairs Department) at Ibri hospital Tel no. 25697146 Fax no. 25692526 within the official working hours from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 pm. The documents costs shall be only as per mentioned above- non refundable.
- The envelope shall be sealed with red wax and addressed to head of Tenders Committee at Ibri hospital, number and subject of the bid shall be written there on, and nothing that would refer to the tender holder or his name.
- The Ministry of Health is unrestricted to provide any reasons for the offers that will not be accepted.

JW Marriott Muscat opens the doors to Pink Salt

Continuing to elevate luxury cuisine in the sultanate, JW Marriott Muscat has opened the doors to Pink Salt. Introducing Muscat's first dry-aging refrigerator, full-fledged oyster bar, and three signature cooking methods, the sophisticated restaurant is the ideal place for refined tastes and those keen to try new things. With a creative menu crafted by our Executive Chef Angelos, Pink Salt celebrates quality ingredients cooked to perfection.

A chic and social atmosphere is enhanced with contemporary furnishings both inside and outdoors, as well as an impressive open kitchen manned by the hotel's dedicated team of professional grill-masters. Topping off the experience, the expert sommelier is on hand to suggest the perfect pairing for every dish. Bringing together outstanding food and drink in elegant and inviting surroundings, Pink Salt is the ideal venue for social evenings, winding down with friends, and everything in between.

Giuseppe Ressa, general manager, said, "The concept of Pink Salt is founded on the principles of freshness and simplicity, incorporating the finest ingredients obtained from local farmers and suppliers and impeccable storage techniques. The caringly crafted menu supports seasonal cooking to ensure the freshest flavours all year round. Catering to grill lovers and offering multiple cooking methods, every single dish is prepared and served exactly how it's meant to be. What's more, it's all delivered



with intentional service that anticipates our guests' every need, while inspiring them to enjoy every moment with the people most important to them."

Experience upscale and refined dining with classic international delicacies like foies gras, beef tartare, and succulent dry-aged steaks. Or, savour the

freshest local seafood, including a selection of oysters prepared with flair. Meanwhile, world-class steakhouse cooking techniques such as the smoky, charcoal-cooking method of Parrilla Grill, the controlled-cooking technique of Montegue Grill, and the Jospier oven method of cooking at high temperatures for a



crispy exterior and a juicer inside are all on offer. Pink Salt is the latest addition to JW Marriott Muscat's unique and world-class venues, each designed to take its guests on a nourishing culinary journey.

Strategically located just 10 minutes' drive from Muscat International Airport, JW Marriott

Muscat offers pure luxury in the heart of the city. A romantic meal, or a social gathering, the hotel features an array crafted experiences that foster togetherness, ensuring guests leave with a greater sense of wellbeing than when they arrived. For reservations, contact +968 24920000.



Sony Middle East & Africa enhances Soundbar line-up

Sony Middle East & Africa introduced a new soundbar with the launch of the HT-G700. The new model is perfect for enjoying TV and movies with powerful and immersive sound in the comfort of your own home.

The HT-G700 is a 3.1ch Dolby Atmos and DTS:X soundbar that couples immersive cinematic surround sound with clear dialogue, so you can lose yourself completely in your favourite TV programmes and movies.

The HT-G700 includes Immersive Audio Enhancement, meaning that the HT-G700 provides an upgraded surround experience- seamlessly enveloping listeners with up to 7.1.2 channel surround sound. The HT-G700 has three front speakers, combined with Sony's signal processing, which enables sound placements that can envelop you in all directions, providing an experience that carries the user away into the world of movies and music through the latest technology.

This new signal processing is also advanced to deliver surround sound to a wider area. Furthermore, the finely tuned S-Force PRO for HT-G700 uplifts sound to fit a wider TV

screen height (over 55 inch), enabling viewers to relive moments in newfound clarity and depth. Plus, by selecting the Immersive AE (Audio Enhancement) button on the remote, the HT-G700 can also upscale even regular stereo audio to up to 7.1.2 surround sound so every TV show and movie gets the surround sound treatment.

In addition, the HT-G700 offers a dedicated centre speaker so that vocals can be heard clearly, whether it's quick-fire dialogue in your favourite TV shows or whispered lines in a Hollywood movie. It's also great for music, creating a rich, detailed listening experience.

The sound or audio mode best suited to what you're listening to can be selected directly via a button on the remote control. It allows you to get deeper into movies with Cinema mode and hear every detail of your favourite tracks in Music mode. Plus, there are additional Voice mode and Night mode settings. Voice mode tailors sound settings to accentuate speech, so you won't miss a word and Night mode optimises the sound balance, so you can hear everything clearly, even at low volume levels.

Omantel a key partner with NBC in 'Ideation Program'



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

This year's outcome is three youth projects, the first titled Musleh owned by Hamad bin Ali al Mahrouqi, a smart application to provide home maintenance services in plumbing, electrical failures, and maintenance of air conditioners by experienced and highly skilled Omani technicians. Yasmine bint Hamdan al Shaqsi came second with an innovative drive-through shopping project

that allows shopping comfortably and efficiently through the car without the need to stepping off. In the third place, the announced winner is Iman bint Mohammed al Hashimi for the idea of establishing a recruitment platform offering part-time necessary domestic and cleaning services and answering various requests to contribute to the provision of job opportunities for job seekers.

"At Omantel, we believe in the youth to do their role and bear their responsibilities in this society," said Laila al Wahaibi, manager of Corporate Social Responsibility at Omantel.

"Omantel, as part of its CSR programme, always invest in the youth and help them enhance their capabilities to maximise their contribution to the welfare of their society. The 'Ideation Program' seeks to provide young entrepreneurs with a healthy business environment that can promote and enhance their creativity. This will provide many business opportunities and open new horizons, which will generate many knowledge-based ideas. It will also help in promot-

ing digitalisation and knowledge-based society."

She added, "We also believe that when these ideas are provided with a conducive environment, they can be easily turned into viable projects that can be later developed and nurtured. We are delighted with the ideas we received in the programme this year and those evaluated and well coached. Three best ideas are chosen to work on and support to be transformed into real projects."

Rashid bin Hamad al Alawi, director of Business Development Department and National Business Centre, stressed the importance of the programme in promoting youth capabilities by hosting new creative ideas to prepare a business plan that helped ideas' owners to implement their projects.

"This will be done through several of e-training workshops using the available technology," he said.

"The 'Ideation Program' aspires to support these creative ideas and help to shape business plans that allow the participants to establish their projects."

Renault Megane RS offers outstanding driving pleasure

Renault Megane RS has been impressing car aficionados with its unparalleled driving performance and motorsport cutting-edge technology. Suitable for all enthusiasts and driven by its powerful design and focused on performance, Renault Megane RS makes no attempt to hide its motorsport pedigree, offering outstanding driving pleasure on the road and on the track.

The Megane RS features a new generation of 1.8lt turbo engine, delivering 280hp and 390Nm, thanks to the development work jointly carried out by engineers from Renault Sport Cars and Renault Sport Racing. The car comes with 6AT Electronic Dual Clutch transmission.

4Control System

Renault Megane RS takes Renault Sport's unmistakable hallmarks of agility, efficiency and driving enjoyment a step further. Merging competence, dexterity, and constancy, new Megane RS chassis is jam-packed with motorsports cutting-edge technology: 4Control System, independent pivot front-axle and suspension with hydraulic compression stops. With its finely-tuned chassis and 4Control technology, complete with four-wheel steering, the car is aiming to become - like its predecessors - a benchmark in the C-segment hot hatch market.

RS Vision

The impressive Renault Megane RS is a car built to awaken the driving instincts with four-wheel steering and dynamic styling. Sitting squarely on its 19-inch black diamond alloy wheels, the front features LED lights with RS Vi-



sion. With its many driving aids, Megane RS allies sporting performance with safety. It also features parking sensors, adaptive cruise control and emergency braking assistance.

The Megane RS benefits from the know-how of Renault Sport in adapting motorsports technologies to production sports vehicles. It features in-car equipment on par with the best in class and a range of driving aids for any type of road and any situation. 4Control technology contributes to incisive steering and optimised road holding for a precise, surefooted drive. At low speeds, the system turns the rear wheels in the opposite direction to the front wheels. At speeds of over 60kph, all four wheels turn in the same direction.

Safety first

Among its appreciated features are launch control, multi change down and braking performance.

Megane RS's safety features include front side airbags; Front and rear curtain airbags; Antilock Braking System; Emergency brake assist; Driver and passenger front airbags; Disconnectable passenger airbag; Seatbelt reminder for Driver + front passenger + 3 rear passengers; Engine electronic immobilizer; Adjustable L-shape rear headrests; Height adjustable front seatbelts; Three 3-point rear seatbelts; Blind Spot Warning; Tyre pressure monitoring; ESP with Hill Start Assist; ISOFIX child seat mounting points; Hands Free parking; Rear camera plus front and rear parking sensors; Electric parking brake.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman said, "Megane RS takes styling and technology even further to deliver truly exceptional driving enjoyment. The car has been designed by people who are passionate about cars, for people who love to drive. Its ver-

satility also makes it perfectly suited for everyday use. The 4Control system is a dream come true for every driver looking for efficiency, since it improves both the agility and the stability of the car."

Support enhancements

It is supported by visibility and lighting enhancements such as C-shape LED DRLs and 1-touch triple turn signal on door mirrors; Rear high mounted LED brake light; Full LED headlights; RS Vision: long range light beams with integrated signature; Power heated door mirrors with temperature sensor, power foldable, with puddle lamps; Manual day/night dimming room mirror.

Comfort attributes encompass 4Control four wheel-steering technology; Automatic headlamps and rain sensing wipers; Smoker accessories and rear 12V power outlet.

Badr al Samaa launches post COVID-19 package

Badr al Samaa group of hospitals launched post COVID-19 screening package on Friday. The post COVID-19 wellness programme is aimed at assessing the health of COVID-19 recovered patients. A tailor-made package is designed in consultation with their team of internists and specialists for COVID-19 recovered patients.

Badr al Jabri, director Licensing, Ministry of Health in his video presentation, said that it is very important to get your health evaluated after recovery from COVID-19 as COVID-19 can have implication on many facets of your health.

“The wellness programme designed by Badr al Samaa will help the public to address any issue on time. I am sure many people, who are infected with COVID-19 will be benefitted throughout Oman as Badr al Samaa is spread across the country.” He appreciated Badr al Samaa for their initiative and wished successful outcome of their efforts during the pandemic.

Abdul Latheef, managing director, Badr al Samaa, who spoke on the occasion, said



Badr al Samaa has been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. Badr al Samaa has treated thousands of COVID-19 patients especially the critically ill patients. Badr al Samaa has showcased professionalism, clinical competency and philan-

thropy in this fight against COVID-19. Badr al Samaa has treated hundreds of needy COVID-19 patients free of cost. Dr Mohammed, managing director, spoke on the occasion of the launch of post COVID-19 wellness programme; acknowl-

edged and appreciated various initiatives taken by the Ministry of Health and its officials in containing this pandemic. He further said that ministry's stringent preventive control measures, guidelines and protocols provided to the public

and all private healthcare providers really commendable and the ministry deserves lots of appreciation. Dr Basheer A, HoD, Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, who also heads the COVID-19 management team,

showcased a presentation on the importance of health evaluation after COVID-19 recovery. The session was interactive where Dr Basheer addressed many questions raised by the attendees.

“Badr al Samaa also played our little role by treating many people infected with COVID-19. Our team of doctors and nursing staffs throughout Oman extended maximum care and attention to many infected with COVID-19 for the last many months.”

Oman will also be celebrating it's National Day in the coming weeks and the hospital congratulated His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of the sultanate on the glorious 50th National Day of Oman. Under his able leadership, Oman continues to witness progress and has become a very vital and important nation in this region. At Badr al Samaa Group, we have always followed the vision of providing the best possible healthcare to each one of fellow citizens of the sultanate.

Sameer, chief executive officer, who opened the session

said that screening package is offered to all the citizens who recovered from COVID-19 and awareness classes will be organised to the public about the importance of controlling this pandemic and monitor their health closely.

He further indicated that care continuum programme is another new programme, in which hospital paramedics will reach out to all COVID-19 recovered patients and collect details about their health condition and give necessary advices and suggestions.

Devassy, chief marketing officer, briefed about the screening package and said that this is the first-ever initiative taken by Badr al Samaa in the private healthcare sector of Oman.

“We have made it conveniently available to the public in all branches of Badr al Samaa throughout Oman and it is available to you at an affordable rate at RO25 and it is valid till January 2021.”

Jacob, chief operating officer proposed vote of thanks and thanked the huge gathering of people who participated and made the event successful.

Riyami completes first stage of Canadian coaches programme

The national lecturer and coach Shihab al Din Ahmed al Riyami, nominated by Oman Volleyball Federation, finished the first stage of International Olympic Solidarity Program (the Canadian Coaches Program LTAD), which started on September 21 and lasted until November 5.

He attended the event 'remotely' with a total of 100 credit hours.

The first stage included many sports sciences such as sports training science, sports training physiology, energy production systems, selection of sports talents, athletic performance development, sports psychology and pedagogy for coaches, in addition to the Canadian programme for coaches.

