

Sultanate participates in session of World Health Assembly

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, on Monday participated in the 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA73) resumed session, taking place virtually from November 9-14 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Sultanate's delegation is led by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, in the presence of Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmiah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs.

The resumed session is attended by delegations from all WHO member states and focuses



on a specific health agenda prepared by the executive board. The resumed WHA73

discusses several agendas most importantly the preparedness and response to the public health

emergencies, preparedness for pandemic influenza, access to vaccines and other benefits, in

addition to discussing the report of the team tasked with reviewing the WHO health emergency

preparedness framework. The session also discusses a number of administrative and technical files such as the qualification of human resources on the global level, reviewing the report of the WHO expert advisory group on the WHO global code of practice on the international recruitment of health personnel. The session sheds light on the consultations of the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Neglected Tropical diseases (STAG) with the aim of devising a draft road map for the tropical countries' diseases. — ONA

Report COVID-19 impact: OCCI tells SME owners

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The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) called upon the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and other private companies to report their issues in the wake of the COVID-19 to the Chamber so that solutions can be found. Speaking to the *Observer*, a key official said that this initiative aims at supporting various private companies to make good their losses in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak. "We are inviting all SMEs and other private companies operating in the country to report their issues and financial challenges pertaining to their business in a given format so that we will be able to prioritise the needs to be attended and find solutions", he said. Accordingly, companies in the private sector seeking assistance from the OCCI should fill out a form and submit it with the concerned authority online. Companies in wholesale and retail trade industry, agriculture,



services, tourism or others are asked if they are facing issues with financing. "If there is a financing issue, they should clarify whether it is short term which is less than five years or long-term financing which is

more than five years as well as the volume of funds required." The fund required can be of four categories such as between RO 1,000 to RO 20,000 or RO 20,000 to 50,000 or between RO 50,000 to 100,000 or any amount

above RO 100,000. SMEs are also required to detail the nature of the issue with regard to finances such as guarantee, non-availability of loans for emergency situations and productive operations.

Medium-term fiscal plan to enhance social safety net

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The Sultanate's medium-term fiscal plan, unveiled in line with Vision 2040, aims to build an integrated national social safety net to protect low-income and social security families. "The reform package should work to ensure social protection for vulnerable populations and promote intergenerational fairness so future generations of Omanis can benefit from the country's natural and financial wealth", urges the blueprint for the ambitious four-year plan. Along with a number of new measures, the medium-term fiscal plan, approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, commits to bring in reforms in different sectors.

In this regard, the Royal orders include implementation of a number of developmental projects to the tune of RO 371 million in different governorates. The plan aims to better define what constitutes a vulnerable population in order to improve programme coverage, strengthen the targeting of benefits to vulnerable populations, and increase the adequacy of the financial benefits provided. "Ensuring social protection is not just the responsibility of initiatives focused on reforming the social safety net; rather, all initiatives have this obligation", it says. "May it be zero-rating essential food-stuffs and households good in the value-added tax (VAT) or structuring electricity tariffs in a way that gives preference to the primary households of Omani families, all initiatives must do their part to promote social equity and ensure support for Oman's most vulnerable. A socioeconomic impact assessment has been carried out by an independent, third-party to assess the fiscal, social and economic impact of VAT in Oman. "This assessment has allowed the government to carefully design a VAT regime that takes into account the unique social

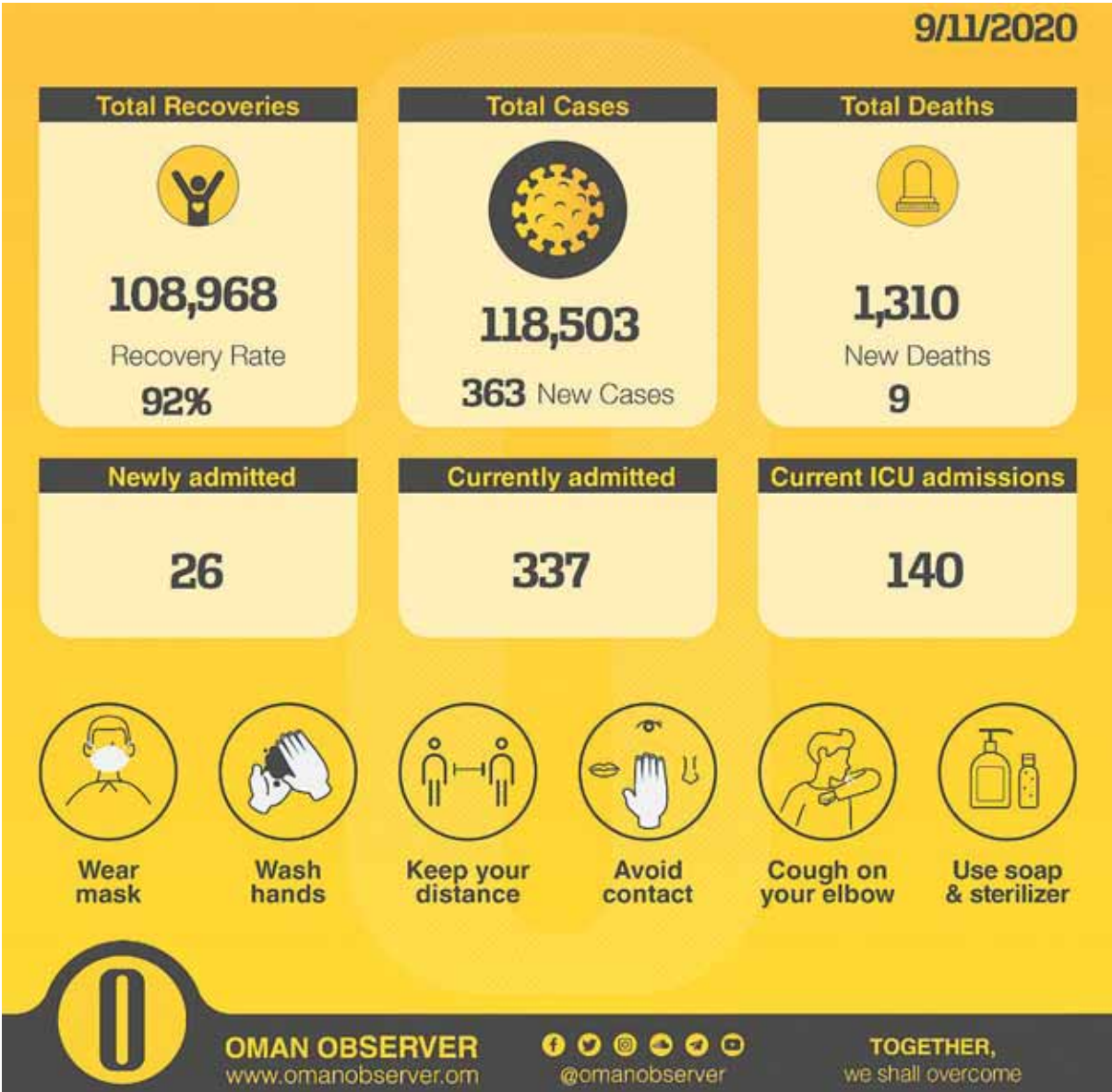
context of the Sultanate", it said. Over 90 basic goods have been zero-rated in VAT to ensure Omani households do not see higher prices in food and other household essentials. The government has also chosen to exempt healthcare, education and residential rents from the VAT system — meaning these critical services will not fall under VAT. The government recognises adjustments to the revenue-raising framework alone are not enough. It is also pursuing a range of cost containment and expenditure optimisation initiatives. All public, either citizens or expats, companies and

"Redesigning subsidies and the social safety net are critical components to helping contain future expenditure growth and capture savings opportunities. This initiative intends to reallocate the subsidy to the vulnerable and people who deserve it"

financially capable people, benefit from the subsidized services. "Redesigning subsidies and the social safety net are critical components to helping contain future expenditure growth and capture savings opportunities. This initiative intends to reallocate the subsidy to the vulnerable and people who deserve it by gradually increasing the electricity and water tariffs and ensuring that support is provided for vulnerable populations", it adds. Currently the government subsidies to public services account to approximately RO 1 billion. Additional refund mechanisms are also being considered where appropriate to achieve other social objectives. A particular focus has been placed on ensuring that short-term support mechanisms are developed to offset water and electricity subsidy reforms while also developing a longer-term strategy to holistically rationalize and strengthen the entire social safety net system. The plan also envisages review of the laws and legislation that will help to raise the living standards of Omanis and ensure that companies will employ Omanis. As part of the process, the Ministry of Labour is reviewing the policies and rates Omanisation has imposed on various sectors by making Omanisation targets more flexible.

National Artificial Intelligence forum concludes

MUSCAT: The National Artificial Intelligence and Education Forum, concluded here on Monday. The virtual forum was organised by the Ministry of Education represented by Oman National Commission for Education, Science and Culture and was attended by a number of experts from inside and outside the Sultanate. The participants debated several trends and general frameworks for introducing AI into education and the extent of benefiting from international organisations in this regard through the provision of technical and advisory support in addition to introducing new university specialisations to acquaint students with future skills and abilities. The final day included a dialogue session entitled: The need for a national AI and education framework. — ONA



Oman Air named best airline for Economy Class service



MUSCAT: Oman Air has earned international recognition from a popular media outlet for providing the world's best Economy Class experience.

The site, thepointsguy.com, recently ranked airlines across the globe for their Economy Class service, based on hundreds of flights taken and ranked by their journalists.

In establishing the scores for Economy Class service, reviewers considered a number of factors including seat comfort and space, meal and beverage service, in-flight entertainment, cabin crew service and aircraft cleanliness.

Earning praise for all facets of the flight, Oman Air outsourced airlines such as Emirates, Qatar Airways and Delta, a large US-based carrier.

The review noted that Oman

Air provided excellent seat comfort and legroom, along with high-quality food and beverage service, world-class in-flight entertainment, an amenity kit and first-rate service throughout a 787 Dreamliner flight connecting London and Muscat.

The crew "were the icing on the cake of this top-class economy flight with Oman Air", the site said.

Their reviewer "woke up to find bottles of water at his feet after a nap, one of which was replaced after waking up a second time.

That's the kind of service you'd expect in First Class, not Economy".

In closing, the review said, "This economy experience with Oman Air definitely deserves the top spot".

State Council Bureau reviews proposals, session agenda

MUSCAT: The State Council's Bureau held its meeting chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah bin Ali al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, in the presence of Bureau members and Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, Secretary-General of the Council.

During the meeting, the Council's Bureau focused on the study of the Social Committee on the reality of the status of the elderly care in the Sultanate.

Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani hosted the committee's Rapporteur for a discussion about the study that aims to identify the reality of policies and legislations for the care and protection of the elderly, and to identify the efforts made by the authorities concerned in this context, and seeking to develop appropriate proposals and mechanisms to bridge the legislative and legal gaps in the field of elderly care. The Council's Bureau expressed its observations about the study.