Some 14 coaches from five continents participated in the programme. The second stage will start at the middle of this



month and will include 100 credit hours. As for the final stage, it will be in Montreal, Canada, and it includes 150 credit hours of 350 hours for all stages of the programme to obtain the International Training Diploma in the Canadian Program for coaches, which is one of the leading programmes in the world.

Ahlibank launches retiree portfolio ‘Istqrar’ for benefit of sultanate’s senior citizens

In an endeavour to constantly enhance its versatile product portfolio, ahlibank announced the launch of a new product segment – ‘Istqrar’, to cater to the financial needs of Oman's senior citizens. This product has been designed to provide financial solutions to the sultanate's people who are above the age of 60 years, offering them a host of benefits that will enable them to maintain financial security and help them fulfil their retirement dreams.

‘Istqrar’ accountholders will be able to enjoy the benefits of special rates on Fixed Deposit with monthly interest payment on Fixed Deposit, dedicated Wafra draw wherein weekly prizes of RO1,000 each for one winner will be announced in addition to the participation in all other Wafra draws including salary for life prize of RO250,000, free credit card for the first year, lower interest rates



on personal, auto and home loans. The bank will also offer short term loans at 3.99 per cent p.a., under this product segment.

Commenting on the new product offering amidst challenging market environment,

Muneer al Balushi – AGM-head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, “As circumstances with COVID-19 evolve, ahlibank continues to pursue a prudent growth strategy for the remainder of 2020 and beyond. While

industry challenges remain, the bank, driven by rapidly evolving customer expectations, continues to innovate and present new age banking products to the market. The challenges posed by the pandemic have highlighted a greater need for savings and retirement planning, given the financial insecurities that can arise anytime. ‘Istqrar’ account will help address these requirements, and aims to support the nation's senior citizens in maintaining their comfortable lifestyle, and at the same time meet their commitments.”

“Ahlibank offers multifaceted financial solutions to suit individual needs, while helping customers reduce costs and increase savings. The bank's innovative flexibility in providing banking solutions, and products that suit different categories according to variables and circumstances is an industry benchmark. Going forward too,

improving customer satisfaction and boosting revenue streams will remain a priority,” Balushi added.

Established as a full-fledged commercial bank in 2007, ahlibank is committed to enhance customer satisfaction with a comprehensive suite of services, use of modern technology and innovative solutions across its branches in Oman. All its product offering and account types are aimed at inculcating a culture of savings and developing financial stability. In line with its vision of being vibrant and an innovative centre of banking, the Bank offers top-class retail, commercial, investment banking solutions and is well-known for its customer-centricity.

Additionally, the digitisation of procedures and the highly focused team offers a range of advisors and specialist services, which makes it one of the preferred banks in the sultanate.

Low EMI on excellent mileage offering crossover Nissan Kicks

Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced a special low EMI on the compact crossover. Customers of Nissan Kicks can now avail an exceptionally low EMI rate of RO113 (terms and conditions apply). EMIs are calculated based on 3.2 per cent rate of Interest, 20 per cent down payment, six-year loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals.

Nissan Kicks has been impressing with its excellent mileage, unique styling, roominess, personal technology, smart functionality, and advanced safety features. The spectacular Nissan Kicks combines emotion and practicality by blending familiar Nissan design signatures with striking modern themes. The crossover demands attention for its dynamic styling and nimble performance and the Nissan Intelligent Mobility feature ensures seamless connectivity and advanced driver assistance features.

Nissan Kicks continues to be popular since its introduction due to its stylish design and “Excellent” Rated GSO Fuel efficiency of 17.8Km/litre. Nissan

Kicks’ Dual Tone further augmented the style quotient of the innovative, stylish, and functional crossover. The range of Dual Tone available in SV and SL grades has created a new standard of design, driving enjoyment and technology within the segment.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman said, “Nissan Kicks guarantees a top-quality driving experience with its expressive style, personal technology, intelligent safety, efficient powertrain and strong value positioning. Nissan Kicks is a great hit with all age group of car buyers who value innovation, agility and contemporary fashion trends. This is a good time for potential buyers to check out the Nissan Kicks which is available on low EMI.”

Amazing functionality

The car's advanced chassis control technology allows it to deal with the rough and tumble of the urban jungle while the drivers will love the ease of parking thanks to the Around View Monitor and the amazing functionality of the 7-inch colour touchscreen.

The newcomer is aimed



squarely at urban driving environments and combines a robust exterior and elevated driving position with compact dimensions for agile performance and manoeuvrability. The body features an advanced aerodynamic design, which optimises fuel consumption and minimises noise. Nissan Kicks is also one of the

first models to realise the concept of Nissan Intelligent Mobility, initially presented at the Geneva Auto Show in 2016.

Simplify urban driving

Nissan Intelligent Mobility uses smart, relevant technology to make the driver's life easier while

also making advances towards Nissan's long-term goal of zero emission and zero fatality motoring. Nissan Kicks targets young people who are early adopters of such technology and who appreciate and embrace the way it can both simplify urban driving and connect them more easily to what matters. The Intelligent

Mobility technology present in Kicks aims to reduce stress for drivers through innovations such as the Around View Monitor (AVM) and the Moving Object Detection system (MOD).

Using four cameras, placed at the front and rear of the car and in both door mirrors, AVM creates a bird's eye 360-degree view of the car, which can be displayed on the central monitor and used as a parking aid.

When the MOD system detects a moving object – a pedestrian, for example – a warning is sounded to alert the driver to the hazard and prevent a potential accident.

Technology-loving Nissan Kicks owners will relish the convenience and simplicity of the suite of systems that are accessible via the centrally mounted 7-inch colour touchscreen. These functions include navigation, audio, and Bluetooth phone connections.

Complementing the touchscreen, and ideally located in front of the driver, a further screen in the main cluster of dials relays information from the on-board drive computer, audio system and navigation systems, as

well as displaying warnings. Vehicle settings can be easily adjusted using the four-way selector on the steering wheel.

Advanced electronic systems

Among a host of comfort and safety technologies included in Nissan Kicks, its chassis control, supported by advanced electronic systems known as Active Trace Control, Active Ride Control and Active Engine Brake, is a truly outstanding feature.

Active Trace Control is an innovation that intervenes during driving through corners to ensure the intended trajectory is maintained by discreetly applying brakes to wheels individually. This has the effect of preventing a sudden loss of grip or stability.

Similarly, Active Ride Control, applies the brakes for a split-second after the car has encountered large undulations in the road, to reduce the “bounce” effect on the suspension. This simple, effective solution is lighter and less complex than expensive and heavy adaptive damping systems.

For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011.

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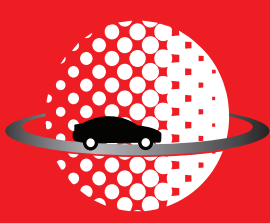
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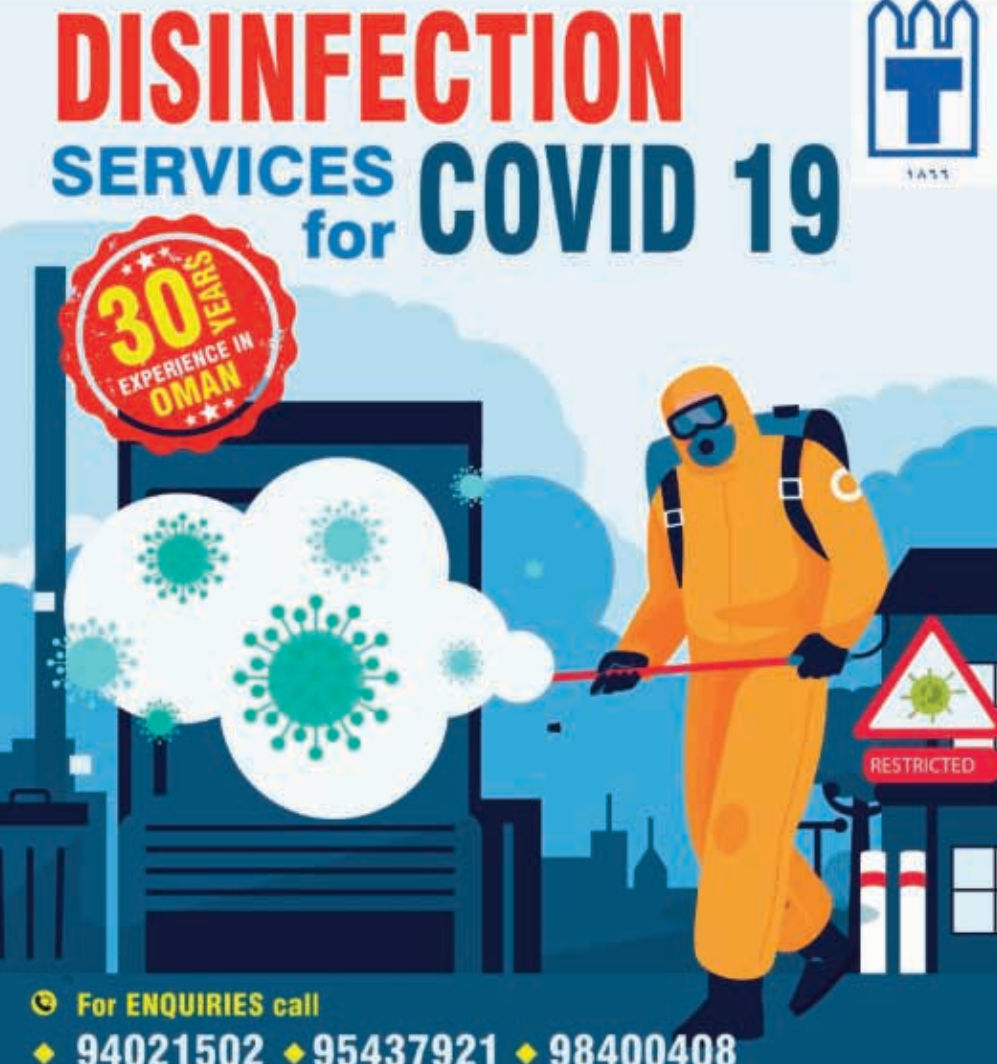
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QUICK RUN

Fati out for four months: Barcelona

Barcelona expect Ansu Fati to be out for four months after the club confirmed the 18 year old underwent surgery on his knee injury on Monday. Fati had the operation after tearing the internal meniscus of his left knee during Barca's 5-2 win over Real Betis on Saturday. He will miss the majority of the rest of the season but could return for the run-in and will hope to be fit again in time to play for Spain in next summer's European Championship.

Prandelli makes Fiorentina return

Former Italy coach Cesare Prandelli, 63, has returned to the Fiorentina bench after ten years away following the sacking of Giuseppe Iachini, the Serie A club announced on Monday. Prandelli's last spell with the 'Viola' was between 2005-2010 when the club qualified twice for the Champions League. Fiorentina sit 12th in Serie A.

Garcia withdraws from Masters

Sergio Garcia, the 2017 Masters champion, withdrew from the 84th Masters on Monday after announcing he has tested positive for COVID-19. Garcia, who took his only major title at Augusta National three years ago by defeating England's Justin Rose in a playoff, tested positive on Sunday after missing the cut at the US PGA Houston Open. The 40 year old Spaniard won his first US PGA title since the Masters last month at the Sanderson Farms Championship in Mississippi. AFP



A file photo of Italian rider Andrea Iannone during a MotoGP race

MotoGP: Iannone banned four years for doping

Lausanne, Switzerland - Italian MotoGP rider Andrea Iannone was suspended four years for an anti-doping violation on Tuesday, after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) extended his initial 18-month suspension following an appeal.

Iannone, 31, was suspended in March after testing positive for an anabolic steroid in a urine sample collected at an in-competition test at the Malaysian MotoGP in Sepang last November.

The Aprilia rider was also disqualified from the final two races of the 2019 season - in Malaysia and then Valencia - which he had not finished.

In its ruling, CAS said the Italian's suspension would be

backdated to December 17, 2019. Iannone had contested that the presence of drostanolone in his system was the result of eating contaminated meat in Malaysia.

However, CAS rejected his argument and upheld a WADA appeal seeking a four-year ban.

"The panel found that Andrea Iannone had failed to establish neither the precise type of meat he had consumed nor the origin of said meat," read a CAS statement.

It said that contrary to the original decision taken by the International Motorcycling Federation (FIM), the violation was to be "treated as intentional

for purposes of the applicable anti-doping rules, and therefore

upheld WADA's Appeal."

"The CAS award sets aside the decision rendered by the FIM International Disciplinary Court dated 31 March 2020 and imposes a four-year period of ineligibility on Andrea Iannone," it added.

Marquez will not return before 2021

Six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez, who has not raced since fracturing his arm in the season-opener, will sit out the final two events on the 2020 calendar, his Honda team announced on Tuesday.

Marquez, 27, had won the title four years in a row but has been sidelined since crashing out of the Spanish grand prix in Jerez on

July 19. The Spaniard will now focus on a return to the track in 2021.

MotoGP organisers last weekend released a provisional calendar featuring 20 races.

"As his recovery continues, Marc Marquez and the Repsol Honda Team confirm he will not participate in the remainder of the 2020 MotoGP season and aims to return to racing in 2021," Honda said in a statement.

"Working through his recovery programme and tracking the progress of his arm, Marc Marquez in conjunction with Honda, his team and multiple expert doctors, has elected to officially delay his return to action until 2021."

AFP

Neymar, Mbappe's contract talks with PSG have started, says Leonardo

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) sporting director Leonardo said on Tuesday contract negotiations with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe are underway.

The deals of the attacking pair, who cost the French champions US\$474mn in two separate transfers, are up in 2022.

Leonardo also said talks with Angel Di Maria and Juan Bernat are also ongoing.

"All the extensions we're considering, we've started to talk about. I think they'll escalate over the coming weeks," the former Brazil midfielder told the club's video channel.

He said his relationship with coach Thomas Tuchel

has improved since they made their differing opinions about the summer transfer market public during media interviews.

The Champions League runners-up have lost two of their opening three group stage matches this term, but Leonardo denied PSG had looked at replacing the German.

"That sort of thing happens, we spoke, the situation is now clear for everyone," he said.

"The truth and the facts are that internally we've never thought about changing Tuchel. We've never called anyone," he added.

AFP



Neymar (left) and Kylian Mbappe, PSG stars

Liverpool bid farewell to Melwood training ground



London, UK - Jurgen Klopp said an emotional farewell to Liverpool's historic Melwood training ground on Tuesday as the English Premier League champions prepare to move into a new headquarters.

Melwood has been the club's base for more than 70 years, with generations of Anfield players honing their craft on the training pitches. But, unable to develop the site any further, the Reds will move the first team into the new US\$66mn AXA Training Centre in Kirby, on the outskirts of Liverpool, next week.

Their new 9,200sqm training

base is a state-of-the-art facility including three pitches, an indoor sports hall, two gyms, a swimming pool, hydrotherapy and sports rehabilitation facilities.

Melwood was sold last year to a company who will build homes on the site. Klopp and his coaching staff were on site to close the gates on one of football's most famous training grounds.

"Mixed emotions, really mixed emotions. I am happy about going to Kirby and very sad about leaving Melwood, to be honest," Klopp told Liverpool's website. "So, it's strange; I didn't think properly about it so

far, but my PA is obviously already moving all my stuff out of my office so I realised step-by-step that the place already looks different. Melwood was really good, it was important - an important place in my life, so I will miss it. But Kirby will be great."

Liverpool had initially planned to move during pre-season, only for the switch to be delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Like Anfield's old 'Boot Room', Melwood has been an iconic part of the Liverpool story since it was transformed in the 1950s by former boss Bill Shankly.

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson took to Twitter to post several black-and-white pictures of himself on his last day at Melwood alongside the caption: "One last time..." Former Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler posted a poem about Melwood, including the lines: "From Heighway to Macca and Rush through to Yeats, so many legends have shone through those gates."

AFP

Ideal Technology, Aflag, Ghantoot, Sam Royals prevail

LOCAL CRICKET

Sooraj Raj took a wicket and then hit an unbeaten 35 to guide Ideal Technology to a five-wicket win over Al Rehwan in an Oman Cricket D Division T20 game at Al Amerat on Friday.

Elsewhere on Friday, Junaid Iqbal's allround show helped Aflag Group edge Sketch International by two runs in an E Division match.

Meanwhile, two E Division matches started late after the toss was delayed as the teams failed to have all the 11 players on the field.

The umpires then decided to reduce the matches to 17 overs a side. Ghantoot Group and Sam Royals emerged winners in their respective matches.

BRIEF SCORES:

D Division: Al Rehwan 171-6 (Ayyita Valappil 62, Mohammed Nihal 31; Sundar Biji 2-26, Umesh Karakoickal 2-32) lost to Ideal

Technology 174-5 in 19.1 overs (Sooraj 35 n.o., Waseem Abbas 32).

E Division (T20 League): Aflag Group 159-8 (Junaid Iqbal 51, Imran Bagdad 33 n.o.; Yusuf Patanwala 3-26, Issam Othman 3-23, Khalid Manzoor 2-23) beat Sketch International 157-9 (Saifee Ali Asger 73; Abbas Shah 3-25, Junaid Iqbal 2-11).

E Division (17 overs a side): Ghantoot Group 173-3 (Tandel Kirit 81 n.o., Arumugam Kuppan 31) beat Danmark 134-8 (Shankar Gayathri 61; Mohammed Rafeek 2-26, Saravanan Manickam 2-29, Mafas Sainulabdeen 2-30).

E Division: Sam Royals 162-4 (Pramod Kumar 62, Thankachan Sinu 41, Mohammed Shahas 39; Mohammed Siyad 2-40) beat OCT Al Nahdha 125-4 (Siyad 72; Shejeer Abdul Rahman 2-20).

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HIGH FIVE FOR MUMBAI

Skipper Rohit leads defending champions to easy win over Delhi Capitals for their fifth IPL title



Dubai, UAE - They won the toss, batted and lost. Then they lost the toss, and got blown away. They won the toss again, chased and lost. Between that third match and the final, they discovered that they play their best cricket when batting first. So, in the final on Tuesday, the Delhi Capitals won the toss and did just that. And got blown away again.

The Mumbai Indians were way too good for the second-best team of the tournament on four different occasions. With their fourth win over the Capitals, they sealed their fifth IPL title, a crown jewel for the most dominant Twenty20 empire across the cricketing world.

Mumbai had made big strides towards that title even before the start of the final. Off-spinner Jayant Yadav was to play only his second match of the tournament, to counter Capitals' left-hand hitters. Before Jayant came into play, Trent Boult took out Delhi's super hero Marcus Stoinis.

Despite a first 50 this IPL from Rishabh Pant, the Capitals finished with 156. Quinton de Kock and Rohit Sharma then killed off the chase in the powerplay.

Former Capitals boys strike

It was a perfect start for Mumbai.

Boult struck with the first ball, getting Stoinis with extra bounce and inwards movement. In Boult's second, Ajinkya Rahane tickled one down the leg side.

It was in the fourth over that Mumbai struck real gold.

Against Jayant - like Boult, not long ago a Capitals player - Shikhar Dhawan had two options: the obvious one was to let the right-hand batsman Shreyas Iyer take Jayant on, or he could try to use the field restrictions himself. He took the less obvious route, trying the big sweep, exposing his stumps and getting bowled. Capitals 22 for three in 3.3 overs.

It was left for Iyer and Pant to build the innings. Pant soon opened up. He went straight for his first six. And after that he nailed the slog-sweep.

He reached 32 off 20, and with the Capitals 75 for three in ten. The next five overs saw Capitals reach 108 for three.

Under pressure as the third seamer, Coulter-Nile was picked over short fine twice, the first of those bringing Pant his only fifty of this IPL. It is not known if Pant noticed the fine leg go back because, later in the over, he appeared to just help along a bouncer. This didn't look like an attempt to hit a six, and deep fine leg took an easy catch.

Now Mumbai tightened the screws. Iyer seemed to run out of gas. Having been 37 off 28 at one time, he scored just 28 off the next 22. The last six overs, when the Capitals needed to accelerate, they brought 48 for four.

The chase is a runaway train

Skipper Rohit and de Kock began well and the former showed intent as he hit a straight loft off R Ashwin. De Kock was fierce against his compatriot Kagiso Rabada and laid into Rabada, hitting 4, 6 and 4 in his first.

Stoinis got de Kock out with the first ball he bowled, but immediately Suryakumar Yadav hit him out of the attack with a four and a six the first two balls he faced.

The next three overs from spinners brought about a period of lull. But Rohit dashed Capitals' hopes with two sixes down the ground off Praveen Dube.

Soon he ran Suryakumar out, but kept picking the boundaries to never let the asking rate rise. Ishan Kishan was an able ally, handing over the strike at first and then making it a double-barrel attack. By the time Rohit got out, they needed just 20 off 22, a job easily accomplished.

Cricinfo

AWARDS:

IPL 2020 Most Valuable Player:

Jofra Archer

(Rajasthan Royals)

IPL 2020 Emerging Player:

Devdutt Padikkal

(Royal Challengers Bangalore)

IPL 2020 Fairplay award:

Mumbai Indians

SCOREBOARD

DELHI CAPITALS		
M Stoinis	c de Kock b Boult	0 (1)
S Dhawan	b J Yadav	15 (13)
A Rahane	c de Kock b Boult	2 (4)
S Iyer	not out	65 (50)
R Pant	c H Pandya	
	b Coulter-Nile	56 (38)
S Hetmyer	c Coulter-Nile b Boult	5 (5)
A Patel	c sub (A Roy)	
	b Coulter-Nile	9 (9)
K Rabada	run out	0 (0)
Extras	(lb 1, w 3)	4
TOTAL: 156 for seven		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-16, 3-22, 4-118, 5-137, 6-149, 7-156		
Bowling: T Boult 4-0-30-3, J Bumrah 4-0-28-0, J Yadav 4-0-25-1, N Coulter-Nile 4-0-29-2, K Pandya 3-0-30-0, K Pollard 1-0-13-0		
MUMBAI INDIANS		
Rohit Sharma	c sub (Lalit Yadav)	
	b Nortje	68 (51)
Q de Kock	c Pant b Stoinis	20 (12)
S Yadav	run out	19 (20)
I Kishan	not out	33 (19)
K Pollard	b Rabada	9 (4)
H Pandya	c Rahane b Nortje	3 (5)
K Pandya	not out	1 (1)
Extras	(lb 4)	4
TOTAL: 157 for five in 18.4 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-45, 2-90, 3-137, 4-147, 5-156		
Bowling: R Ashwin 4-0-28-0, K Rabada 3-0-32-1, A Nortje 2-4-0-25-2, M Stoinis 2-0-23-1, A Patel 4-0-16-0, P Dube 3-0-29-0		

OUTSIDE IPL

Qadir bags four as Pakistan sweep series



Pakistan's Usman Qadir (second from left) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Zimbabwe's Wesley Madhevere (not in photo)

PAKISTAN VS ZIMBABWE THIRD T20I

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - In a game so similar to the second T20I it could almost be a carbon copy, Pakistan eased to a seven-wicket win over Zimbabwe to complete a clean sweep over the visitors on Tuesday.

It was another game lit up by a delightful spell from Usman Qadir whose four for 13 ripped Zimbabwe to shreds as they

stuttered to 129, their lowest total of the series. Pakistan made short work of the chase again, getting to the target with a dismissive Khushdil Shah six with nearly five overs to go.

Zimbabwe failed to apply any pressure on a youthful top order; Babar Azam decided to push debutant Abdullah Shafique up the order, who didn't disappoint, his 33-ball 41 the top score.

Zimbabwe won the toss, and

for the fifth straight time on tour, the visitors batted first. But if the opening stand has been an Achilles heel for Chamu Chibhabha's side, the entire batting order failed to turn up on Tuesday.

It was the Qadir show once again. He coaxed a top edge from Chibhabha, who top-scored with 31, with his second delivery. Milton Shumba was beaten all ends up by a googly that simply required the wicketkeeper to whip off the bails, while Wesley Madhevere was undone by the classical leg-break.

Qadir then removed Elton Chigumbura, playing his last international game, off the final ball of his spell, whose inside edge was pounced upon by Rizwan. Donald Tiripano's spirited 28 combining with Wellington Masakadza for a 33-run eighth-wicket partnership got Zimbabwe past 120.

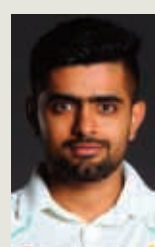
In chase, Fakhar Zaman managed just 21 but Shafique alongside Haider Ali shared a 40-run partnership to take the

SCOREBOARD		
ZIMBABWE		
B Taylor	c Shah b Wasim	8 (11)
C Chibhabha	c Ali b Qadir	31 (28)
C Ervine	c Zaman b Rauf	4 (6)
W Madhevere	c Azam b Qadir	9 (14)
R Burl	c Zaman b Wasim	1 (3)
M Shumba	st Rizwan b Qadir	11 (12)
E Chigumbura	c Rizwan b Qadir	2 (6)
DT Tiripano	run out	28 (22)
W Masakadza	c Wasim b Hasnain	11 (8)
F Akram	not out	2 (4)
B Muzarabani	not out	5 (6)
Extras	(b 4, lb 2, w 11)	17
TOTAL: 129 for nine		
Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-33, 3-55, 4-57, 5-74, 6-75, 7-87, 8-120, 9-122		
Bowling: M Hasnain 4-0-22-1, H Rauf 4-0-38-1, I Wasim 4-0-27-2, M Musa 4-0-23-0, U Qadir 4-0-13-4		
PAKISTAN		
F Zaman	c Madhevere b Masakadza	21 (24)
A Shafique	not out	41 (33)
H Ali	c Taylor b Shumba	27 (20)
K Shah	not out	36 (15)
Extras	(lb 1, w 3)	4
TOTAL: 130 for two in 15.2 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-39, 2-79		
Bowling: B Muzarabani 2-0-13-0, D Tiripano 2-0-17-0, F Akram 2-0-12-0, W Masakadza 2-0-19-1, W Madhevere 2-0-14-0, R Burl 3-0-27-0, M Shumba 2-0-28-1		

game away. Shah made a blistering cameo that drew the curtains on Zimbabwe's tour in frighteningly quick time.