Following this, the Bureau discussed the report of the



working group formed by the State Council to study "Capital Initiatives" and in this context the Bureau hosted Sayyid Noah bin Muhammad al Busaidy, Head of the group. After discussing the proposal, the Bureau decided to refer it to the Council's Technology and Innovation Committee for inclusion in the Committee's study on 'technology investment draft law' that the committee is currently studying.

The Council's Bureau reviewed two draft proposals: "law for the

organisation and encouragement of industry" and "law for older persons" referred by Majlis Ash'shura.

The Bureau also reviewed the proposals submitted by the Social Committee that it wishes to study during the second annual session of the seventh term regarding the study of the reality of people with disabilities and the services provided to them in the Sultanate and the study of the delay in the age of marriages in the Sultanate, the causes, the effects, and solutions.

The Bureau as well discussed several proposals submitted by the members, who expressed their observations on the proposals.

The report submitted by the Council's General Secretariat on the Council's participation in the preparation of the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025) also came up for the discussion.

The meeting concluded with the setting of the agenda of the first ordinary Sitting of the second annual session of the seventh term scheduled to be held on November 15.

VOICES

Sugar ain't always sweet



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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As the Sultanate celebrates 50 years of modern renaissance if there is an area that needs extra focus by everyone it is diabetes.

Dr Noor al Busaidy, Director of National Diabetes and Endocrine Center, said diabetes is a chronic progressive disease and another twin to diabetes is obesity. Obesity causes 90 per cent of diabetes. These two diseases are preventable and a lot can be done for prevention and management as well as awareness.

"We need to teach children, the women and schools. Health practices should be everywhere in our schools, workplace, in our home. This responsibility is not just the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, it is everyone's responsibility."

As the public, have we done enough?

"Statistics tell us that around 40 per cent of our nation is overweight or obese and 26 per cent is diabetic with pre-diabetes reaching 30 per cent. We need to do more measures addressing prevention, prevention and prevention."

So should education start from within the family?

"I think women are the key to everything — women running the home, women buying the things, women at school so we need to focus on women. Women bring children to the world. So when we empower women and make them healthy their offspring will be healthy. They will implant this in their kids, schools and everywhere," pointed out Dr Noor.

The changes in the body due to diabetes start way before the symptoms are diagnosed.

"We take pre-diabetes very seriously as well as pre-

hypertension and overweight. We do not start after diagnosis, instead we start way before and when a patient is diagnosed with diabetes, they should not ignore it because they do not have complication; it is just that they do not know when the complication will hit them because it can be very sudden and traumatic," said Dr Noor.

A misconception has been that once diagnosed one cannot come out of diabetes.

"There is a lot of hope. We see a lot of patients at the National Diabetes and Endocrine Center who are highly dependent on insulin and with morbid obesity who change by implementing a healthy lifestyle and changing how they eat, exercise, sleeping pattern and how they manage stress and taking medication. We have people totally reversing diabetes... so management of chronic disease is not acute. It is all to do with a healthy lifestyle not dieting. This is the basic requirement of health."

Eat a well-balanced diet, exercise every day, manage stress and sleep seven to eight hours. "We do not support people who stay up at night because there are a lot of metabolism changes that take place at night. If we do not sleep at night, our body gets stressed and cortisol is released. People who stay up late tend to eat a lot and the wrong food. Chronic stress causes the adrenal gland to produce cortisol and wherever there is cortisol, there is obesity.

"We might delay saying I will meditate later, will catch up with exercise tomorrow and take care of stress. This has to be daily practice. We can maintain health and in case we encounter disease all these parameters are maintained in order for the medicine to work," said Dr Noor al Busaidy.

GCC military cooperation discussed



MUSCAT: The Preparatory Committee of the assistants to the GCC Chiefs of Staff for Operations and Training on Monday began their meeting in preparation of the consultative meeting of the GCC Supreme

Military Committee.

The Sultanate was represented in the two-day meeting, held via video-conferencing, by Brigadier Abdulaziz Abdullah al Manthri, Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning.

The meeting discussed fields of the existing military cooperation among the GCC states in preparation to submit them at the meeting of the Supreme Military Committee of the GCC Chiefs of Staff. — ONA

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ESCAPE TO QUIETNESS



The Wilayat of Al Amerat, which was once an empty expanse has witnessed comprehensive urban development since the modern renaissance. Of late, many people have made it their home away from the hustle and bustle of Muscat.

A visitor to the place will notice the harmony between the modern apartments and old neighbourhoods.

The wilayat was known as Al Fath and later as Al Muthahdemat due to drought and aridity.

Al Amerat borders Muttrah to the north and Bausher to the west, Muscat to the east and Qurayat to the south.

The wilayat spreads across an area of 1,244 sq km, which is one of the biggest wilayats in Muscat Governorate.

The place houses 112 villages which are Al Bajriyyah, Al Daql, Al Ghanainat, Saih Al Dhab, Al Mahaj, Social Housing District,

Al Hajer, Tunis, Heem, Gahlaut, Al Hashya, Wadi Al Sarine, Al Sidirat, Al Raja, Al Gafinah, Al Majam, Grabeb, Al Alayah and others.

The wilayat embraces various archaeological landmarks including outdated houses. There are some historic sites like Baai castle, Al Rajie and Al Mandhriyah towers. Additionally, there are many archaeological mosques including Al Khafaiji mosque, Al Midam, Al Harah, Al Ghafat, Al Hadri, Al Arish and Ain Fuad mosques.

Spacious lands cloistered between towering mountains make Al Amerat feel remote and tranquil.

The wilayat is full of traditionally inspired villas, new commercial buildings, fertile agricultural villages, and even tourist attractions, like the park where the annual Muscat Festival is held, and Wadi al Sareen, a famous animal sanctuary.



The area itself has fantastic infrastructure, with newly developed roads connecting the valley to Bausher, Al Khuwair, and Qurum via the Aqabat Bausher.

Wadi al Sareen Natural Reserve is home to a number of animals like gazelles, ibex, red

foxes, wild rabbits, wolves and some birds.

The reserve is situated 35 km away from the centre of the wilayat and spread over an area of 200 sq km.

Wadi al Meih, located in Al Amerat, offers stunning scenery that delights the eye and indulges

all senses. Visitors are charmed by multi-colour blooms in this valley of flowers, chirping birds, wild beetles and black-eyed flies. The high mountains surrounding the valley are a hiker's paradise. The farms in the valley are filled with date palms, lemons, mangoes, bananas, pomegranate, olives

and grapes. Wadi al Meih also has ruins of old houses that tell one about traditional Omani architecture.

There are currently hypermarkets, coffee shops, and all the usual necessities available, and new businesses opening all the time. For a tranquil, affordable family life Al Amerat reigns supreme.

Muscat Municipality recently built pedestrians' walkways in Al Amerat as part of a programme to beautify the governorate and for the recreation of residents.

The walkway in Al Mahaj area of Amerat is 1.7 km long and 4 metres wide, with two lanes. One lane is dedicated for pedestrians, and the others for cycling.

The project is aimed at encouraging people to take part in the exercise-related activities as Al Amerat, unlike other wilayats, lacks beach or waterfronts. The project includes green spaces and a roadside garden.

شركة عمان للاستثمارات والتمويل

OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE Co. SAOG

khedmah

Powered By OIFC

Report of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to present the unaudited financial results for the nine months period ended 30th September 2020.

Operating & Financial Performance

The Group made a net profit after tax of RO. 1.140 million for the nine months period ended 30th September 2020, compared to RO. 2.356 million during the corresponding period of the previous year. The net profit after tax of the Parent Company was RO. 1.822 million for the nine months period ended 30th September 2020, compared to RO. 2.842 million during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Group made a profit from operations for the nine months period ended 30th September 2020 of RO 0.256 million compared to a profit of RO 0.134 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This profit was mainly due to the new collection contract, new debt recovery activities and positive rate renegotiation for existing contracts with principles.

Investments

The Parent company holds the following Investments in associates:

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		September 2020	September 2019
1	Sohar International Bank SAOG	15.37%	15.37%
2	The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP)	21.82%	21.82%
3	National Bureau Commercial Information SAOC (NBCI)	7.35%	7.35%

The shares in profits or losses from associates are accounted as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The value of investment in NBCI has been fully written off in the parent company books since the company is under liquidation.

The Parent Company holds the following Investment in subsidiaries

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		September 2020	September 2019
1	Wasel Exchange SAOC	100%	100%
2	Afaq Al Musanah LLC	92%	92%

The Financial statement of the subsidiary companies have been consolidated as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

Business Outlook

The Parent company has commenced the collection operations under the new collection contract, 20 new branches have been opened and are operational. Further the parent company is engaged with multiple principles to explore new business opportunities. Unfortunately the current COVID-19 situation had major impact on the collection revenues and closure of some field operations had resulted in loss in revenues. The collection revenues are steadily improving post the opening of the lockdown and we expect improvement in the fourth quarter results. The Parent company is actively working on areas for pruning costs and increase efficiencies to cover up as much of the losses due to the current situation.

Acknowledgement

The Board of Directors wishes to express its sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman. The Company appreciates the support received from Public Authority for Water, Oman Telecommunications Co. SAOG, Muscat Electricity Distribution Co. SAOC, Majan Electricity Company SAOC, Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC, Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC, Dhofar Power Company SAOC, Oman Wastewater Services Company SAOC (Haya Water), Ooredoo, Awasr, Muscat Municipality, Public Authority for Social insurance, Capital Market Authority, Central Bank of Oman, the Company's bankers, Muscat Securities Market and Muscat Clearing & Depository Co. SAOC, Business partners, shareholders and employees of the company for their continued support to our company.

Nasser Mohamed Al Harthy
Chairman – Board of Directors

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Income for the period ended 30th September 2020

	Group 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Group 30-Sep-19 RO'000	Parent 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Parent 30-Sep-19 RO'000
Operating income	11,282	11,813	8,260	7,689
Operating expenses	(10,345)	(10,611)	(7,133)	(6,758)
Doubtful debts	134	(156)	134	(107)
Depreciation	(815)	(912)	(517)	(525)
Operating profit	256	134	744	299
Finance charges	(1,907)	(1,547)	(1,699)	(1,318)
Investment income	117	145	117	145
Other Income	316	51	98	41
Other expenses	(462)	(456)	(291)	(388)
Impairment of associates and subsidiary	-	-	-	-
Directors remuneration	-	-	-	-
Share of profit in associates	2,646	3,875	2,658	3,886
Profit before taxation	965	2,202	1,627	2,665
Taxation	173	153	191	177
Net profit attributable to OIFC shareholders	1,139	2,356	1,818	2,842
Attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent company	1,202	2,406	1,818	2,842
Non-controlling interests	(63)	(50)	-	-
Profit for the period / year	1,139	2,356	1,818	2,842
Basic Earnings per share (RO)	0.006	0.012	0.009	0.014

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Comprehensive Income for the period ended 30th September 2020

	Group 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Group 30-Sep-19 RO'000	Parent 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Parent 30-Sep-19 RO'000
Profit/(Loss) for the period	1,139	2,356	1,818	2,842
Other Comprehensive Income				
Net release to income statement on sale of available for sale financial assets	(203)	16	(203)	16
Share of reserves movement of associates	(379)	(106)	(379)	(106)
Release of deferred tax liability on depreciation of revalued building	-	-	-	-
Total Comprehensive Income for the period	(582)	(90)	(582)	(90)
Profit/(Loss) for the period after Comprehensive Income	556	2,265	1,236	2,752
Attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent company	622	2,317	1,236	2,752
Non-controlling interests	(63)	(50)	-	-
Profit for the period / year	559	2,267	1,236	2,752

1. Provision for Taxation has been made at Current Tax rate
2. Certain Comparative figures have been reclassified to conform to the presentation adopted in these financial statements

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Financial Position at 30th September 2020

	Group As on 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Group As on 30-Sep-19 RO'000	Group As on 31-Dec-19 RO'000	Parent As on 30-Sep-20 RO'000	Parent As on 30-Sep-19 RO'000	Parent As on 31-Dec-19 RO'000



ASSAD SAYS REFUGEE RETURNS A ‘PRIORITY’ FOR SYRIA

DAMASCUS: Syria's President Bashar al Assad told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Monday ahead of a Moscow-backed conference on repatriation that he is adamant on the return of refugees.

Speaking in a video call broadcast by the Syrian presidency's Facebook page ahead of the two-day conference in Damascus opening on Wednesday, Assad called their return a priority for his government.

"For us, as a government, it is a number one priority in the

coming stage," especially since large parts of Syria had been recaptured by Damascus and battles have subsided, he told Putin.

"The Syrian government is not just ready, but also eager, for the results of the conference so that we can see the largest number of refugees return in the coming few months."

Assad's forces control more than 70 per cent of Syria, while remaining areas are held by US-backed Kurdish forces as well as rebels and militants opposed to the Damascus government.



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al Assad via a video conference call at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow on Monday. — AFP

Since the Syrian conflict started in 2011, more than half of its pre-war population has been forced to flee their homes, including 5.5 million abroad. Neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees.

Last month, Russia pitched an international conference to facilitate their repatriation despite warnings from international agencies and Western nations that it is not yet safe to return.

It remains to be seen which countries will take part in the conference but Lebanon — which says it hosts some 1.5 million refugees — will send its caretaker minister of social affairs.

UN Resident and Humanitarian

Coordinator for Syria Imran Riza is to attend as an observer.

Apart from ongoing violence in some parts of the country, a "siege" imposed by Western nations on Syria is the "biggest obstacle" to refugee returns, Assad told Putin, referring to a spate of Western sanctions since the war started.

The latest US sanctions took effect in June, compounding an economic crisis that has seen the value of the Syrian pound plummet against the dollar while inflation has soared. — AFP

UN opens Libya peace talks in Tunis with eye on elections



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres addresses participants at the opening of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum hosted in Gammarth on the outskirts of Tunisia's capital, on Monday. — AFP

TUNIS: The United Nations opened talks on Libya's future in Tunisia on Monday aimed at ending nearly a decade of chaos and bloodshed by arranging elections, but obstacles remain despite progress in cementing last month's ceasefire.

Acting UN Libya envoy Stephanie Williams has described it as the best opportunity in six years to end the turmoil and warfare that have plagued the North African oil exporting country since 2011. But she warned at Monday's opening ceremony attended by Tunisian President Kais Saied: "The road will not be paved with roses and it will not be easy."

The talks, held among 75 participants chosen by the United Nations to represent an array of political viewpoints, regional

Acting UN Libya envoy Stephanie Williams has described it as the best opportunity in six years to end the turmoil and warfare that have plagued the North African oil exporting country since 2011

interests and social groups, come as the main warring sides discuss how to implement a truce they agreed in Geneva.

Libya has been split since 2014 between rival factions in the west, held by the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), and the east, home to Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA).

However, both sides are made up of sometimes unstable coalitions with their own interests, and contain figures who might seek to sabotage any agreement they regard as a threat.

They are also backed by foreign powers with their own concerns that have invested heavily to build up military strength on the ground and strike deals with their local partners.

After frontlines solidified near the central coastal city of Sirte, both sides began UN mediated ceasefire talks. Williams said they had made new progress in implementing the nationwide ceasefire they agreed last month and had set up a headquarters in Sirte to hash out details.

She wants the Tunisia political talks to set a road map for elections as soon as possible and establish

a single, unified authority across the country that can manage the process. Those taking part have pledged not to accept any role in a new transitional government, she said.

Nearly a decade after central authority collapsed, repeated bouts of warfare have sapped state resources, damaged the water and power networks and worsened a financial crisis, making life wretched for millions.

As Libya sweltered in August and cases of the coronavirus began to rise, protests broke out on both sides of the frontlines over dire living conditions and corruption.

"It is necessary to set dates for the elections so that the Libyan people will have the ballot box after the sounds of bullets are silenced," Saied said. — Reuters

Excavators find rare, ancient gold coins in Jerusalem's Old City

TEL AVIV: Israeli archeologists have discovered four pure gold coins in Jerusalem's Old City that were minted more than 1,000 years ago, a rare find from an era of political upheaval in the region.

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said the coins were unearthed during excavation work near the Western Wall, which is the holiest site where Jews can pray.

The coins, contained in a small jug, "were in excellent preservation and were immediately identifiable even without cleaning," IAA specialist Robert Kool said in a statement.

The coins date from the 940s to the 970s, "a time of radical

political change," in Jerusalem and the surrounding region, Kool added.

During that period, the ruling Abbasid caliphate, which was headquartered in Baghdad, lost control of Jerusalem to its rival, the Fatimid dynasty of North Africa, which fell in the 12th Century.

"This is the first time in 50 years that a gold cache from the Fatimid period has been discovered in Jerusalem's Old City," Kool said. Israeli excavators last uncovered gold from the Fatimid period shortly after the 1967 Six-Day War, which saw Israel seize control of east Jerusalem from Jordan, before annexing it. — AFP

Archaeologist at the Israel Antiquities Authority David Gellman shows a small pottery jug with four pure gold coins found inside it, at the archaeological rescue excavation in the Old City of Jerusalem, on Monday. — AFP



Iran's daily cases top 10,000

TEHRAN: Iran's daily novel coronavirus infections crossed the 10,000 mark on Monday, the health ministry announced, setting a new record as fatalities remained close to their all-time high level.

The latest official figure of 10,463 positive COVID-19 cases in a 24-hour period comes only three days after the Islamic republic exceeded 9,000.

Iran's coronavirus caseload now stands at 692,949, the ministry said.

The virus also claimed 458 lives in the past day, raising the country's overall number of fatalities to 38,749.

The previous fatality record of 459 came on Sunday, according to official figures.

Iran recently imposed several rounds of short-lived restrictions across the country to contain the virus, but the rising deaths and infections have prompted calls by experts and officials for a full lockdown.

—AFP

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Plan to extend rail lines to Libya, Sudan

Egypt's transport minister has announced proposals to construct a railway line to reach the Sudanese city of Wadi Halfa, and to extend a line in the north to Libya's Benghazi. The announcement came on Sunday as part of Egyptian government efforts to overhaul the country's transport system, including an ailing railway network with a poor safety record.

The government decided on "a number rail transport projects that could be carried out in



cooperation with investors," Transport Minister Kamel al-Wazir told a news conference in Cairo.

BAGHDAD

IS attack on lookout point kills 11

An IS group attack on a lookout point west of Baghdad manned by a state-sponsored tribal force left 11 people dead late on Sunday, security sources and medics said.

The militants threw grenades and fired on the tribal Hashed forces stationed at Al Radwaniyah, on the southern outskirts of the Iraqi capital, near the Baghdad airport.

"IS attacked the monitoring tower, killing five members of the tribal Hashed and six local people who had come to help repel the attack," a security source said. A medic confirmed the toll, and said eight wounded were transferred to a hospital in central Baghdad.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility from IS.

IS swept across a third of Iraq in 2014, seizing major cities across the north and west and reaching the suburbs of the capital Baghdad.

After a fierce three-year fight backed by the US-led coalition, Iraq declared IS defeated in late 2017.

TEL AVIV

Rapid virus testing opened at airport

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu inaugurated a rapid coronavirus testing centre at Israel's main international airport on Monday, meant to ease travel in and out of the country.

The testing and a lab situated in Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport is available to arriving and departing travellers, he said.

"This can help us return faster, better and more efficiently to normal air travel," he said.

"We want to make it possible to reunite Israel with the world."



The new set-up allows travellers to give a sample at the terminal and have it analysed at an on-site lab, with the result ready in 5½ to six hours as the traveller waits.

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD

**MEDIA MOGUL GETS BAIL AFTER MONTHS IN PRISON**

Pakistan's top court on Monday granted bail to the owner of one of the country's largest media groups, after a month-long detention.

Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman's Jang Group includes some of Pakistan's biggest newspapers and the Geo television network.

He was arrested in March over alleged corruption in a land transaction dating back to 1986, an accusation denied by his representatives who in turn alleged that Pakistan's corruption watchdog targeted him because Rehman's media group looked into the agency's workings.

■ SYDNEY

**NEW YEAR'S EVE FIREWORKS TO BE RESTRICTED**

New Year's Eve fireworks over Sydney Harbour will go ahead this year but will be shortened to just a few minutes and the city precinct will be restricted to those with restaurant, cafe and hotel bookings in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Prime harbourside spots, normally coveted by thousands of revellers to watch the traditional 12-minute pyrotechnic display, will be set aside for health workers who have been treating COVID-19 patients and firefighters.

Although Australia has for weeks recorded just daily single digit new cases of COVID-19, New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said crowd numbers will be limited for the event in areas that typically draw thousands of viewers.

■ KABUL

**BIDEN URGED TO REASSESS STALLING TALIBAN TALKS**

Afghanistan's Second Vice President Sarwar Danish on Monday called on the incoming US administration of president-elect Joe Biden to reassess the Afghan peace process, which has made very little progress in past weeks. "We hope that the process so far will be reviewed and re-evaluated under the new government in the United States," Danish said in Kabul.

"All sides should support the peace process with more responsibility, more accuracy, and based on reality." The historic talks between the government and the Taliban kicked off in mid-September in Doha, Qatar.

Suu Kyi's party claims win in Myanmar

YANGON: Myanmar's ruling party said on Monday it had won enough seats in parliament to form the next government, after reporting a lead based on its unofficial count of votes from the country's second general election since the end of strict military rule.