Cricinfo

Azam named Pakistan Test captain



Lahore, Pakistan - Azhar Ali has been removed as Pakistan Test captain, with limited-overs skipper Babar Azam replacing him in the role.

That makes Azam, 26, the Pakistan captain across all three formats, bringing to an end Azhar's brief second stint.

In just over a year as the man at the helm in Test cricket, Azhar led Pakistan in eight Test matches, which included two wins - against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and three defeats, which led to series losses against Australia and England.

Cricinfo

Australia-India series to have crowds

Sydney, Australia - Crowd capacities for India's visit to Australia have been confirmed, ranging from 75% at the Gabba which will stage the final Test to 25% at the MCG for Boxing Day, as fans return to men's international cricket in both Australia and New Zealand for the first time since COVID-19 took hold in March.

The SCG and Canberra, which will share the limited-overs matches at the start of the tour with Sydney then hosting the New Year's Test on January 7, will both operate at 50% of their full capacity although Cricket Australia will stagger the release of tickets to enable them to adapt to any changes.

It had previously been announced that the aim was for a crowd of 25,000 at the MCG after Melbourne came out of its long COVID-19 lockdown.

The exact figures for other stadiums remain to be confirmed, but it is likely to be a similar figure at the SCG, Adelaide Oval and the Gabba.

Manuka Oval in Canberra will be able to host around 6000 for the final ODI and first T20I.

The same day as the Australia-India tour begins - November 27 - is also set to see crowds return to stadiums across the Tasman when New Zealand play West Indies, beginning with T20I series. Both Australia and New Zealand hosted winters sports with crowds since July.

To date, all men's internationals since the sport resumed have been played behind closed doors - the England home season and the Pakistan-Zimbabwe series - while IPL and CPL have also been staged without crowds.

The India squad, along with the Australia players who have been at the IPL, are due to arrive on Thursday following the IPL final. They will quarantine at a hotel at Sydney's Olympic Park and train with a bubble at Blacktown for two weeks, a period that finishes on the eve of the ODI series, which begins at the SCG.

Cricinfo



F1 announces biggest-ever 23-race calendar for 2021

Vietnamese Grand Prix dropped, first ever race to be staged in Saudi Arabia

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

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

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

on Tuesday, the race slot was left vacant.

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

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

"The plans for 2021 have involved extensive dialogue with all promoters and their local and national authorities at a time of ongoing fluidity related to the global pandemic," Formula

One said in a statement.

"As we have said before, we expect fans to return for the 2021 season and for the calendar to look similar to the originally planned 2020 season."

Saudi Arabia said last week it was holding a race for the first time, an announcement that is likely to spark fresh accusations from human rights groups that the kingdom is using high-profile sports events to 'wash' its human rights record.

The Netherlands, home to the popular Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, gets a race a year earlier than originally planned with a September 5 slot in the

coastal town of Zandvoort. It will be the first Dutch grand prix since 1985.

Vietnam signed up for F1 hoping the glamour of the sport could reflect the country's economic lift-off and reshape Hanoi's staid image, much as it has done for Singapore which will again host a race next year.

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

The fee has been picked up in full by the country's largest private conglomerate, VinGroup, which had been hoping to

dazzle with a night race.

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

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

There has been no word from Vietnamese authorities. Some spectator stands have been removed from beside the track.

AFF

Formula 1[™]

2021 SEASON CALENDAR

 March 21 AUSTRALIA (MELBOURNE)	 June 27 FRANCE (LE CASTELLET)	 October 3 SINGAPORE (MARINA BAY)
 March 28 BAHRAIN (SAKHIR)	 July 4 AUSTRIA (SPIELBERG)	 October 10 JAPAN (SUZUKA)
 April 11 CHINA (SHANGHAI)	 July 18 BRITAIN (SILVERSTONE)	 October 24 US (AUSTIN)
 April 25 TBC	 August 1 HUNGARY (HUNGARORING)	 October 31 MEXICO (MEXICO CITY)
 May 9 SPAIN (BARCELONA)*	 August 29 BELGIUM (SPA)	 November 14 BRAZIL (SAO PAULO)*
 May 23 MONACO	 September 5 NETHERLANDS (ZANDVOORT)	 November 28 SAUDI ARABIA (JEDDAH)
 June 6 AZERBAIJAN (BAKU)	 September 12 ITALY (MONZA)	 December 5 ABU DHABI (YAS MARINA)
 June 13 CANADA (MONTREAL)	 September 26 RUSSIA (SOCHI)	(*provisional pending promoter agreement)



OOC discusses preparations for OCA General Assembly in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) board on Tuesday discussed preparations for the forthcoming Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) General Assembly, which is scheduled to be held in Muscat on December 16.

The discussions were held during the sixth OOC board meeting of the year, chaired by the OOC president Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi.

Besides ensuring the smooth preparations for the OCA General Assembly, many other key issues were also touched upon, according to a press statement released by the OOC on Tuesday.

A committee headed by Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi and Sheikh Badar al Rawas, Oman Volleyball Association chairman and OOC board member, has been formed to oversee the preparations for the December 16 meeting.



Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi (centre), the OOC chairman, presides over the OOC board meeting on Tuesday

The OCA General Assembly is planned as both an in-person and online event with delegates from majority member nations expected to attend.

The meeting will be selecting the host of the 2030 Asian Games from the two-horse race between regional rivals Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The contest is

particularly intriguing due to a diplomatic crisis between the two nations.

The 2030 race is a departure from the OCA's normal custom of deciding on its preferred city and electing it unopposed.

Among the other matters deliberated upon on Tuesday was the national teams' and athletes

Premier League expected to keep three-sub rule, says CEO

London, UK - English Premier League (EPL) chief executive Richard Masters said on Tuesday that the English top-flight was expected to stick to its three-substitutes rule after pressure from Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola to allow five changes.

Liverpool manager Klopp and Manchester City boss Guardiola have been vociferous in their calls for the EPL to allow five substitutions, with fears over rising player injuries during the hectic fixture schedule. At present only three changes per match are permitted.

All the other major European leagues and the Champions League have continued with the five-sub rule. However, Masters, giving evidence to British lawmakers on the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, said clubs had voted against it twice already and there was little appetite for a change.

AFF





AMAZON FACES EU CHARGES
The European Union has charged Amazon with damaging retail competition, accusing the US company of using its size, power and data to give it an unfair advantage over smaller merchants

BUSINESS

MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,576.76
BSE Sensex	43,277.65

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	193.29
Pakistani Rs	412.84
Bangladeshi Taka	220.61
Philippine Peso	125.81
Sri Lankan Rs	479.66

*Rates as on November 10
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's SMEs see stable recovery in October

Vitality and recovery of China's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) kept improving in October as the country's relief policies generated more tangible benefits, the latest industry data showed.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, based on a survey of 3,000 SMEs, went up by 0.1 points to 87 in October and hit a new high since February, according to the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises.

The index contains multiple sub-indexes to gauge the performance and expectations of SMEs. A reading below 100 indicates dented vitality.

In October, the sub-indexes for the sentiment on the macroeconomy, operating cost, labor force, and financing were above 100, suggesting an upward trend in business.

Adidas reports Q3 virus rebound

German sports manufacturer Adidas said on Tuesday that sales and profitability recovered in the third quarter as shops reopened, alongside booming e-commerce sales, with a modest profit expected in the final quarter.

Adidas reported net profit of €546mn for the three months to September, down 15.5 per cent from €646mn in the same period of the previous year.

But this followed a damaging second quarter for the company, when it posted a €295mn loss on sales of €3.6bn. Third-quarter revenues fell 7 per cent year-on-year to €6bn, but beat expectations according to a survey.

Raysut breaks ground for \$30mn Duqm plant

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Raysut Cement Company (RCC), Oman's largest cement producer, on Tuesday held a groundbreaking ceremony to start the construction of its new US\$30mn grinding unit in Duqm.

The development of Raysut Cement's Duqm plant will complement the company's leadership in cement manufacturing adding another 1mn tonne to the overall group output, taking the total production capacity to 7.4mn tonnes per annum.

"Today's groundbreaking is a milestone for Raysut Cement on two counts. It will contribute significantly to our ambitious capacity expansion targets of 10mn tonnes by 2022 which is expected to be further scaled up to 22mn tonnes in the near future. Second, it will help us generate more employment opportunities aiding our efforts to enhance social and economic progress in Oman," said Raysut Cement's group CEO Joey Ghose.

Last year Raysut had signed a land lease and port of terminal services agreement with Port of Duqm Company as part of the development of the new grinding unit.

"The new grinding unit will add more muscle to our capabil-



Construction of the new grinding unit will raise Raysut Cement's production capacity by 1mn tonnes a year

ity to cater to the regional and global markets of Raysut Cement which continues to expand with new investments and acquisitions in Oman, Asia and East Africa," said Salim bin Ahmed al Ibrahim, acting deputy group CEO of Raysut Cement.

He said Raysut Cement's investments are calibrated to ensure that these are in locations where demand is high and locally available additives are at close proximity. "Duqm unit will help the company consolidate and strengthen its presence in Oman and the neighbouring Gulf markets."

Raysut Cement has been on a spree of expansion through acquisitions and new investments in Oman as well as globally in the past one year.

In May 2019, Raysut Cement acquired Sohar Cement Company at a value of US\$60mn. As part of its global expansion, the company had also announced developing a new greenfield 1.2mn tonnes per annum cement plant near Tbilisi in Georgia, at an investment outlay of US\$200mn last October.

Raysut Cement's latest acquisition was a majority takeover of LafargeHolcim's cement termi-

nal at Thilafushi Islands in the Maldives in October this year. Last year, the company had also announced investing US\$40mn in a new grinding unit in Berbera, Somaliland in East Africa.

"Our aim is to develop Raysut Cement into a global leader in cement manufacturing, supply and exports, and the development of Duqm is an important element in this strategy. Our expansions are dovetailed to the opportunities that exist and are upcoming in the markets we focus on, like for instance in East Africa, a booming market for the next 50 years," said Ghose.

PDO secures double win at ADIPEC Awards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

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

The company won the Social Contribution & Local Content Project of the Year Award for boosting in-country value (ICV) through local manufacturing and the Best Oil and Gas Inclusion and Diversity Company of the Year Award for sharing PDO's diversity and inclusion journey.

PDO's external affairs and value creation director Abdul Amir bin Abdul Hussein al Ajmi accepted the ICV award on behalf of PDO at the virtual ADIPEC 2020 event along with other members of the management.

"It is a huge honour to accept this prestigious ADIPEC 2020 award on behalf of everyone at PDO. ICV is a core value in all we do and an integral part of our contracting and procurement process. It all started with our vision and commitment to create value for Oman and all our stakeholders," Ajmi said in a press statement issued by PDO.

PDO has worked to boost manufacturing as part of Oman's economic diversification efforts and has expanded its efforts by collaborating with the government to enhance ICV in other sectors beyond oil and gas. To date, 57 manufacturing opportunities have been realised, and the number is still growing. Its latest contribution was in combatting COVID-19 by introducing local manufacturing of hand sanitisers and facemasks.

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

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

UAE currently doesn't plan to increase VAT

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The UAE's Ministry of Finance on Tuesday reiterated that there are no plans or decision at the moment to increase the value added tax (VAT) to more than 5 per cent in the UAE.

The UAE began applying VAT on January 1, 2018, at a basic rate of 5 per cent on most goods and services levied at each point of sale. The Ministry of Finance announced that from the beginning of January until the end of August 2020, the total VAT revenue amounted to AED11.6bn and the country's total excise tax

revenue amounted to about AED1.9bn.

Saeed Rashid al Yateem, assistant undersecretary of resource and budget sector at the Ministry of Finance, noted that 30 per cent of VAT revenues will be distributed to the federal government and 70 per cent to local government. Yateem said, "Tax revenues contribute to the continued implementation of development projects in accordance with the UAE government's plans, and to mitigating the repercussions of the COVID-19."

WAM

Oman marks 20 years of WTO membership

Muscat - Oman on Monday joined the regional and international community in celebrating 20 years of Oman's membership to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The event, held via video conferencing, explored the experience, achievements and challenges witnessed by the sultanate over the past period.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said during the session that Oman's joining of the WTO reinforced the principles on which its modern renaissance was established, including an economic



H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef

policy that is open to trade liberalisation. Over the past 20 years, Oman has maintained respect to the basics of a multilateral trade system represented by the

WTO, H E Yousef said.

He explained that the WTO membership brought about positive gains to Oman's national economy. The government

adapted itself to these obligations through the enactment of legislations conforming to WTO agreements, even as the country has been bracing for its future strategy Oman Vision 2040 where economic diversification constitutes a basic pillar, H E Yousef added.

The membership to the WTO contributed to the entry of Omani exports to markets of 164 members of the WTO.

The sultanate officially joined the WTO on November 9, 2000. Royal Decree No 112/2000, issued on November 15, 2000, ratified Oman's joining the WTO. ONA

COVID-19 vaccine results fuel hopes for return to normal

Washington, US - Hugely promising results from a coronavirus vaccine trial fuelled optimism around the world on Tuesday that humanity may be a step closer to defeating the worst pandemic in a century.

Some of the industries hit hardest by travel curbs, social distancing and lockdowns rebounded on hopes that the world may return to normal, after pharma giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech announced on Monday that their vaccine candidate was 90 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19.