Party spokesman Myo Nyunt said internal reports showed the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, had won the 322 seats in parliament needed, though no official results had been announced by the election commission. "We thank the people," he said. "For the people, for the party, this is such an encouraging election result."

The Election Commission is expected to announce official results later on Monday. Sunday's election was seen as a referendum on the fledgling democratic government led by Suu Kyi and the NLD, which remains hugely popular at home but has seen its reputation collapse overseas amid allegations of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Up for grabs in the election are 315 seats in the 425-member lower house and 161 seats in the 217-seat upper house of parliament. The NLD came to



Supporters of the National League for Democracy party wave flags during celebrations in front of the party's headquarters in Yangon on Monday. — AFP

power after a 2015 landslide in which it won a total of 390 seats, a benchmark Myo Nyunt said it expected to exceed, according to data compiled from reports by party agents at polling stations across the country.

A spokesman for the second-

biggest party, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) could not immediately be reached for comment. The military, which ruled Myanmar for nearly 50 years until it began withdrawing from civilian politics in 2011, controls a

National League for Democracy spokesman Myo Nyunt said internal reports showed the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, had won the 322 seats in parliament needed

quarter of seats in both houses of parliament, under a constitution it drew up and which Suu Kyi and her allies want to amend. The NLD had been expected to win but with a smaller margin following the emergence of new parties and ethnic minority parties gaining support in some regions.

SOME UNABLE TO VOTE

In contrast to the wave of optimism that greeted the NLD's landslide win in 2015, Myanmar went into this election under a cloud of a surging COVID-19 outbreak, economic hardship and escalating ethnic conflicts.

Although Myanmar is seeing an average of 1,100 new coronavirus cases a day - compared with a handful in early August - fears of the virus appeared not to dampen Sunday's turnout among the 37 million registered voters.

The Election Commission has

yet to release data on turnout but in the biggest city, Yangon, long lines of voters wearing face masks and shields formed from dawn. But more than a million people across the country were unable to vote after polls were cancelled due to insurgencies. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, a Muslim minority confined to camps and villages in Myanmar's Rakhine State, most without citizenship, were also unable to vote.

The Democracy and Human Rights Party, a Rohingya party, said in a statement it was "utterly disappointed" that its people had been disenfranchised. The election commission has said the polls in areas affected by conflict had to be cancelled for safety reasons and that only citizens were entitled to vote.

Most Rohingya are not considered Myanmar citizens but migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh even though many can trace family roots back many generations. The United Nations has said there was genocidal intent in a 2017 army crackdown that forced 730,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Myanmar rejects that saying its security forces were carrying out legitimate operations against Rohingya militants.

— Reuters

Duterte's pick for top cop causes stir

MANILA: Philippine activists voiced concern on Monday about President Rodrigo Duterte's choice of a new police chief, warning of unchecked human rights abuses ahead and a crackdown on dissent under his watch.

Debold Sinas's appointment also caused a stir on social media, where users recalled how as Manila police chief he had celebrated his birthday in May with dozens of senior officers at a party that defied strict coronavirus lockdown rules. Sinas is the latest commander to rise to the top post under Duterte having led operations in bloody hotspots of his war on drugs, during which thousands of urban poor have



been killed, many in mysterious circumstances. Rights groups accuse police of executing suspected dealers.

Police say those killed in their operations were legitimate targets who resisted arrest. "What lies ahead for the Filipino people with Sinas's appointment is a bloody party of human rights violations," said Cristina Palabay of rights group, Karapatan. "This fascist regime is gearing up for an intensified crackdown on dissent and assault on human rights." Sinas could not be reached and the national police did not respond to a request for comment.

■ CAMBODIA MARKS INDEPENDENCE DAY



Balloons are released at the Independence Monument during a ceremony marking Cambodia's Independence Day in Phnom Penh on Monday. Cambodia is celebrating its 67th anniversary of its independence from France in 1953. — AFP

■ MEASURE AHEAD OF DIWALI

India court bans firecrackers in pollution-hit cities

NEW DELHI: India's environmental court on Monday ordered a ban on firecrackers during the country's biggest annual festival in cities battling hazardously poor air quality, citing a link between pollution and a coronavirus surge.

The National Green Tribunal said the role of pollution in the COVID-19 crisis meant that the ban was needed ahead of Diwali celebrations on Saturday.

Traditionally, millions of firecrackers are set off during Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Light, but the practice has been blamed for worsening air pollution — especially in northern India which suffers from serious smog every winter.

The tribunal, whose powers are



Customers buy firecracker at a market ahead of Diwali, the festival of lights, in Allahabad on Monday. — AFP

similar to a regular court, said that pollution caused by fireworks was an "aggravating risk to lives and health". It said a general ban in all cities with rising air pollution

should last until November 30.

India has the second-highest number of coronavirus infections in the world, and experts have raised concerns about air pollution

worsening the symptoms of respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19.

The capital New Delhi and the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra and West Bengal have already halted or restricted the sale and use of firecrackers.

The tribunal said the ban in Delhi must be "absolute" because of the pollution crisis and rising COVID-19 cases.

State authorities in the rest of the country are considering allowing one-hour windows on Saturday for setting off firecrackers.

Delhi on Sunday reported 7,750 coronavirus cases in a day, a record since the start of the pandemic with hospitals reporting that intensive care beds are running out. Pollution levels have

been at the "severe" top level on the government index for almost a week.

New Delhi is caught in a perfect pollution storm because of its position in the bowl of a plain, the burning of crop stubble in states around the city, and its dirty industries. Firecracker makers immediately demanded that the government pay compensation for the ban.

The southern district of Sivakasi, which supplies about 90 per cent of India's firecrackers and employs more than 250,000 people, has been hit particularly hard by restrictions in recent years.

Factory owners say they have already lost 30 per cent of their business this year because of the coronavirus. — AFP



BIDEN FOCUSES ON STEPS TO TACKLE CORONAVIRUS

WILMINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden was to convene a task force on Monday to craft a plan for tackling the coronavirus pandemic in the United States and hailed progress on a vaccine, while President Donald Trump steadfastly refused to acknowledge his defeat.

Two days after clinching victory over the Republican president, Democrat Biden is set to give remarks in Wilmington, Delaware, about his plans to address the pandemic that has killed more than 237,000 Americans and to rebuild the economy.

He labelled as “great news” Pfizer Inc’s announcement on Monday that its experimental COVID-19 vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective. Pfizer and German partner BioNTech SE are the first drugmakers to release successful data from a large-scale clinical trial of a coronavirus vaccine. But Biden warned it would be “many more months before there is widespread vaccination” in the United States and underscored the importance for Americans of wearing protective masks to curb the spread of the pathogen.

“Americans will have to rely on masking, distancing, contact tracing, hand washing and other measures to keep themselves safe well into next year. Today’s news is great news, but it doesn’t change that fact,” he said in a statement. Biden will meet with a pandemic advisory board co-chaired by

A group of top scientists and experts to join his coronavirus task force

Keep respected White House coronavirus task force member Anthony Fauci on board

Stimulus package to assist families and small businesses

Free vaccine for all Americans

Access to regular, reliable and free testing

Biden’s anti-pandemic strategy



Main proposals by US president-elect Joe Biden to fight the coronavirus

Cancel withdrawal by US from the World Health Organization

Increase national supply of PPEs*

Nationwide mask mandates and lead by example by wearing a mask

Covid-19 in US
Around 10 million cases and 237,000 deaths

Source: AFP/Joebiden.com

AFP Photo/Jim Watson, Nov 7

*personal protective equipment

AFP

former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler and Yale University Associate Professor Marcella Nunez-Smith.

“I will be informed by science and by experts,” Biden said. Even as some of Trump’s allies encourage him to exhaust every recourse for hanging onto power, the task force will liaise with local and state officials to consider how to safely reopen schools and businesses and tackle racial disparities.

The Biden panel includes Rick Bright, a whistleblower who says

he was removed from his Trump administration post for raising concerns about coronavirus preparedness, and Luciana Borio, who specialises in complex public health emergencies. Trump has frequently clashed with top health officials over the pandemic.

Vice-President Mike Pence was due to meet on Monday with the White House coronavirus task force for the first time since October.

POPULAR VOTE

Biden cleared the threshold of 270 Electoral College votes needed to win the White House on Saturday, four days after the

November 3 election. He beat Trump by more than 4.3 million votes nationwide, with Trump becoming the first US president since 1992 to lose a re-election bid. Trump has not accepted defeat and has launched an array of lawsuits to press claims of election fraud for which he has produced no evidence. State officials have said they are not aware of any significant irregularities.

Asked when Trump would concede or call Biden, Trump campaign adviser Jason Miller on Monday told Fox Business Network: “That word’s not even in our vocabulary now. We’re going

to pursue all these legal means, all the recount methods.”

Although the states have yet to officially certify final election results, in keeping with normal practice, presidential candidates traditionally have recognised the independent analysis of major US media and companies such as Edison Research, which called the election for Biden on Saturday.

Trump has no public events scheduled for Monday, and has not spoken in public since Thursday. He plans to hold rallies to build support for his challenge to the results, campaign spokesman Tim Murtaugh said. — **Reuters**



Anti-Brexit protester Steve Bray demonstrates outside of the conference centre where Brexit trade deal negotiations are taking place in London, on Monday. — **Reuters**

UK, EU resume Brexit talks

LONDON: Britain and the European Union resumed crucial negotiations in London on Monday for a post-Brexit free trade deal, with time running short and both sides saying major obstacles remain.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier arrived in the British capital late on 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.

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 mechanism 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”.

In a weekend phone call, Prime Minister Boris 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**

■ RESTIVE TIGRAY REGION

Hundreds dead in escalating Ethiopian conflict

DANSHA, Ethiopia: An escalating conflict in Ethiopia’s restive Tigray region has killed hundreds of people, sources on the government side said, even as the prime minister sought on Monday to reassure the world his nation was not sliding into civil war.

The flare-up in the northern area bordering Eritrea and Sudan threatens to destabilise Africa’s second most populous nation, where ethnic conflict has already killed hundreds since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took over in 2018.

Reuters reporters travelling

in Tigray and the neighbouring Amhara region saw trucks packed with armed militia and pick-ups with mounted machine-guns rushing to the front line in support of the federal government push.

Some militia members waved the Ethiopian national flag. Abiy, the continent’s youngest leader at 44, won a Nobel Peace Prize last year for democratic reforms and for making peace with Eritrea. But last week the prime minister, who is from Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, the Oromo, launched a campaign against forces loyal to Tigrayan leaders whom he accused of attacking a military



Members of Amhara region militias ride on their truck as they head to face the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, in Sanja, Amhara region near a border with Tigray, on Monday. — **Reuters**

base in the town of Dansha.

“Concerns that Ethiopia will descend into chaos are unfounded and a result of not understanding our context deeply,” he tweeted on Monday.