A vaccine is seen as the best hope to break the cycle of deadly virus surges and severe restrictions across much of the world since COVID-19 first emerged in China late last year and unleashed devastation on the global economy.

"Bombed-out sectors such as aviation, travel, leisure, big oil...

time-warped back to 2019 with giant rallies," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst from OANDA.

Wall Street and European markets soared after the announcement, and Asian markets continued the rally on Tuesday, with worst-hit sectors such as airlines, travel, entertainment and energy getting a boost.

"We are a significant step closer to providing people around the world with a much-needed breakthrough to help bring an end to this global health crisis," Pfizer chairman Albert Bourla said.

Pfizer and BioNTech's candidate is one of more than 40, but no other has yet made similar claims about effectiveness.

The companies said they could pass the final hurdles for a US rollout later this month, and could supply up to 50mn doses globally this year and up to 1.3bn



An electronic billboard in Times Square announces 'stocks soar on vaccine hopes' in New York City on Monday (AFP)

next year.

Apart from Asia, other financial markets were calmer on Tuesday but sizeable gains continued for some stocks and oil

prices on hopes for a coronavirus vaccine.

"Monday's market surge was arguably a knee-jerk reaction to the potential game-changing

[vaccine] news with more consideration paid to the potential rewards than the risks," noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell. "That said, the vaccine

news from Pfizer was very encouraging and investors have every right to be more bullish. After all, the stock market is all about pricing in what people think might happen, not what's already happened."

The scientific community reacted positively, with top US expert Anthony Fauci describing the results as 'extraordinary' and World Health Organization boss Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailing the news as 'encouraging'.

But others pointed out that data from the ongoing trial was still needed for review, including the ages of the participants.

The Pfizer candidate uses the 'messenger RNA' method to fight the virus, but a major disadvantage of such vaccines is that they need to be stored in specialist deep freezers as opposed to refrigerator-level temperatures required for some other types of

prophylactics.

Experts have raised concerns about the capacity of poorer nations, especially in warm climates, to set up safe supply chains for such a vaccine.

The coronavirus has infected close to 51mn people worldwide, with more than 1.2mn deaths.

The United States remains the hardest-hit nation at more than 10mn cases and nearly 240,000 deaths, and the pandemic was one of the top issues for voters in the presidential election this month.

Joe Biden, who had slammed President Donald Trump's handling of the crisis, spared no time in announcing a COVID-19 task force after he was declared the winner of the election.

"We're still facing a very dark winter," he said. "The bottom line: I will spare no effort to turn this pandemic around once we're sworn in."

AFP

MSM jumps 0.82%, volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) surged 0.82 per cent to close at 3,576.76 points on Tuesday.

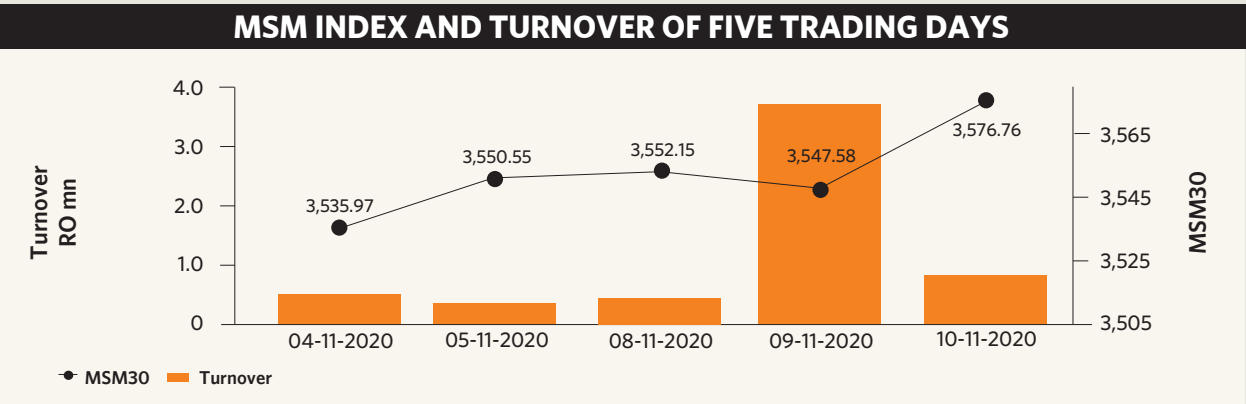
Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 78.28 per cent to RO815,474 and volumes fell 43.94 per cent to 6.89mn shares.

While services index fell 0.33 per cent, Financial and industrial indices rose 0.99 per cent and 0.6 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah Index closed up by 0.21 per cent at 516.27 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 17 companies closed up, while four companies closed down. The rest 13 traded stocks closed flat for the day.



Top gainers were Al Madina Investment (4.35 per cent), BankDhofar (2.97 per cent), Muscat Finance (2.7 per cent) and Raysut Cement (2.58 per cent). The four losers were Gulf Investment Services Holding (-3.45 per cent), Al Maha Petroleum Products (-2.47 per cent), Renaissance Services (-1.16 per cent) and National Aluminium Products (-1.12 per cent).



Saudi Arabia's rating affirmed by Fitch

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The COVID-19 implications and oil price shock have resulted in a credit rating adjustment cycle of an unprecedented scale and speed.

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday affirmed Saudi Arabia's 'A' rating, while revising the outlook to negative from stable amidst this unprecedented global shock. Despite the negative outlook, the Kingdom's ratings have demonstrated notable resilience with three consecutive rating affirmations by the three major credit rating agencies since the onset of the crisis in March 2020

Exceptional balance sheet strength and a track record of policy flexibility place Saudi Arabia in a favourable position to front these shocks.

The government has articulated a strong official response with a comprehensive and targeted stimulus, reflecting solid institutional capacity, preparedness, and policy coordination. Saudi Arabia's economic support has proven more effective vis-à-vis peers, with the contraction in 2020 expected to be less severe than the G20 median, despite a



significantly smaller support package (IMF estimates). Stimulus measures have played a critical role in cushioning the impact on the private sector and households, within the realm of fiscal prudence and ample fiscal space. The government's commitment to medium-term consolidation and fiscal sustainability remains strong, and has been reinforced by swift implementation of structural fiscal measures.

Fitch said, 'The government has taken a number of structural fiscal measures this year to limit the impact of lower oil prices and the pandemic on public fi-

nances, demonstrating its commitment to fiscal consolidation. The kingdom's consolidation drive has structurally enhanced public finances and led to a remarkable revenue expansion.'

The government is confident that Saudi Arabia will be able to successfully overcome the current crisis. Fitch confirmed that Saudi Arabia had amongst the strongest balance sheets for the rated countries, including one of the largest foreign reserves in the world. Fitch also reduced its estimates on public debt from 38 per cent of GDP in April to 35 per cent of GDP for 2020.

SPA

Britain sheds record number of jobs

London, UK - Britain's unemployment rate has jumped to 4.8 per cent as the coronavirus pandemic destroys a record number of UK jobs, official data showed on Tuesday.

The reading for the third quarter compared with an unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent for June-August, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

'The employment rate has been decreasing since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, while the unemployment rate is now rising sharply,' the ONS said.

'Redundancies have reached a record high,' it added. Since the start of the UK pandemic in March, the number of payroll employees has dived by 782,000, the data showed.

In the third quarter, or July-September period, UK redundancies reached a record high 314,000. This surpassed the quarterly record in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2009, the ONS said.

"Today's figures underline the scale of the challenge we're facing," Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement. AFP

UAE's Taqa records AED31bn revenue

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi National Energy Company (TAQA) has reported its first consolidated pro-forma financial results following its transaction with Abu Dhabi Power Corporation (ADPower) on July 1, 2020, announcing group revenues of AED30.8bn during the first nine months of 2020.

In addition to approving Taqa Group's financial results, the board of directors approved an increase in the company's foreign ownership limit of Taqa shares to 49 per cent,

effective immediately. Ownership was previously limited to UAE nationals and institutions.

The board also proposed a new dividend policy that will target a total dividend of 2.50 fils per share for 2020, growing 10 per cent annually for the following two years. As per the proposed policy, dividends for 2020 will be paid through an interim dividend of 1.50 fils per share to be paid as soon as possible and a final dividend of 1.00 fils per share to be paid after the annual general assembly in 2021.

Dividends for 2021 and 2022 will be paid quarterly. Taqa will be the first UAE listed company to pay dividends on a quarterly basis. The implementation of the policy will be subject to further regulatory and shareholder approval, which, once obtained, will allow the board to subsequently approve the payment of an interim dividend as soon as possible thereafter.

Following the company's board meeting, Mohamed Hassan al Suwaidi, chairman of Taqa Group, said, "We are excited to see Taqa embark on a journey

that is strengthened by the recent integration with ADPower. We are also pleased to start delivering on the company's new strategic imperatives, which includes delivery of sustainable shareholder returns. To that end, we will propose to our shareholders a progressive dividend policy that will see Taqa return cash to investors on a quarterly basis - a first in the UAE by a publicly listed company - and commit to growing this by 10 per cent per year over the next two years." WAM

Electrifying growth of renewables despite coronavirus pandemic

Paris, France - The coronavirus pandemic may have dealt a blow to energy demand but growth of renewables in the electric power sector has continued at a record pace, an International Energy Agency (IEA) report said on Tuesday.

Moreover, wind and solar photovoltaic (PV) panels are on course to become the top source of electricity in a few years, first surpassing natural gas and then coal.

"In 2025, renewables are set to become the largest source of electricity generation worldwide, ending coal's five decades as the top power provider," said the head of the IEA, Fatih Birol.

"By that time, renewables are expected to supply one-third of the world's electricity - and their total capacity will be twice the size of the entire power capacity of China today," he added.

The IEA's annual report on renewable energy put new capac-



ity of renewable electricity generation on track for a record of almost 200GW this year despite the disruptions caused by the coronavirus.

The electricity generated by renewables will increase by 7 per cent globally in 2020 despite a 5 per cent annual drop in global energy demand, the largest since World War II, the IEA estimates.

Furthermore, the Paris-based agency which advises advanced

nations on energy policy expects growth in renewable power to set another record in 2021.

The blistering pace of growth is due in part to strong appetite by investors. The IEA pointed out that shares in publicly-listed renewables manufacturers and project developers have outperformed the overall energy sector and most major stock market indices.

Subsidies have also played a

role and the IEA report said policymakers need to take steps to maintain the momentum as the expiration of incentives could lead to a decline in 2022.

"Renewables are resilient to the COVID-19 crisis but not to policy uncertainties," said Birol.

If incentives are maintained, however, the IEA expects growth of solar PV and wind could accelerate to 25 per cent growth in 2022.

"Governments can tackle these issues to help bring about a sustainable recovery and accelerate clean energy transitions," added Birol.

But renewables outside the electricity sector are suffering from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the IEA found.

Biofuels have been hit by the drop in transport and industrial activity as countries have put in place restrictions to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

AFP

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US President-elect Joe Biden delivers remarks at The Queen in Wilmington, Delaware on Monday (AFP)

How will Joe Biden change life for US businesses?

New York, US - President-elect Joe Biden, a champion of green energy and a higher minimum wage, could prove to be a game-changer for some US businesses. How far-reaching the new administration's reforms can be, however, will depend largely on who controls the Senate, and that outcome will not be decided until January 5 after two run-off elections in Georgia.

Trade
President Donald Trump has shaken up US trade relations, imposing steep tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of goods, sparking retaliation from trading partners and pushing prices higher. While he is likely to be more predictable than the current occupant of the White House who changes policy by tweet, Biden's trade policy stance will not necessarily change much. He has said some tariffs are justified, like those on Chinese steel, but any easing of tensions with China, a key market for many sectors, could be favourable to companies like Boeing. Biden wants to impose a tax on companies relocating jobs

overseas, to help boost US manufacturing jobs.

Corporate taxes
Many companies benefited from President Donald Trump's 2017 tax overhaul, which lowered the corporate tax rate to 21 per cent from 35 per cent. Biden has proposed raising the corporate rate to 28 per cent. The plan also calls for a minimum tax on corporations making US\$100mn or more, while Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have expressed support for a financial transaction tax, a small fee on equity and debt trading. The new administration is also expected to restore power to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), an independent agency created after the 2008 global financial crisis to defend consumers against predatory loans and credit card policies, after Trump defanged the agency.

Clean energy
The new President has pledged to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord and reach net zero emissions by 2050, including carbon-free electricity produc-

tion by 2035, phasing out coal. He has said he would not issue new permits to drill for oil and gas on state-owned land and offshore. But he would not ban the controversial technique of hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' to produce of shale oil and gas, only blocking new permits on state-owned land. Biden wants to invest US\$2tn over four years for renewable energy, clean transportation, construction and infrastructure, which also will spur green industry jobs. His plan also calls for new emissions standards for fuel-powered vehicles.

Economic stimulus
Job one is getting the COVID-19 pandemic under control. That goal got a boost on Monday with good news on a vaccine from Pfizer and BioNTech. But Biden also will have to take steps to shore up the American economy, as businesses continue to struggle and millions are jobless. Focus will turn to a new economic rescue programme to replace the US\$2.2tn CARES Act approved in March, but the size and scope will depend on

whether Republicans or Democrats control of the Senate.