“Our rule of law operation is aimed at guaranteeing peace and stability.” Abiy has said that jets have been bombing arms depots and other targets. Aid workers and security sources have reported heavy fighting on the ground. A military official in Amhara, on the side of the federal troops, said that clashes with Tigrayan forces in Kirakir had killed nearly 500 on the Tigrayan side. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

STRASBOURG

Carrier pigeon’s century-old message found

A couple out for a walk in eastern France have discovered a tiny capsule containing a message despatched by a Prussian soldier over a century ago using an ill-fated carrier pigeon.

The message from an infantry soldier based at Ingersheim, written in German in a barely legible hand, detailed military manoeuvres and was addressed to a superior officer, said Dominique Jardy, curator of the Linge Museum at Orbey in eastern France.



It appears to be dated 1910, or possibly 1916.

At the time, Ingersheim — now in France’s Grand Est department — was part of Germany.

PARIS

Students clash with police over health risks

Students outside a high school in Compiègne, north of the French capital Paris, clashed with police on Monday in protests over health risks posed by schools being open during the novel coronavirus crisis, police and the town’s mayor said. The local police department said on Twitter that four arrests had been made, one fireman had suffered minor injuries and that there had been “unacceptable” incidents of criminal damage caused during the clashes.

Videos on social media showed a group of youths surrounding a police car outside the Lycée Mireille Grenet school and trying to overturn it, while other videos showed fires burning in the street. Compiègne Mayor Philippe Marini also confirmed to BFM TV that there had been trouble, and condemned the attacks on police officers.

Student demonstrations having started to build up in France over the last week, with some teachers and students protesting against keeping schools open saying it jeopardises their health.

MIAMI

Eta makes landfall in Florida Keys

Tropical Storm Eta made landfall at the Florida Keys late on Sunday, bringing heavy rains and strong winds after slamming Cuba and earlier cutting a deadly path through Central America and southern Mexico.

At least 200 people are dead or missing after Eta — initially classified as a hurricane — ripped through Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras, causing flooding and landslides.

But by the time the storm made landfall on the tip of



Florida, it had weakened with the US National Hurricane Center downgrading its earlier warnings. Eta was still bringing “strong winds, heavy rains, and dangerous storm surge” over portions of southern Florida and the Florida Keys, the NHC said.

A lesson from the pandemic

Drive into National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre of Oman and you will feel a different energy. Everyone is charged with new energy because they are walking the talk. Whether they are health worker or administrator, they have walking in their mind.

The centre launched walk for better health and the number of steps each person takes is recorded and the competition is going on neck to neck. Short breaks are not spent on mobile chats they rush to the parking place or wherever they can to maintain their level of points.

Is it not amazing how a concept has changed lifestyle? People do not want to use elevator. Walking is an opportunity now. It is said we often do not appreciate our blessings but we know now every step counts. Amidst all this is the power of health. The ultimate goal is health. As the Director of the National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre, Dr Noor al Busaidy who is also the chairperson of the Oman Diabetes Association said: “Let’s walk for better health, Let’s do it today.”

It is interesting how the idea has caught on and even outsiders are keen



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WALKING IS AN
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on it. It has been the pandemic which made us appreciate aspects that we had taken for granted. We have been missing family and friends and then as the visits were restricted we began to appreciate outdoors and then came the closure of the beaches. People opted out for camping and hiking, but alas it all falls under gathering and that means none of it is allowed for our own good.

In many ways the pandemic has made us think differently and in a way it has forced us to look inward. We realise the importance of touch and we realise the value of company and conversations. When there was hardly time for people to spend time at home, pandemic came along to make you work from home.

Home became the creative place and parents got more involved in children’s day to day lessons.

Many of us still might be lost in the middle of it all but many have gained the rhythm of the momentum. Change is inevitable and the best lesson and the most difficult probably have been to accept it.

Walking alone might not be enough either but for now it feels amazing for

everyone who is trying it. The weather is perfect and why not explore the changes the walking is going to bring in?

A friend said, “Humans are stronger than virus. We just have to make ourselves stronger.”

All of a sudden it seems a wonder how we were immersed in our daily routines as if, ‘the world would stop if we didn’t, transformed to calmer selves, but not to forget the hardships people are going through due to job loss and other changes that have come about.

Happened to meet a person who was relaxed on the prospect of job loss – he is an expatriate and he said: “Why should I be worried about my job? I am a bachelor, I have knowledge and work experience and I can go and find another job any time. It might take time, and there might be a bit of a struggle, but that is part of life. The world is out there. I found this job so I am sure I will be able to find another one too. But I do feel for the others who have been at a job for a while and have their family with them. It might not be that easy for them.”

BEHIND VACCINE

An understated couple’s ‘dream team’

LUDWIG BURGER & PATRICIA WEISS

Positive data on BioNTech and US partner Pfizer Inc’s COVID-19 vaccine is an unlikely success for the married couple behind the German biotech firm, who have devoted their lives to harnessing the immune system against cancer.

Pfizer said on Monday said its experimental vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19 based on initial data from a large study. Pfizer and BioNTech are the first drugmakers to show successful data from a large-scale clinical trial of a coronavirus vaccine. The companies said they have so far found no serious safety concerns and expect to seek US emergency use authorisation later this month.

From humble roots as the son of a Turkish immigrant working at a Ford factory in Cologne, BioNTech Chief Executive Ugur Sahin, 55, now figures among the 100 richest Germans, together with his wife and fellow board member Oezlem Tuercü, 53, according to weekly Welt am Sonntag.

The market value of Nasdaq-listed BioNTech, which the pair co-founded, had ballooned to \$21 billion as of Friday’s close from \$4.6 billion a year ago, with the firm set to play a major role in mass immunisation against the coronavirus.

“Despite his achievements, he never changed from being incredibly humble and personable,” said Matthias Kromayer, board member of venture capital firm MIG AG, whose funds have backed

BioNTech since its inception in 2008.

Despite his achievements, he never changed from being incredibly humble and personable

MATTHIAS KROMAYER

Board member

He added Sahin would typically walk into business meetings wearing jeans and carrying his signature bicycle helmet and backpack with him. Doggedly pursuing his childhood dream of studying medicine and becoming a physician, Sahin worked at teaching hospitals in

Cologne and the southwestern city of Homburg, where he met Tuercü during his early academic career. Medical research and oncology became a shared passion. Tuercü, the daughter of a Turkish physician who had migrated to Germany, said in a media interview that even on the day of their wedding, both made time for lab work.

Together they honed in on the immune system as a potential ally in the fight against cancer and tried to address the unique genetic makeup of each tumour. Life as entrepreneurs started in 2001 when they set up Ganymed Pharmaceuticals to develop cancer-fighting antibodies, but Sahin — by then a professor at Mainz university — never gave up academic research and teaching.

They won funding from MIG AG as well as from Thomas and Andreas Struengmann, who sold their generic drugs business Hexal to Novartis in 2005. That venture was sold to Japan’s Astellas in 2016 for up to \$1.4 billion. By then, the team behind Ganymed was already busy building BioNTech, founded in 2008, to pursue a much broader range of cancer immunotherapy tools. That included mRNA, a versatile messenger substance to send genetic instructions into cells.

For MIG’s Kromayer, Tuercü and Sahin are a “dream team” in that they reconciled their visions with the constraints of reality. The BioNTech story took a twist when Sahin in January came across a scientific paper on a new coronavirus outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan and it struck him how small the step was from anti-cancer mRNA drugs to mRNA-based viral vaccines.

BioNTech quickly assigned about 500 staff to project “light speed” to work on several possible compounds, winning pharma giant Pfizer and Chinese drugmaker Fosun as partners in March.

— Reuters

HIGHS AND LOWS

At pivotal moments of 2020, Trump failed to win over doubters

STEVE HOLLAND

Donald Trump had reason to count on the loyalty of the large chunk of Americans who drove his improbable election victory in 2016. But in 2020, he needed a wider swath of voters to believe in his promise to “Make America Great Again.”

Faced with three crises — mounting coronavirus infections and deaths, the ensuing economic collapse and protests against police killings of Black Americans — Trump as US president had an opportunity to unite people across political persuasions in the final year of his tumultuous first term.

Instead, at almost every pivotal moment, the brash businessman and former reality television star stayed true to his divisive brand. Spurning the advice of scientists and advisers, he stuck to a script embraced by his hard-core supporters and mocked those who dared to disagree.

His approach ultimately left a majority of American voters convinced he was not the right man to lead the country forward.

“If he had buckled down with a coherent and reassuring strategy dealing with the coronavirus, he absolutely could have made up the small margins that he lost several states by,” said Republican strategist Ryan Williams, who advised Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign.

“Instead of addressing the pandemic by listening to the advice of his best advisers, he doubled down on his instincts, which is what Donald Trump has done his entire life,” Williams said.

Even after major networks had declared Democrat Joe Biden the winner on Saturday, Trump refused to concede. Among Republicans, there was a feeling Trump did better than expected. Pre-election opinion polls had signalled



A supporter of President Donald Trump holds a placard stating ‘LEGAL VOTES ONLY’ while shouting across the street in Philadelphia. – Reuters

TRUMP HAD AN
OPPORTUNITY
TO UNITE PEOPLE
ACROSS POLITICAL
PERSUASIONS IN THE
FINAL YEAR

a Democratic tidal wave. But Trump kept it close, helped Republicans down the ballot and attracted more than 70 million votes, seven million more than he did in 2016.

“Trump delivered,” Republican strategist Scott Reed said. “And he’s still going to have a major impact on the party.”

Trump began the year riding high and looking poised to coast to re-election. The economy was booming. His impeachment trial was behind him after the Republican-led Senate cleared him on two charges brought

by Democrats. The Democratic Party, meanwhile, was fractured in its search for a presidential nominee.

On Air Force One in February, Trump chuckled and critiqued the performances of each potential rival as he watched them debate on the TV in his front cabin. But by April, COVID-19 had spread throughout the country. Seeing that daily news briefings by his coronavirus task force were getting good TV ratings, Trump stepped in and took them over, reluctant to cede the limelight.

— Reuters

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MAGNIFICENT MEDVEDEV

Russian beats Zverev to win first Paris Masters title

PARIS: Third seed Daniil Medvedev claimed his first Paris Masters title at Bercy Arena on Sunday by battling back from a set down to beat Germany's Alexander Zverev.

The Russian was on top form in a high-quality encounter, winning 5-7, 6-4, 6-1 to secure his first trophy of the season and the eighth of his career.

"It's great, I'm really happy. As I always say, I don't always show this after matches, but I'm always happy to win", said Medvedev after securing his third Masters title.

Both players will now turn their attentions to the ATP Tour Finals in London, an event won by Zverev in 2018.

Medvedev has had an up-and-

down season, but was at his best this week in Paris, continuing his magnificent record on hard courts — all of his ATP titles have come on the surface.

"Before this tournament I wasn't in great form, zero finals this year and I was crying, well complaining, to my wife, 'Oh my God, I don't have the level, not playing well, not even any finals", he said.

"But now, three Masters titles, it's great. I have had the level this week. I managed to keep the pressure on and in the end I broke his level a little bit"

Fourth seed Zverev, who was bidding for a third straight tournament victory after back-to-back successes on home soil in Cologne, remains without

a Masters title since the 2018 Madrid Open after seeing his 12-match winning streak ended.

He has recently denied allegations from his ex-girlfriend Olga Sharypova that he tried to "strangle" her while at last year's US Open.

Zverev hit out at those criticising him after the match.

"I know that right now there are a lot of people who will be trying to wipe a smile off my face, but I'm still smiling under this mask", said Zverev.

MEDVEDEV OUTLASTS ZVEREV

The 24-year-old Medvedev has won two of his last three matches against Zverev, having also beaten him in last year's Shanghai



Before this tournament I wasn't in great form, zero finals this year and I was crying, well complaining, to my wife, 'Oh my God, I don't have the level, not playing well, not even any finals

DANIIL MEDVEDEV
Russian World No 4

Masters final, but still trails their head-to-head 5-2.

The world number five outlasted the US Open runner-up in a near-empty Bercy Arena — with France in its second coronavirus lockdown — securing the win after two hours and eight minutes on court.

Zverev, who knocked out Rafael Nadal in the semifinals, was left to rue a losing run of seven straight games from the end of the second set and into the decider. Both players continued their excellent serving form for much of the opening set, but the German waited for his moment to pounce, bringing up three set points in game 11 with a fine backhand passing shot.

It looked as though he had

sealed the set at the second opportunity when a Medvedev backhand was shown by Hawkeye to have flown long, but there was no challenge from Zverev. It mattered little, as the world number seven secured a one-set lead when his opponent fired off target on the next point, celebrating with a fist pump matched by coach David Ferrer sitting in his player's box.

Medvedev put Zverev under serious pressure in a marathon third game of the second set, but after eight deuces and four break points, the 23-year-old managed to hold on thanks to strong play at the net. But Medvedev kept pushing and finally broke through to lead 5-4 as Zverev sent a forehand long. — AFP



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority



SAUD BAHWAN Group

Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign :10/11/2020
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : FORTUNER

Production Year	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Range*	Nos. of Affected Vehicles
August 16, 2019 Through December 2, 2019	TOYOTA	FORTUNER	MHFD88FS7L0025618 to MHFBA3FS4L1042271	39

* Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges are affected.

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with a brake vacuum hose. Due to an improper vulcanization machine process, the hardness of the hose may be insufficient. If the vehicle is kept driving, the hose deforms, and in the worst case, braking assist could be lost resulting in an increased brake pedal effort being required to stop the vehicle and an increase of the vehicle stopping distance.

Procedure:
As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

For More Information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc.from 10/11/2020.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. from 10/11/2020.

C.R. 1703412



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority



SAUD BAHWAN Group

Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign :10/11/2020
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : RAV4

Production Year	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Range*	Nos. of Affected Vehicles
September 25,2019 Through October 29,2019	TOYOTA	RAV4	JTMB13FVOKD046885 to JTMWD33FV6LD526974	82

*Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges are affected.

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with front lower suspension arms connecting the front wheels to the vehicle front cross member. Due to certain improper production conditions that occurred at the steel material supplier, a steel slab that was used to produce front lower suspension arms may have had cracks on some portions of its surface. If a vehicle with an affected front lower suspension arm(s) is driven frequently with rapid acceleration and deceleration over its lifetime, the cracks in the affected arms could propagate and the suspension arm can eventually separate from the front wheel assembly. This may result in a loss of vehicle control and increase the risk of a crash.

[Reference]
Front lower suspension arms: A vehicle part which connects the front wheels to the Vehicle front cross member.
Steel slab: A semi-finished steel product. Steel slabs are roll formed into coils which are used to create stamped steel products, including the front lower suspension arms.

Procedure:
As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

For More Information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc. from 10/11/2020.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. from 10/11/2020.

C.R. 1703412



Kohli given 'paternity leave' for 3 Australia Tests

NEW DELHI: India captain Virat Kohli has been granted "paternity leave" to miss three of the country's four Tests in Australia starting in December. But the Board of Control for Cricket in India also announced on Monday that another key batsman, Rohit Sharma, has been added back to the Test squad despite his injury worries.



Bio-bubble not a sustainable lifestyle: Starc

SYDNEY: Prolonged stay in bio-secure bubbles is not a "sustainable lifestyle" and is bound to take toll on a cricketer's body and mind, Australia quick Mitchell Starc said on Monday. Playing in bubbles has become the new normal since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted cricket in March and Starc joined a growing list of players questioning the viability of these arrangements.



MUMBAI OUT TO SHATTER DELHI'S MAIDEN IPL DREAM

DELHI OUTPLAY SUNRISERS HYDERABAD TO REACH THEIR FIRST FINAL

DUBAI: Rohit Sharma's Mumbai Indians are aiming for a record-extending fifth title when they defend their Indian Premier League crown on Tuesday, but the Delhi Capitals under skipper Shreyas Iyer are threatening a changing of the guard.

The 13th IPL final will be played in an eerily empty Dubai stadium because of the coronavirus pandemic, but more than 200 million are expected to watch on television in India alone.

Delhi outplayed Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday to reach their first final, meaning a new name could be added to the trophy if the Ricky Ponting-coached Capitals beat Mumbai, who lifted it in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.

Led by the 25-year-old Iyer, Delhi have been the surprise package of 2020 — though their path to the final has not been smooth. They started the season brilliantly, winning seven of their first nine games and briefly battling Mumbai for top place in the league before four straight

defeats. Three defeats have come against Sharma's Mumbai — including the first play-off on last Thursday.

Mumbai-born Iyer said Delhi, with Shikhar Dhawan shining with the bat and the impressive pace of Kagiso Rabada, had to hold their nerve to counter Mumbai's big-match experience.

"This has been a rollercoaster. A lot of ups and downs. We have stuck together like a family," Iyer said after his team's 17-run win over Hyderabad in the final play-off match took them to the final.

"In the next game... we have to play freely and maintain our temperament."

Iyer's inconsistent batting has been a cause for concern, but Dhawan has hit two centuries while Australian Marcus Stoinis and West Indian Shimron Hetmyer have contributed valuable power-play runs.

Rabada leads the IPL bowling chart with 29 wickets, while fellow South African Anrich Nortje has set the IPL record for the fastest delivery at 156 kilometres per hour.



Stoinis, who took three wickets and scored 38 in Sunday's victory, said Delhi at their best should be able to beat Mumbai, who he called a "great team".

FRESH GAME

But Sharma said beating Delhi three times this season will not matter much on a new day in a closely contested IPL.

"You can take confidence from the past but you can't dwell on it," he said on Monday, "because one guy having a good day can take the game away from you."

"We need to keep focus, do little things well. Treat this as a fresh game, think they are a new opponent. We keep doing the right things on the field I am sure we will have the fifth one in the bag."

Ponting was part of the Sharma-led Mumbai team which won the first of their four titles seven years ago.

Sharma, 33, was appointed skipper midway through the 2013 season after Ponting stepped down due to poor form, but has since grown into his role

as a leader — even being touted as a rival to Virat Kohli as captain of India's limited-overs teams.

Sharma is not in the best of form with the bat and missed a few games because of a hamstring injury which keeps him out of the one-day and Twenty20 squad from India's upcoming tour of Australia.

But his team remain favourites against Delhi, with a strong batting line-up that includes rising star Ishan Kishan, South African wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock and Suryakumar Yadav.

The fast-bowling duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Trent Boult, who moved from Delhi Capitals this year, have shared 49 wickets in their impressive run to the final.

But Boult, who struck twice in his first over of the opening play-off, bowled just two overs before going off the field with a reported groin strain.

Sharma said his left-arm paceman "pulled up pretty well in the last two days, fingers crossed, hopefully he plays".

— AFP

■ OBA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OBA board term extended till May 2021

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 9

The general assembly of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) agreed on extension of the current term of the board directors for a period of six months until May 19, 2021.

This decision came after the AGM meeting on Sunday at City Seasons Muscat in presence of 11 representatives of clubs including Nizwa, Ahli Sidab, Dhofar, Seeb, Al Ittifaq, Al Mudhaibi, Qurayat, Salalah, Majees and Bausher. Al Salam did not attend the meeting.

The meeting also approved the membership of Al Kamil W'al Wafi club at the OBA. The AGM meeting was presided over by Shaikh Ahmed bin Abdullah al Rawas, Vice-Chairman of OBA, on



behalf of Dr Farid bin Khamis al Zadjali, Chairman of OBA.

Al Rawas welcomed the members and conveyed the greetings of Dr Farid al Zadjali who is currently abroad for medical treatment. "On behalf of the board directors, I would like to thank the top efforts by the clubs to support the plans and initiatives of OBA to help develop the sports locally to reach to all the categories. Thanks to all the clubs as well for their active presence in all the basketball

events," Al Rawas added.

In a previous decision by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the sports bodies elections were postponed to 2021.

Dr Farid Khamis al Zadjali had affirmed to *Oman Daily Observer* that he will stand for chairman's position for another term if there is no committed candidates. According to some sources, Nizwa club chairman Eng. Khalfan al Naabi, is planning to run for the chairman's post.

■ OMAN CRICKET LEAGUE

Victories for OCT Ruwi, Design Group

MUSCAT: Brilliant all-round performance by Ali Akbar al Balushi powered OCT Ruwi to a commanding 51-run victory against OCT Al Hail A in a 30-over B Division League clash at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Amerat. Ali Akbar's fluent 97 off 78 was instrumental in taking OCT Ruwi to a total of 187 for 9 in 30 overs which Al Hail side found too good to chase, falling short by 51 runs.

Brief scores (B Division - 30 overs): OCT Ruwi 187 for 9 in 30 overs (Ali Akbar 97 - 9x4, 1x6, Abdul Aziz Qader Baksh 27 - 3x4, Nadhir Ghulam 3-26, Hisham Shafi 2-20) beat Oct Al Hail 'A' 136 for 10 in 26.2 overs (Waleed Rahim 29 - 3x4, Faris Said 28 - 3x4, Najeeb Qader Baksh Karim 2-15, Ali Akbar 2-27) by 51 runs.

ALTHAF HEROICS LIFT DESIGN GROUP

Design Group Engineering Consultants rode on Mohammed Althaf's superb all-round show to seal a thrilling 2-run win over Al Waad Trading in a C Division T20 game at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Batting first, Design Group posted a sizeable 189 for 6 on the board thanks to a 78 not out off only 40 balls by Althaf. Al Waad fell short by 2 runs as they ended 20 overs at 187 for 9.