Health insurance
Biden, who served as vice president under former president Barack Obama, wants to expand that administration's signature health care reform, which provided insurance to millions of Americans. Trump has been trying to gut it for the past four years despite its popularity. A key feature would be to provide a public health insurance option like Medicare, which is offered to the elderly. The new President also plans several measures to lower prescription drug prices, for example by allowing Medicare to negotiate prices or by allowing patients to order medicines abroad.

Minimum wage
Biden pledged to increase the minimum wage to US\$15 an hour, which would increase the purchasing power of low-wage workers but would eat into the profits of certain businesses, particularly in restaurants, where servers, who rely on tips, are paid less the minimum wage. AFP

UK suffers parliamentary defeat over Brexit bill

London, UK - The British government suffered a fresh Brexit setback in parliament late on Monday over controversial legislation that would have allowed it to override parts of the country's EU divorce treaty. Members of the unelected upper chamber House of Lords rejected key provisions of the Internal Market Bill, which is designed to regulate trade between all four UK nations. The government has insisted the bill provides a safety net in case talks for a new trade agreement fail, even though it admits it breaks international law in a 'very specific and limited way'.

Members of the unelected upper chamber House of Lords rejected key provisions of the Internal Market Bill on Monday

But the Lords voted overwhelmingly to remove clauses relating to Northern Ireland, which will have the UK's only land border with the EU from January 1 and will remain under some of the bloc's rules. A 'no-deal' could complicate the situation on the island and its politically sensitive border between UK-ruled Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland. Brussels has already initiated legal action over the draft law. A government spokesman said after Monday's vote that the removed clauses would be reintroduced when the bill goes back to the House of Commons, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson has a comfortable majority.

'Pause for thought'
Top Democrats in the United States, including President-elect Joe Biden, have waded in, warning a US-UK trade deal could be compromised if a 'no-deal' jeopardises a hard-won peace. An open border was a keystone of the US-brokered 1998 Good Friday Agreement that largely ended more than 30



Anti-Brexit campaigner Steve Bray holds placards outside a conference centre in central London on Monday (AFP)

years of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Monday that the election of Biden, who has Irish roots, could lead London to 'pause for thought' and ensure Irish issues are prioritised. The debate and vote came as London and Brussels met again to thrash out a post-Brexit trade deal. EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier arrived in the British capital late Sunday before another week of talks with his UK counterpart David Frost, as they scramble to find an agreement. Britain formally left the bloc in January but remains bound by most of its rules until the end of the year under the terms of its divorce.

'Robust guarantees'
Parliaments in London and Brussels need time to ratify any deal struck, leaving scant time for the two sides to find a compromise on key outstanding issues. These include establishing rules for competition between British and European companies, oversight mechanisms and fishing rights. Barnier said on Twitter the keys to unlocking the door to a deal were 'respect of EU autonomy and UK sovereignty' alongside 'robust guarantees of free and fair trade' and "stable and reciprocal access to markets and fishing opportunities". On Saturday, Johnson and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged big differences must be bridged after two weeks of 'intense' meetings ended last Wednesday. Von der Leyen vowed both negotiating teams would 'continue working hard' while Johnson said they would 'redouble efforts to reach a deal'. AFP

China inflation dips to 11-year low

Beijing, China - Falling food prices dragged China's consumer inflation to an 11-year low last month, official data showed on Tuesday. The country's consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose 0.5 per cent from a year ago, a slower pace than expected, according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data. This marked the third straight month of slower growth, and the lowest headline inflation since October 2009. But Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting told AFP, "The falling CPI inflation does not mean China is experiencing disinflation or deflation." China saw a historic contraction in economic growth in the first quarter this year, following



harsh measures to curb the coronavirus outbreak, and has since grappled with uncertainty in global demand while trying to spur domestic spending. In October, the producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, fell 2.1 per cent on-year, slightly

more than expected. Factory gate prices have been dragged by the coronavirus fallout. Dong Lijuan, a senior statistician at the NBS noted on Tuesday that prices have been hit by the 'volatility of international crude oil prices'. AFP

Philippine economy shrinks 11.5% in Q3

Manila, Philippines - The Philippine economy shrank for the third straight quarter in July-September, official data showed on Tuesday, but there were signs activity was slowly picking up as coronavirus restrictions eased and more businesses reopened. President Rodrigo Duterte's government has been gradually

loosening measures introduced in March to contain the virus after they sent the country plunging into its first recession in three decades and pushed many families deeper into poverty. Gross domestic product fell 11.5 per cent on-year in the latest quarter, the Philippine Statistics Authority said.

That was worse than the 9.6 per cent contraction forecast by economists in a Bloomberg survey. But it was smaller than the downwardly revised 16.9 per cent fall in the April-June and 0.7 per cent drop in the first three months of the year. Consumer spending fell 9.3 per cent as many people fearful

of catching the virus that has infected around 400,000 in the country avoided shopping malls and restaurants. But it was better than the 15.5 per cent plunge seen in the second quarter as the government extended operating hours and allowed more types of businesses to reopen. AFP

BioNTech: Plucky German upstart leads COVID-19 vaccine race

Berlin, Germany - The small German biotech firm BioNTech, started by a husband and wife team with Turkish roots, has never brought a vaccine to market before. But its experimental technology has now put it in pole position in the global race to develop a jab that will end the coronavirus crisis. Along with its US partner Pfizer, BioNTech announced on Monday that their vaccine has proved 90 per cent effective in ongoing Phase 3 trials, paving the way for them to apply for emergency use approval.

Cancer pioneer
Mainz-based BioNTech was co-founded in 2008 by Ugur Sahin and his wife Ozlem Tureci, both

scientists and the children of Turkish immigrants to Germany, as well as Austrian cancer expert Christoph Huber. In normal times, BioNTech and its roughly 1,500 employees are focused on developing specialised immunotherapies for cancer patients based on 'messenger RNA' (mRNA) molecules that trigger the building of proteins in cells, to stimulate the immune system. It's this same technology, which has the benefit that it can be developed more quickly than traditional vaccines, that lies at the heart of its COVID-19 shot. The vaccine would introduce synthetic mRNA into the human body to trick the immune system into producing the viral proteins needed to provoke a safe but ro-



bust offensive against the coronavirus. Sahin (54) jumped into action in January shortly after reading about the emergence of a new and deadly coronavirus in the

Chinese city of Wuhan. By the time much of the planet was in lockdown in March, BioNTech had developed 20 vaccine candidates based on mRNA technology, he told Der

Spiegel weekly. Those were eventually whittled down to a handful of the most promising options, with vaccine BNT162b2 now becoming the frontrunner.

Teaming up with Pfizer
Having struck a deal with US pharma giant Pfizer to work together to develop mRNA-based flu vaccines in 2018, teaming up on a potential coronavirus vaccine was an obvious next move for BioNTech, which has yet to bring one of its ideas to market. The two companies announced in March that they aimed to jointly develop a COVID-19 jab, 'pairing Pfizer's development, regulatory and commercial capabilities with

BioNTech's mRNA vaccine technology and expertise', they said at the time. While global headlines tend to lead with Pfizer's involvement, Sahin insisted to Spiegel, "It is our technology." The cooperation is a good fit because it allows BioNTech 'to develop and distribute a possible vaccine in the shortest time possible', he added.

Global rollout
The BNT162b2 vaccine, if approved, would require two jabs to be effective. BioNTech and Pfizer have said they expect to supply up to 50mn vaccine doses globally in 2020, and up to 1.3bn in 2021. In a clear sign that they were gearing up for mass production, BioNTech in September bought a

manufacturing site in Marburg in western Germany from Swiss pharma group Novartis, along with its 300 employees, allowing it to produce millions of additional doses each year. BioNTech already has two other production sites in Germany, while at least four Pfizer sites in the United States and Europe will join in the unprecedented effort to roll out a vaccine at record speed. The European Union and a slew of countries including the US, Japan and Britain have already placed orders for millions of doses of the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine as nations eagerly await the regulatory nods, which could see the jab become available before year-end. AFP

Russian peacekeepers head to Karabakh

Moscow-brokered ceasefire that began at 1.00am sparked celebrations in Azerbaijan but fury in Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia - Hundreds of Russian peacekeepers were deploying to Nagorno-Karabakh on Tuesday after Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a peace deal to end weeks of fierce fighting over the disputed region.

The Moscow-brokered agreement, which saw a ceasefire take effect at 1:00am local time, came after a string of Azerbaijani victories in its fight to retake the ethnic Armenian enclave.

It sparked celebrations in Azerbaijan but fury in Armenia, where protesters took to the streets to denounce the country's leadership for losses in the territory, which broke from Azerbaijan's control during a war in the early 1990s.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the deal in the early hours of Tuesday.

Pashinyan described the agreement as 'unspeakably painful for me and for our people', while Aliyev said it amounted to a 'capitulation'. The full text of the deal was released several hours later and showed clear gains for Azerbaijan.

Its forces will retain control over areas seized in the fighting, including the key town of Shusha, while Armenia agreed to a timetable to withdraw from large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A Russian force of 1,960 military personnel and 90 armoured



Armenian police officers guard a government building after protest broke out against the country's agreement to end fighting with Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, outside the government headquarters in Yerevan on Tuesday (AFP)

personnel carriers will deploy to the region as peacekeepers, for a renewable five-year mission. The Russian Defence Ministry said on Tuesday that ten Il-76 aircraft carrying the first peacekeepers and their equipment had taken off from an airfield in Russia.

Aliyev said that Turkey, a key ally, would also be involved in

peacekeeping efforts but there was no mention of it in the agreement.

Armenian Defence Ministry spokeswoman Shushan Stepanyan said on Twitter that the situation was calm in the region at 6:00am local time and that 'combat operations on the whole frontline are suspended'.

The conflict over the territory - which has simmered for decades despite international efforts to reach an accord - erupted into fresh fighting in late September. More than 1,400 people have been confirmed killed, including dozens of civilians, but the actual death toll is believed to be significantly higher.

Azerbaijani forces made steady gains over the weeks of fighting, sweeping across the southern flank of the region and eventually into its heartland.

A turning point came on Sunday when Aliyev announced that his forces had captured Shusha, the region's strategically vital second-largest town.

Shusha sits on cliffs overlooking Nagorno-Karabakh's main city Stepanakert and on the main road to Armenia, which backs the separatists.

Armenian officials had initially denied the town had been taken and the announcement of the deal caused outrage, with angry protesters storming the government headquarters in the capital Yerevan where they ransacked offices and broke windows.

Crowds also entered parlia-

ence nearly 30 years ago but the declaration has not been recognised internationally, even by Armenia, and it remains a part of Azerbaijan under international law.

Attempts at ceasefires brokered by France, Russia and the United States - who together lead the 'Minsk Group' that sought for years to end the conflict - repeatedly failed over recent weeks.

The agreement announced on

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan described the agreement as 'unspeakably painful for me and for our people', while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said it amounted to a 'capitulation'

ment and demanded Pashinyan's resignation.

Police had retaken control of both buildings on Tuesday but there were calls for demonstrations against Pashinyan, who came to power leading a wave of peaceful protests in 2018.

In the Azerbaijani capital Baku joyful residents took to the streets chanting 'Karabakh! Karabakh!' and waving Azerbaijani and Turkish flags.

"I am very happy, congratulations to the motherland, I hope these lands will be ours forever," said Elnar Hajiye, waving an Azerbaijani flag in celebration.

Karabakh declared independ-

Tuesday made no mention of the status of the Armenian-populated areas of Nagorno-Karabakh or of the format of future negotiations to settle the conflict.

Azerbaijan has been pushing for Turkey's involvement in a settlement and the new deal came after Putin spoke with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday.

'Our dear Azerbaijan achieved significant gains in the field and at the (negotiating) table. I wholeheartedly congratulate this blessed success,' Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu tweeted on Tuesday.

AFP

Turkey violated journalists' rights, Europe court rules

Strasbourg, France - The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Tuesday ruled that Turkey violated free speech and unlawful arrest protections when it detained ten journalists and managers of a newspaper critical of the government in 2016.

The ten worked for the opposition daily *Cumhuriyet*, one of the oldest newspapers in Turkey, and were arrested following a series of articles and social media posts criticising government policies.

The group was accused of promoting and disseminating propaganda on behalf of 'terrorist organisations' including the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), listed as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies.

Their arrest came just months after a failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who unleashed a crackdown on the



This file photo shows European Court of Human Rights President Robert Spano at the opening ceremony of the Turkish Justice Academy in Ankara

opposition in response.

The detained journalists had lodged various applications for release, but all were rejected by Turkish courts.

One of the group was detained for 16 months, another for over 14 months, one for nearly

nine months, and the rest for over seven months, the rights court in Strasbourg noted.

"The decisions of the domestic courts ordering the applicants' initial and continued pre-trial detention had been based on mere suspicion that did not reach the

required level of reasonableness," the judges ruled.

They found the detainees had been exercising their right to free speech, did not support or advocate the use of violence, and there was no evidence that they wished to contribute to the objectives of any terror group.

The seven judges, including one from Turkey, ruled unanimously that Ankara had violated the group's right to liberty and security under the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as their right to free speech.

The court ordered Turkey to pay damages of €16,000 to each of the applicants.