Brief scores (C Division T20): Design Group 189 for 6 in 20 overs (Mohammed Althaf 78 not out - 10x4, 3x6, Karthik Rajappa 40 - 7x4, Sujith Kumar 2-30, Shine NV 2-31) beat Al Waad Trading 187 for 9 in 20 overs (Pradeesh Kumar 63 - 7x4, 1x6, Suseendran 41 - 4x4, Satham Hussain 3-30, Mohammed Althaf 2-25) by 2 runs.

CHADHA STARS FOR VANDERLANDE

In D Division, Rahul Chadha's (pictured) great day (62 and 3-15) paved the way for Vanderlande's 13-run win over Al Jadidi Engineering.

Brief scores (D Division): Vanderlande 129 for 7 in 20 overs (Rahul Chadha 62 - 5x4, Madan Abhishek 23 - 2x4. Shahzad Ahmed 3-22) bt Al Jadidi Engineering 116 all out in 20 overs (Krishnan Dhanesh 30 - 5x4, Mohammed Shafeeq 29 - 2x4. Rahul Chadha 3-15, Muhammed Muzaizen 3-19) by 13 runs.

SHAMEEL BOWLS SAFARA TO VICTORY

In another D Division match, Mohammed Shameel's 4 for 30 was the highlight of Safara International's 5-wicket win over Spanio VDD.

Brief scores (D Division): Spanio VDD 148 for 6 in 20 overs (Sanjay Dhanjayan 37 - 2x4, Sajith Chenganassery 32 - 4x4, Ansal Ali 30 - 2x4. Mohammed Shameel 4-30, Amol Dhote 2-32) lost to Safara International 149 for 5 in 18.5 overs (Sandesh Pusalkar 44 - 4x4, 1x6, Mohammed Ahmed 37 - 5x4, Amol Dhote 27 not out - 3x4. Faisal Majeed 2-24) by 5 wickets.



Impressive Al Faisal finishes overall fourth at Silverstone



MUSCAT: It was a debut to cherish and celebrate for Oman's talented driver Al Faisal al Zubair as he along with Martin Kodric claimed a Silver Cup class podium finish and an overall fourth spot in the highly-competitive final round of the 2020 British GT Championship at the Silverstone circuit in UK on Sunday.

The 22-year-old two-time former Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East champion displayed no signs of rustiness despite the fact that he was returning to the wheel after a gap of nearly 10 months.

Racing for 2 Seas Motorsport in a McLaren 720S GT3 car, Al Faisal and Croatia's Kodric displayed their mettle with a P4 in the overall GT3 standings and notching up a third-place in their Silver Cup class among a grid of 30 cars.

Barwell Motorsport finally took their first British GT title as Sandy Mitchell and Rob Collard's victory at the Silverstone 500 was enough to claim the crown.

The race featured some of the

best drivers and also included former Formula One champion Jenson Button.

Button, the 2009 F1 champion had a frustrating race,

The race featured quite experienced drivers and former champions. It was a tough race and I am happy to have made my return in such a competition

**AL FAISAL
AL ZUBAIR**
Omani race driver

in the Jenson Team Rocket RJN McLaren he shared with Chris Buncombe and they eventually finished 14th.

Muscat-based Al Faisal and Kodric were the third entry



from 2 Seas Motorsport in the competition and the other two teams from the same stables finished in fifth and 12th positions respectively.

CHALLENGING RACE
Al Faisal began the race at P11 after the two qualifying sessions saw him and Kordic end up P5 and P14 in the first and second

qualifying sessions.

Taking on the wheel for the first stint of the three-hour race, Al Faisal soon moved to P8 and came up with a superb control to climb up to P4 before making the pit stop for Kodric to take over.

A slight delay during the pit stop pushed the advantage back and Kodric had to resume at P15. The Croatian got the team back to tenth before Al Faisal took over and reached P6 with an hour to go.

In the final session, Kodric managed a P4 and ensured they keep the place till the finish line to spark joy in the team as 2 Seas Motorsport ended with a third-place in the teams' standings in the Silver Cup class.

The podium finish was ensured with 2 Seas Motorsport other team of Angus Fender and Dean Macdonald coming fifth and the duo of Jordan Witt and Jack Mitchell at 12th.

**DELIGHTED
ON MY RETURN**
Later speaking after the P4 overall finish, Al Faisal said, "I

am delighted with my return to the circuit. Thanks to my team-mate Martin (Kodric), we could come up with such a good result in one of the top races and at a world-class Silverstone circuit.

"It was a great run with Martin on my debut at the championship. Very happy to have ensured my team [2 Seas Motorsport] a third place in the Silver Cup class and finishing overall fourth is something I am proud of as the race featured quite experienced drivers and former champions. It was a tough race and I am happy to have made my return in such a competition."

The Omani added, "despite the lack of preparations, we were close to an overall third but a glitch during a pit stop hit us hard. However, my team is satisfied with the result and that was my primary goal."

"I have definitely gained a lot with this participation not just with confidence getting a boost but also the experience to race in one of the top championships. It will be of great help when I begin my new season."

business

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Dhamani platform to strengthen delivery of high-quality health care

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 9

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) hosted on Monday an online forum to showcase the newly launched Dhamani platform underpinning the soon-to-be-launched Mandatory Health Insurance scheme.

The meeting attended by executives from the company contracted by the CMA to build the platform, as well as representatives of insurance companies, brokers, agents, third party claim administrators and private hospitals and clinics.

Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Vice-resident (Insurance Sector), CMA, said: “The Dhamani platform focuses on exchange of health information on the visitors of private health institutions and will contribute in the settlement of insurance claims as well as time-saving, funds transfer, requests for approval and validation of insurance coverage among the parties of the insurance relationship, the regulators and supervisors.

Al Maamari added that the platform will integrate the ‘Shifa’ system of the Ministry of Health, thereby enabling linkages between the medical records of patients with health insurance records – a move that will contribute to the creation of a unified health records system for customers.

Additionally, the platform will integrate the company and manpower databases of the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the ID card and immigration system of the Royal Oman Police.

This will allow for real-time validation of the eligibility



credentials of policyholders and prompt payments digitally, leading to better cash flow between health care providers and customers.

Furthermore, it will reduce the potential for misuse and fraud, he stated.

Eng Mohammed bin Hamed al Maskari, Chief Executive Officer of Infoline, commended the CMA policy in regulating the health insurance market by focusing on creating an electronic platform for health insurance using state of the art technology.

The platform, he said, can be accessed by any health institution, thereby ensuring the provision of quality health insurance and treatment services in the private health care institutions.

He added that CMA’s selection of a consortium of national and international companies, led by Infoline which is an Omani company, was due to the ability of the partnership that participated in building health insurance claim administration platforms in a number of countries, and due to the transformation in the health insurance sector in such countries the system contributed in providing technologies enabling speedy access to approvals for treatment, easy follow-up by the supervisors to limit delays and unsound practices in dealing with insurance policies.

Omran plans chain of tourism service stations in Oman

DOMESTIC TOURISM: Local firms, SMEs invited to lease retail and commercial space in maiden Aber-branded tourism service station on Qurayat-Sur coastal road

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



tourists and travellers all the essential public services,” the country’s tourism development flagship said in a recent announcement on the Aber project.

As integrated one-stop rest areas, Aber tourism service stations will come equipped with, among other things, filling station, car care centre, retail and commercial building, washrooms, prayer area, and parking facilities for cars and buses.

When fully developed, Qurayat-Sur Travellers Oasis is proposed to incorporate an ‘Atana Stay’ lodge, family entertainment zones, outdoor play areas, all-day dining facilities and even a park for recreational vehicles (RV).

Omran Group has also invited local companies and SMEs to consider leasing retail and commercial space within the integrated rest area on Qurayat-Sur highway with an eye on motorists, tourists and visitors who are expected to patronise the station.

Retail opportunities include restaurants and cafes, car maintenance services, cosmetics and accessories, pharmacies, handicraft and gift stores, and camping and adventure shops, it said.

Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and

Tourism has long mooted private sector investments in public services and express stops at key tourism destinations around the Sultanate — an initiative that was later taken in hand for accelerated implementation under Tanfeedh (The National Programme For Enhancing Economic Diversification).

Its successor agency, the erstwhile Implementation Support & Follow-up Unit, underscored the importance of public services, such as washrooms, F&B areas and lodges, at popular holiday locations to help boost domestic tourism in the Sultanate.

Central bank sees French GDP down 10pc in 2020

PARIS: France’s central bank said on Monday it expects economic activity to decline between 9 and 10 per cent this year, a bigger drop than previously forecast due to a new lockdown.

While the new confinement

measures will deepen the recession, the Banque de France believes that they will be far less destructive than during the country’s first confinement earlier this year.

“Before the second wave, we thought the recession would be a

little less than 9 per cent, we think today that for 2020 as a whole it will be between 9 and 10 per cent,” Banque de France chief Francois Villeroy de Galhau said on RTL.

The central bank had forecast in September that economic

activity, or GDP, would decline by 8.7 per cent this year. But that was before the rapid rise in COVID-19 cases in France in October, which led the government to impose a second lockdown.

— AFP

TOURISM SPENDING

Tourists spent RO 684 million in Oman last year: NCSI

STRONG GROWTH: The number of visitors to the Sultanate surged to 3.5 million in 2019, up from around 2.6 million visitors in 2015, representing a growth of 7.4 per cent annually

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 9

The total spend of visitors to the Sultanate during 2015-2019 soared to RO 684.7 million in 2019, up RO 364.8 million in 2015, representing an annual average increase of 17 per cent.

The average spend per visitor increased 9 per cent to RO 195.3 in 2019, up from RO 138.5 in 2015, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCS) said in a new report.

According to the report, the number of visitors to the Sultanate surged to 3.5 million in 2019, up from around 2.6 million visitors in 2015, representing a growth of 7.4 per cent annually.

The number of visitors coming to the Sultanate reached 3.5 million during 2019, up by 8.2 per cent compared to 2018. GCC nationals ranked first with 40.3 per cent, reaching 1.4 million of the total number of visitors.

Visitors came from Asian countries with 24.8 per cent followed by European visitors with 20.7 per cent.

“If the government wants to attract visitors to the Sultanate at higher rates, it should make more efforts to upgrade the tourism sector and continue to develop its infrastructure as a promising and reliable source of income in the gross national product,



in addition to targeting new markets and marketing the Sultanate as a safe and diversified tourist destination, the Centre’s latest tourism bulletin stated.

Entertainment was the principal attraction with 46.4 per cent of the

Entertainment was the principal attraction with 46.4 per cent of the total number of visitors arriving for this purpose, representing about 1.6 million of the total, followed by family and social visits (30.5 per cent), and business (11.7 per cent)

night accounted for 71.3 per cent of the total (2.5 million).

The number of tourists who preferred hotels and hotel apartments for their stay during their visit to the Sultanate reached 1.6 million tourists, constituting 64.8 per cent of the total, followed by tourists who preferred to stay with friends and family (20.5 per

cent).