Turkey is considered one of the world's leading jailer of journalists, and is ranked 154 out of 180 countries on a Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

AFP

Life term sought for Hariri killer

The Hague, Netherlands - The Hezbollah member convicted of the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri should receive a life sentence, even though he remains at large, prosecutors said on Tuesday.

Salim Ayyash was found guilty in absentia of murder by a UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon in the Netherlands on August 18, but three other alleged members of the Shiite movement were acquitted.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah has refused to hand over the defendants in the trial over the suicide bombing that killed the Sunni billionaire politician and 21 other people.

Judges were on Tuesday hearing evidence from the prosecution, victims and the defence about what sentence 56 year old Ayyash should receive.

AFP



This file photo shows pro-democracy activists demonstrating outside the West Kowloon court in Hong Kong on November 3 (AFP)

US hits four more officials over Hong Kong freedoms

Washington, US - The United States has imposed sanctions on four more officials accused of curbing freedoms in Hong Kong, vowing accountability over China's clampdown in the city.

Edwina Lau, head of the National Security Division of the Hong Kong Police Force, was among the officials who will be barred from travelling to the US and whose US-based assets, if any, will be frozen.

"These actions underscore US resolve to hold accountable key figures that are actively eviscerating the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong and undermining Hong Kong's autonomy," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

Others hit by the latest sanctions include Li Jiangzhou, deputy director of a Hong Kong office for 'safeguarding national security'.

Beijing on Tuesday blasted the US for 'blatantly meddling in Hong Kong affairs', calling for Washington to reverse its decision. "Hong Kong affairs are China's internal affairs and no external force has the right to interfere," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

The United States has already imposed similar sanctions on Hong Kong's top leader, Carrie Lam, who is an ally of Beijing.

Lam has tried to downplay the impact but acknowledged that

US resolve to hold accountable key figures that are actively eviscerating the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong

MIKE POMPEO

she had trouble with a credit card after the sanctions.

Hong Kong acting chief executive Matthew Cheung slammed the latest US sanctions as 'absolutely unacceptable and grossly outrageous'. The US pressure comes after China forged ahead with a tough security law that bars subversion in the financial hub, which has witnessed major pro-democracy protests.

China's clampdown comes despite its promises that it would ensure a separate system for Hong Kong before Britain handed over its then-colony in 1997.

Beijing has kept chipping away at dissent in Hong Kong, where pro-democracy lawmakers threatened on Monday to resign en masse if four of their colleagues are disqualified from seeking office.

AFP

End of Ethiopia conflict coming within reach: PM

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - The end of military operations in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray is 'coming within reach', Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Tuesday, as the African Union called for an immediate halt to the fighting.

The Prime Minister sent troops and air force jets into Tigray last week in a campaign against the regional ruling party, which has been at odds with Abiy's government for months.

Tigray has been under a communications blackout ever since, making it difficult to weigh competing claims about casualties and who holds what territory.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace laureate, said operations against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were 'proceeding as planned'. 'Operations will



Members of the Amhara militia - that combat alongside federal and regional forces against northern region of Tigray - ride on a pick up truck in the city of Gondar on Sunday (AFP)

cease as soon as the criminal junta is disarmed, legitimate administration in the region restored, and fugitives

apprehended & brought to justice -- all of them rapidly coming within reach', he posted on Twitter.

But Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the African Union Commission, said the fighting must stop and urgent dialogue

was needed 'to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the country'.

"The Chairperson appeals for the immediate cessation of hostilities and calls on parties to respect human rights and ensure the protection of civilians," he said in a statement, offering the full support of the 55-member bloc for an Ethiopian-led resolution.

State media reported earlier on Tuesday that the Ethiopian military had 'completely captured' an airport about 60km from the northwest town of Humera, close to the border with Sudan and Eritrea.

But the TPLF-controlled Tigray Mass Media Agency said Humera's population was 'undertaking its normal peaceful activity'.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Top Palestinian official Saeb Erekat dies of COVID-19

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Saeb Erekat, one of the most prominent veterans of the Palestinian cause, died on Tuesday of coronavirus complications at the age of 65, in a death mourned far beyond the occupied territory.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas called the passing of 'a brother and friend .. a huge loss for Palestine and our people'.

Egypt praised Erekat, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's secretary general, as 'a steadfast fighter ... who spent his life diligently pursuing the rights of the Palestinian people'.

Erekat was a long-time architect of negotiations aspiring to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a goal he would not live to see.

A lung transplant recipient who suffered from pulmonary fibrosis, Erekat was admitted to Israel's Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital in West Jerusalem on October 18.

Given his prior respiratory conditions, his prognosis for recovery had been dim.

'He received intensive care [upon being admitted],' Hadassah said in statement.

'Unfortunately, his condition didn't improve and remained critical, and he passed away amidst multiple system failure.'

Born in Jerusalem in 1955, Erekat lived in the biblical town of Jericho in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

An academic and author with a perfect command of English, Erekat grew up in the shadow of Israel's crushing victory over its Arab neighbours in the Six-Day War of 1967, and dedicated much of his life to seeking a res-



This file photo shows Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat (right) with the then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice upon her arrival in the West Bank city of Ramallah on October 17, 2007 (AFP)

olution to the conflict.

Erekat was part of every team to negotiate with Israel since 1991, with the notable exception of the delegation that secretly hammered out the Oslo accords of 1993.

But he watched despairingly as the two-state solution that he long worked for was increasingly undermined by Israeli settlement expansion, sporadic violence, stalled peace efforts and Palestinian divisions.

When Israel and the United Arab Emirates recently agreed to normalise ties, he charged this would kill the two-state solution, strengthen 'extremists' and undermine the 'possibility of peace'.

Will remember (Erekat's) dedication to peace and the two-state solution. As long as people like Erekat reach out their hand to peace, it's our duty to negotiate.

PEACE NOW

Reaching peace 'his destiny'

Former Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni, who represented the Jewish state in peace talks with the Palestinians and had a personal relationship with Erekat, said the Palestinian negotiator 'dedicated his life to his people'.

'Reaching Peace is my destiny,' (Erekat) used to say,' Livni wrote on Twitter.

Arab-Israeli lawmaker Ayman Odeh, who heads the mainly Arab Joint List coalition, said, 'Saeb won't get to see his people freed from the occupation.'

'But generations of Palestinians will remember him as one of the giants who dedicated his life for their independence.'

Israeli anti-occupation civil society organisation Peace Now said it 'will remember (Erekat's) dedication to peace and the two-state solution'.

'As long as people like Erekat reach out their hand to peace, it's our duty to negotiate,' it said in a statement.

AFP



Lebanon's caretaker prime minister Hassan Diab addresses press at the presidential palace, in Baabda on Tuesday (AFP)

Lebanon back in lockdown over virus uptick

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

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

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

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

The health sector and other vital industries would also be allowed to operate, he said, without providing details. The airport too will remain open, Lebanese media cited the Higher Defence

Council as saying.

Lebanon, a country of 6mn people has recorded more than 95,000 COVID-19 cases, including 732 deaths since February. The number of new cases soared last week with the daily virus tally hitting unprecedented highs several days in a row.

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

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

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

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

AFP

Italy increases restrictions in five regions

Rome, Italy - The Italian government imposed tighter restrictions on another five regions on Tuesday as it tries to stem escalating new cases of coronavirus, while still resisting a nationwide lockdown.

A total of seven out of Italy's 20 regions are now so-called 'orange' zones, signifying medium-high risk, after a new decree signed by Health Minister Roberto Speranza overnight.

Abruzzo, Basilicata, Liguria, Tuscany and Umbria join Sicily and Puglia in closing bars and restaurants, while their residents are now forbidden from travelling to other regions.

Another four regions - among them three in the populous north, which includes the financial capital of Milan - are subject to even tighter 'red' restrictions, with most shops, bars and restaurants shut and residents' movements restricted.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's government is trying to avoid a repeat of the economically punishing national lockdown imposed earlier this year, when Italy became the first European country to be hit by COVID-19. Nearly 42,000 people have died so far in Italy, with more than 960,000 cases.

The regional approach was introduced last Friday, alongside a nationwide curfew requiring Italy's 60mn residents to stay indoors from 10pm to 5am.

AFP

Global death toll from coronavirus crosses 1.26mn



A French teachers' union leader speaks in front of the Pau Academic Inspectorate to denounce COVID-19 measures, in Pau on Tuesday (AFP)

Paris, France - The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,263,890 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT on Tuesday.

At least 50,907,770 cases of coronavirus have been registered. Of these, at least 33,121,400 are now considered recovered.

The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections. Many countries are

Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were France - 548 new deaths, followed by Spain with 512 (since the previous toll reported on Friday) and the US with 489

testing only symptomatic or the most serious cases.

On Monday, 6,867 new deaths and 465,514 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were France with 548 new deaths, followed by Spain with 512 (since the previous toll reported on Friday) and the

United States with 489.

The US is the worst-affected country with 238,251 deaths from 10,110,552 cases. At least 3,928,845 people have been declared recovered.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 162,628 deaths from 5,675,032 cases, India with 127,059 deaths from 8,591,730 cases,

Mexico with 95,255 deaths from 972,785 cases, and the United Kingdom with 49,063 deaths from 1,213,363 cases.

The country with the highest number of deaths compared to its population is Belgium with 114 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Peru with 106, Spain 84 and Brazil 77.

China - excluding Hong Kong and Macau - has to date declared 86,267 cases, including 4,634 deaths and 81,187 recoveries. Latin America and the Caribbean overall has 413,838 deaths from 11,673,023 cases, Europe 311,035 deaths from 13,031,112 infections.

AFP

Adverse incident compels Brazil to halt Chinese vaccine trials

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Brazil's health regulator said it had suspended clinical trials of a Chinese-developed COVID-19 vaccine after an 'adverse incident' involving a volunteer recipient, a blow for one of the most advanced vaccine candidates.

The setback for CoronaVac, developed by China's Sinovac Biotech, came on Monday as US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer said its own vaccine candidate had shown 90 per cent effectiveness - sending global markets soaring and raising hopes of an end to the pandemic.

Sinovac Biotech on Tuesday stood by its creation, saying:

"We are confident in the safety of the vaccine."

The Brazilian regulator Anvisa said it had 'ruled to interrupt the clinical study of the CoronaVac vaccine after a serious adverse incident' involving a volunteer recipient on October 29. It said it could not give details on what happened because of privacy regulations, but that such incidents included death, potentially fatal side effects, serious disability, hospitalisation, birth defects and other 'clinically significant events'.

Sinovac, however, said the incident was 'not related to the vaccine', adding it will 'continue



This file photo shows a volunteer receiving Sinovac Biotech's vaccine at the Sao Lucas Hospital, in Porto Alegre on November 9 (AFP)

to communicate with Brazil on this matter'.

The public health centre co-

ordinating the trials of the vaccine in Brazil, the Butantan Institute, said it was 'surprised' by

Anvisa's decision.

The institute 'is investigating in detail what happened', and 'is at the Brazilian regulatory agency's disposal to provide any clarification necessary on any adverse incident the clinical trials may have presented', it said.

CoronaVac has been caught up in a messy political battle in Brazil, where its most visible backer has been Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, a top opponent of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

The Sao Paulo state government said in a statement it 'regrets that it learned of the decision from the press, instead

of directly from Anvisa', and was waiting along with the Butantan Institute for more information on 'the real reasons for the suspension'.

Bolsonaro has labelled CoronaVac the vaccine from 'that other country', and pushed instead for a rival vaccine developed by Oxford University and pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca.

Last month, he shot down a plan by his own health minister to buy 46mn doses of CoronaVac, saying, 'The Brazilian people will not be anyone's guinea pig.'

AFP

BIDEN ERA

After cosy ties with Trump, Saudi Arabia faces Biden ‘pariah’ pledge

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - US President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to make Saudi Arabia a ‘pariah’ over its human rights failings, but observers say the oil-rich Arab powerhouse still holds enough leverage to deflect a major rupture in relations. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whose Shakespearean rise to power coincided with the start of Donald Trump’s presidency, has largely escaped US censure thanks to his personal ties with the administration.

But Trump’s defeat leaves the de facto ruler vulnerable to renewed scrutiny from the kingdom’s closest Western ally, which could leave him isolated amid economic challenges that imperil his reform agenda, a gridding war in neighbouring Yemen and pockets of opposition to his rule.

While Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner - who struck up a close rapport with the crown prince - shielded the heir to the Saudi throne, Biden has vowed to reassess the relationship. He has slammed what he calls Trump’s ‘dangerous blank check’ to the kingdom, pledged justice for journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s 2018 murder by Saudi agents and vowed to suspend US arms sales over the catastrophic war in Yemen.

Biden has threatened to make Saudi Arabia ‘the pariah that they are’.

Still, observers say, decades-old military and economic relations, based on cooperation over counter-terrorism and maintaining stability in oil markets, are unlikely to be upended.

Although the US has reduced its reliance on Saudi oil in recent years, the kingdom remains a key customer for American defence industry giants and military contractors.

And observers say Biden would need to work with Saudi rulers on a host of hot-button issues in the tinderbox region, from countering the regional influence of common foe Iran to



This file photo shows US President Donald Trump (right) with Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Oval Office of the White House, in Washington, DC on March 20, 2018 (AFP)

A Biden administration will no doubt take a harder line on human rights than its predecessor, but it is unlikely to completely abandon the Saudi-American partnership

DAVID RUNDELL

fighting a newly resurgent Islamic State group.

“A Biden administration will no doubt take a harder line on human rights than its predecessor, but it is unlikely to completely abandon the Saudi-American partnership,” David Rundell, former chief of mission at the US Embassy in Riyadh, told AFP.

“While the United States has become more energy independent due to fracking, important American allies like Japan and

Korea have not,” added Rundell, author of the book *Vision or Mirage, Saudi Arabia at the Crossroads*.

Policy or rhetoric?

Riyadh appears wary of Biden’s pledge to revive a 2015 nuclear pact between world powers and Iran, a controversial deal that was negotiated when he was vice president under Barack Obama.

The landmark agreement was shredded by Trump, who

chose to go to Riyadh on his first overseas visit as president in 2017, when Saudi rulers lavished him with gifts, a sword dance and a glowing orb.

To ensure the deal’s success this time, analysts say Biden would have to seek consensus among regional states, including Saudi Arabia, which are traditionally opposed to diplomacy with Tehran.

“Nobody expects Biden to travel first to Riyadh and perform a sword dance, but he needs Saudi for any regional buy-in of a new Iran deal, in counter-terrorism support, Israel-Palestine, oil market stability,” said Saudi author and analyst Ali Shihabi.

Biden has separately expressed support for recent Arab-Israeli normalisation ac-

cords with Middle East nations, including Bahrain, which is unlikely to have signed up without a nod from Riyadh.

Observers say Prince Mohammed could use Saudi Arabia’s possible future normalisation with Israel - the biggest diplomatic prize for the Jewish state - as a negotiating tool.

“Many in Riyadh believe that a normalisation deal with Israel would put Prince Mohammed in a much better position with a Biden administration,” Cinzia Bianco, a research fellow at the European Council for International Relations, told AFP.

“Everything depends on how hostile a Biden administration would actually be, in policy, not in rhetoric, towards Saudi Arabia from January onwards.”

‘Make him accountable’

Saudi observers dismiss Biden’s campaign speeches about the kingdom as bluster, pointing out that Trump also struck a hostile note in his 2016 campaign before warming up to its rulers.

Biden’s pledge to suspend Saudi arms sales runs contrary to his past record.

When he was vice president, the US offered the kingdom’s military not just logistical and intelligence support, but also weapons worth over US\$115bn, more than any other previous administration, according to 2016 data from the US-based Security Assistance Monitor.

Even so, relatives of Saudi prisoners of conscience are pinning their hopes on Biden. They expect he will place stronger

conditions on US support, such as demanding their unconditional release.

Prince Mohammed has overseen a sweeping crackdown on dissent, with dozens of activists, journalists, clerics and even royal family members detained in recent years.

“We are hoping that (Biden) will make human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia a priority, which has been neglected by the current Trump administration,” said Walid Alhathloul, the brother of activist Loujain Alhathloul, who has been jailed for over two years and is currently on hunger strike.

“It’s time for the US to restore the international order and to make (Prince Mohammed) accountable,” he told AFP. AFP

Biden may ‘change course’ on Iran, but obstacles abound

Tehran, Iran - Joe Biden has promised a change in US policy on Iran, but the President-elect’s room for manoeuvre with the Islamic republic is narrow, and time is running out.

While outgoing US President Donald Trump has declared Tehran his arch-foe and sought to isolate it globally, Biden has suggested to offer it a ‘credible path back to diplomacy’.

Unlike four years ago, the Iran issue, centred on fears it is seeking a nuclear bomb, was largely absent from campaigning for the 2020 US presidential election, and Biden’s proposals on the subject are still rather vague.

His task of trying to reconnect with Tehran promises to be difficult as the confrontational approach under Trump has seen Iran’s distrust of the Americans intensify.

Sworn enemies for more than 40 years, the US and Iran have twice come to the brink of war since mid-2019 amid soaring tensions over a landmark deal on Iran’s nuclear programme agreed in 2015.

Trump unilaterally withdrew



A woman looks at a copy of Iranian newspaper Shargh featuring the 2020 US general election results at a news stand in Tehran on Sunday (AFP)

the United States from the pact in May 2018 and launched a ‘maximum pressure’ campaign against Iran with sanctions that plunged its economy into a

deep recession. But Trump failed to achieve his ultimate goal of forcing Tehran to negotiate a ‘better deal’, leaving the way open for Iran to boast of

the ‘resistance’ of its people to the American pressure.

‘We urgently need to change course,’ Biden wrote in September in an opinion piece

that described Trump’s Iran policy as a ‘dangerous failure’ which in his view isolated the US and brought Iran ‘closer to a nuclear bomb’.

In an op-ed published by CNN, Biden wrote that he would ‘offer Tehran a credible path back to diplomacy’ in order to bring US back into the nuclear deal

‘Credible path’

In the 2015 deal with world powers Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, Iran agreed to curb its controversial nuclear programme in exchange for a relaxation of international sanctions.

But in response to the reimposed US sanctions, the Islamic republic has since May 2019 reduced most of its key commitments to the accord.

The International Atomic Energy Agency says Iran has considerably stepped up its production of low-enriched

uranium, but without increasing it to a degree that allows military use.

In the op-ed published by CNN, Biden wrote that he would ‘offer Tehran a credible path back to diplomacy’ in order to bring Washington back into the 2015 nuclear deal.

But the US President-elect also vowed to be ‘tough on Iran’, and said that his country’s return would hinge on the Islamic republic coming back to ‘strict compliance with the nuclear deal’.

While Iran insists the United States can return to the pact, it says the Americans must first make amendments and lift all sanctions reimposed or instigated by the Trump administration.

Tehran says that this is the condition for its return to commitments under the nuclear accord.

In recent weeks, it has even reiterated that in order to re-enter the agreement, Washington should first compensate Iran for the damage caused by the US withdrawal and sanctions.

AFP

DIWALI DINNER



It is customary to have pure vegetarian meals for Diwali, whether for lunch or supper. And elaborate planning often goes into creating a spread that's varied as well as novel, though sweet dishes form an important part of the meal. So if you haven't yet planned your Diwali dinner, don't just decide to go with the flow with regular fare, and get away with it. This year, in view of restrictions surrounding the pandemic, the focus is more on strengthening relationships within the family. And food can go that extra mile in fostering stronger bonds.

When planning your menu, make sure that the main course alone is not the highlight of the meal. Give good thought to starters and desserts, too. It's good to begin with shots of flavoured almond milk, followed by starters like Paneer skewers/Chatpata Aloo or get more creative by making dishes like Rajma Kebabs or Cauliflower Manchurian. Your main course can include the must-have steamed rice/rotis plus gravies like Dal Tadka or Kadi-pakode, but you must also include some interesting, vegetable dishes like stuffed capsicum/brinjals, and pulaos garnished with dryfruits. A good way to finish it, before your round of sweets arrive, is to let the food sink in with a Hot Fruit Punch. Here are some interesting options to experiment, enchant, and enjoy:

PANEER SKEWERS

INGREDIENTS

- 500gm paneer (block)
- 1/2 cup curds
- 1tsp red chilli powder
- 1/2tsp turmeric powder
- 1tsp garam masala
- 1tsp ginger-garlic paste
- 2tsp lemon juice
- Salt, to taste
- Oil for grilling
- 2 cups chopped capsicum, onions (large pieces)
- 8-10 bamboo skewers

METHOD

Cut the paneer into 2cm thick, large chunks. Whip the curd and add the spice powders, ginger garlic paste, lemon juice, and salt. Marinate the paneer chunks in this paste and set aside in refrigerator for at least an hour. Thread the paneer pieces on the skewers - 3-4 pieces per skewer, interspersed with capsicum and onion chunks. Brush the extra marinade on the vegetables and drizzle the loaded skewers with oil. Place them on a stove-top grill or on an oven rack and grill for 10-12 minutes, until the capsicum appears toasted but remains crunchy. Serve hot with green chutney or ketchup.



STUFFED BRINJALS

INGREDIENTS

- 10-12 baby brinjals (6-8cm length)
- 2tsp minced garlic
- 2tsp minced ginger
- 1tsp mince green chillies
- 2tbsp crushed groundnuts
- 1tsp red chilli powder
- 1/2tsp turmeric
- 1tsp garam masala
- 2tsp tamarind paste or tomato paste
- 1tsp sugar or grated jaggery
- Salt, to taste
- 2tbsp oil
- 2tbsp chopped coriander - for garnish

METHOD

Wash the brinjals and leave the stalks on. From the bottom end, mark two cuts crosswise, till two-thirds the length, to create four quarters joined together. Set aside. Now, in a shallow pan, heat 1tbsp oil and add the garlic, ginger, green chillies, and crushed groundnut and fry on medium flame for a minute. Then add all the spice powders, followed by the tamarind paste, sugar and salt. Saute this paste for 2-3 minutes - add a little water if it gets too dry. Cool this mixture. Then, stuff all the cut brinjals with this mixture evenly. In the same pan, heat 1tbsp oil and add all the stuffed brinjals. Toss them in the oil, then cover the pan with a lid and cook on low flame for 6-8 minutes, turning them once. The brinjals will not remain firm when cooked well. Switch off flame and garnish with coriander.

HOT FRUIT PUNCH

INGREDIENTS

- 500ml orange juice
- 250ml apple juice
- 500ml lightly flavoured tea
- 1tbsp sliced ginger
- 12 sticks cinnamon
- 1/2tsp grated nutmeg
- 6-8 cloves
- 3tbsp grated jaggery
- 2tbsp lemon juice
- 1 orange - peeled
- 1 apple sliced
- 3 oranges - segmented

METHOD

Combine all the ingredients, except the lemon juice and the fruits, and bring to a simmer. Then, add the lemon juice and diced fruit, and serve warm in small, fancy glasses. You may add more chopped fruit of your choice, like berries, kiwi, peaches or mandarins. This drink is best enjoyed warm or slightly hot. Drinking it chilled defeats the purpose of cleansing the palate.





ANURAJ NAIR
Executive Chef
Crowne Plaza
Muscat

CHEF'S SPECIAL

If you're fed up, quite literally, with your own culinary skills and want to savour something different, something that's time-tested and top-notch, how about trying out dishes prepared by a skilled chef. Given here are two exotic, yet practical, recipes to light up your dinner table, shared by Anuraj Nair, executive chef, Crowne Plaza Muscat. You'd note that preparation and presentation are given equal importance. *So, how 'bout wearing the chef's cap today!*



Rack of lamb with provencale crust, glazed thyme jus

Ingredients

- 1 chilled lamb rack (Frenched)
- 50g dijon mustard
- 100g fresh bread crumbs
- 20g parsley, 10g basil, 1 pod garlic,
- Few sprigs of thyme, 2tbsp olive oil

Method

Clean the lamb and portion it as per the requirement or keep it as whole rack, season the lamb with salt and pepper, sear the whole rack on all the sides on a hot pan and keep it to rest for 10 minutes.

Crust

Fine chop the leaves and the herbs, mix the herb mixture with the fresh bread crumbs, and sprinkle some olive oil. Brush 1tsp mustard onto the top of the rack, carefully sprinkle the crust mixture on the rack, once the meat is covered, sprinkle some olive oil. Carefully arrange the meat on an oven tray with the crust on top, roast the rack on a preheated oven 170° C for 16 minutes (Medium). Once the meat is done as per the desired doneness remove from the oven and rest it for 5 minutes. Slice the rack and

serve with desired accompaniments and the jus.

Thyme jus

- 2kg lamb bones, 500g lamb trimmings

Mirepoix

- 1 carrot, 2 onions
- 1 celery
- 1 leek
- Few sprigs of thyme
- 1 clove garlic
- 200ml red grape juice (optional)

Method

Brown the lamb bones and trimmings. Once the bones are browned, sauté the mirepoix with thyme and garlic, along with the bones, and slowly roast along with the mixture. Deglaze the mixture with the red wine and pour chilled water, simmer the mixture for 3 hrs, once the stock is ready strain the mixture through a fine strainer. Add remaining few sprigs of thyme and pour the stock into the pot. Reduce the stock until it becomes a thick and glossy jus.



Pan seared yellow fin tuna, confit egg yolk, balsamic glaze

Ingredients

- 80g yellow fin tuna fillet
- 50g green beans
- 3 cherry tomatoes
- 1 confit egg yolk
- 1 potato
- 1 lemon
- 50ml extra virgin olive oil
- 50ml balsamic vinaigrette
- 30g black olives
- Few sprigs of salad leaves
- Salt, pepper, to taste

Method

Fillet and trim the tuna fillet into a rectangle

shape weighing 80g. Season the tuna with lemon, olive oil, sea salt and black pepper. Pit the olives and marinate with sliced tomatoes. Blanch the green beans and give them an ice bath. Once chilled slice them. Slice the potatoes, boil them tender, and pan sear them. Sear the tuna thoroughly on all sides in a non-stick pan. Ensure not to overcook the tuna. Confit the egg yolk in warm olive oil. Once the preparations are ready, slice the tuna by half and arrange the tuna into the plate accompanied by the rest of the garnishes and pour the balsamic vinaigrette on top. Drizzle some extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle sea salt.