Males accounted for 63.5 per cent (2.2 million) of the total, while females made up the rest (1.3 million).

Tourists spent 32.4 per cent of their total spend on air transport in 2019, generating RO 221.8 million for airlines and related services, compared to RO 202 million in 2018, an increase of 9.8 per cent. Accommodation accounted for 30.1 per cent of the total spend, followed by food and beverages (13.5 per cent) and shopping (7.9 per cent). Tourists generated 19.9 million nights in 2019, representing an average of 8 nights per tourist.

Visitors from the GCC accounted for 40.8 per cent of the total (8.1 million nights), followed by Europeans (6.4 million nights), Asian countries (12.5 per cent), Arab countries (7.9 per cent) and others (6.7 per cent).



Be'ah signs pact with OCGS

The memorandum aims at enhancing the efforts of both parties to achieve mutual benefits in the fields of environmental sustainability as well as the capacity building side which the OCGS provides for their stakeholders in regards with governance.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 9

The Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Oman Center for Governance and Sustainability (OCGS) to strengthen ties between the two parties in terms of governance, sustainability, and capacity-building. The MoU was signed by Sayyid Hamed bin Sultan al Busaidy, the CEO of OCGS, and Eng Tariq bin Ali al Amri, CEO of be'ah.

The memorandum aims at enhancing the efforts of both parties to achieve mutual benefits in the fields of environmental sustainability as well as the capacity building side which



the OCGS provides for their stakeholders in regards with governance.

Dr Mohab bin Ali al Hinai, Head of the Environmental Center of Excellence at be'ah, said in a statement: "We are delighted with this partnership with OCGS and we are looking forward to develop the expertise in be'ah through the training services that OCGS provides. We are also aiming at unifying the governmental institutions' efforts to achieve sustainability and provide the best possible solutions to governance

and sustainability issues."

Dr Al Hinai added that all sustainability training programmes provided by both be'ah and OCGS will be unified in order to avoid duplication of programmes. One of the objectives agreed by be'ah and the centre is the promotion of all the activities, events, and conferences organised by be'ah in OCGS's communication channels.

Sayyid Hamed bin Sultan al Busaidy, CEO of OCGS, confirmed: "This MoU comes as a step to encourage companies

to benefit from the consultation services that we provide at OCGS in the governance and sustainability sectors." He also said that "since the launch of OCGS, the centre has been offering services and establishing partnerships with different organisations across the Sultanate to strengthen ties between the private and public sectors and unify efforts that aim to achieve business and projects sustainability, and utilise all types of resources to best serve the national economy and the Sultanate's Vision 2040 Goals."

MTCIT accredits Cloud and Hosting Services providers

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 9

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has announced the accreditation of 2 new companies: Oman Data Park and Data2Cloud, as part of the Accreditation Programme for IT service providers.

The latter are accredited for delivering Cloud and Hosting Services, with more service providers currently in the accreditation pipeline. The programme is targeting all IT service providers who are wishing to serve the government administrative Units, including critical national infrastructure companies and government owned companies.

The Accreditation Programme is a comprehensive programme established by MTCIT to assist in boosting the national economy. It aims to standardise and enhance the quality of delivered IT services in the Sultanate and to provide job opportunities for Omani startups.

National standards with



technical and administrative baseline requirements have to be fulfilled by IT service providers in order to be accredited, consequently, that will reflect in elevating the quality of the services delivered in the market, increase the local competition and build the required competencies that meet not only the national demand but also will enable national companies to compete at international levels.

Additionally, this will build more trust to invest in local companies. The programme has been launched at the end of last year and is implemented through several planned phases, at which each phase will cover additional number of IT services.

The first phase of the programme focuses on service providers who are delivering security assessment and cloud and hosting services.

■ CSR COMMITMENT

Sohar Aluminium donates medical equipment to Ibri Hospital

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 9

Ibri Hospital and Sohar Aluminium recently celebrated the installation of new medical equipment that was funded by the company as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility commitments.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kharusi, Sohar Aluminium's General Manager of Human

Resources and Corporate Affairs, said: "We are very pleased for taking this step which comes in line with several previous initiatives through which we supported the health sector especially during these difficult time.

We stand committed to playing our role as a leading local company in the field of Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR). We have always prioritised health and education as two of the main focus



areas of our CSR framework."

Dr Nasser bin Abdullah al Shekaili, Manager of Ibri Hospital said: "Undoubtedly, these devices will have a great impact on enriching the quality of the services provided by the hospital, that serves about 250,000 people from Al Dhahirah Governorate. The devices will serve several departments such as the Accident and Emergency Department, the Otolaryngology

Department, the Dental and Maxillofacial Department, and the Gynaecology Department, in addition to the Cardio and Respiratory Clinics." The devices include Portable Ultrasound Scan Machine and Colour Doppler, Dental OMFS Instruments, ENT Video Endoscopy System, IOVAS-Intraosseous System, and Sleep Apnea Screening Device, among others.

P R E S S R E L A S E S



OWN THE TOYOTA RUSH FOR SURE WITH EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS

If you are looking for a fun to drive, value-for-money and rewarding SUV ownership experiences then the Toyota Rush is the perfect vehicle for you.

Besides sporting a sleek and attractive design, the Rush also ticks all the boxes in terms of interiors, space, technology, safety and more.

Those looking forward to owning the Rush can benefit with cash gift RO 1,700, 3 years service / 30,000kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance (Comprehensive Oman Only). (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Please visit the nearest Toyota showroom for exact details).

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Toyota Rush is available with a 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine that generates a maximum output of 103.3 hp and 13.87 kg-m of torque and incorporates the Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing-intelligent) technology, which continuously optimises intake and exhaust valve timing in response to driving conditions for exceptional performance. The engine of the Rush is mated to a four-speed automatic transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with superior fuel efficiency.

OAB PARTNERS WITH SHUKRAN

Oman Arab Bank recently announced the signing of an agreement with the Landmark Group in Oman, which allows its customers to convert their OAB Rewards points into Shukrans.

Customers who pay using their credit cards will be able to redeem these points for Shukrans and shop from a wide range popular, homegrown Landmark Group brands, including Centrepoint, Home Centre, Max, Shoexpress, Emax and more.

Commenting on this new signing, Rashad al Shaikh (pictured), Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB said, "At OAB, we always strive to provide more value-added services to customers by establishing key partnerships with renowned brands.

In line with this commitment, we entered into an agreement with the Landmark Group, which represents several diverse range of brands in the Sultanate.

Our customers can now convert their points received from our OAB Rewards programme into Shukrans, allowing them to receive incredible discounts and shop more."

To convert OAB Rewards points, customers can simply visit <http://www.oabrewards.com/> or log onto the OAB Rewards App and submit a Shukran conversion request.

A notification will be sent to confirm the process completion, after which they can redeem Shukrans against purchases at Landmark Retail brand stores.



ALIZZ ISLAMIC BANK SUPPORTS OMAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OMANI WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

Alizz Islamic Bank was the exclusive banking sponsor of the special 'Omani Women's Day' Celebration that was organised by Oman Medical Association.

The event was held at the Holiday Inn Muscat, under the patronage of HH Dr Mona bint Fahad bin Mahmoud al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in the presence of a number of officials. The annual Omani Women's Day Celebration event aims to recognise the role and effort of Oman's women in shaping the success of the country.

A number of exciting activities took place at the celebrations including speeches by inspiring female speakers who pointed out the continuous participation of Omani women in different fields. Token gifts of appreciation were also presented to the attendants.

It is worth noting that Alizz Islamic Bank rewards its female customers with a monthly draw for the Bank's Bushra Prize Savings Account, Oman's first Sharia-compliant prize savings account whereby 10 female winners win RO 1,000 each every month.

TBY WEBINAR ON DOWNSTREAM PETROCHEMICALS

The Business Year is hosting a webinar on the theme, 'Oman's Downstream Petrochemicals Potential', in collaboration by OQ, the Sultanate's integrated energy firm, and featuring key players in Oman's downstream sector.

Taking part in the online discussion on Wednesday, November 11, are: Ahmed al Jahdhami, CEO Downstream at OQ; Talal al Awfi, Chief Executive-Commercial at OQ; Abdulrahman al Yahyai, CEO of the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL); and Khalid al Mushaileh, a downstream petroleum expert. "Oman is on the path towards significant increases in its downstream capacity due to a number of key investments coming to fruition in the short-medium term, including a nearly \$7 billion integrated refinery and petrochemical facility at Liwa slated to begin commercial production later this year. TBY sits down with key players in Oman's downstream sector to discuss the transformative impact of these investments, their contributions towards the national GDP and diversification vision, and opportunities to decarbonisation," said TBY in a statement.





Aldi UK extends click & collect trial

LONDON: Aldi UK, the British arm of the German supermarket discounter, will extend its trial of a click and collect grocery service by up to an additional 200 stores. — **Reuters**



Gold prices firm as dollar eases

SINGAPORE: Gold prices edged higher in early Asian trade on Monday, propped up by a weaker dollar. Spot gold rose 0.1 per cent to \$1,953.45 per ounce. — **Reuters**



Philippines revises Q2 contraction

MANILA: The Philippine economy contracted 16.9 per cent in the Q2 from a year earlier, worse than the preliminary estimate of a 16.5 per cent decline. — **Reuters**

China's tech industry relieved by Biden win — but not relaxed

Chinese tech giants Huawei Technologies to TikTok owner ByteDance to Tencent Holdings have seen their supply chains upended or global expansion efforts stymied by sanctions issued by the Trump administration after Washington accused them of being national security risks



Visitors are seen at a Huawei stand at the Mobile World Congress in Shanghai, in this file photo. — **Reuters**

BEIJING: China's technology industry, one of President Donald Trump's main targets in Washington's tussles with Beijing, hopes Joe Biden can create a more constructive relationship - but few think the rivalry will deescalate, executives and analysts say.

Trump's four-year term has already taught the industry the importance of self-reliance, and China's intentions to improve its domestic tech capabilities will not change, they said.

"When Biden takes office, tech companies in China might be relieved," said Fang Xingdong, director of the Consortium of Internet and Society at the Communication University of Zhejiang. "At least, the United States is supposed to re-advocate openness, re-respect fair competition, and re-advocate innovation," Fang added.

"However, in the high-tech field, competition and game theory will not end, and China and the US will compete with each other with true innovation capabilities in the next decade."

Chinese tech giants Huawei Technologies to TikTok owner

ByteDance to Tencent Holdings have seen their supply chains upended or global expansion efforts stymied by sanctions issued by the Trump administration after Washington accused them of being national security risks.

Several other Chinese firms have been cut off from US suppliers by a trade blacklist while ByteDance and Huawei, in particular, have been pushed into a corner by the Trump administration.

ByteDance is finalising a preliminary deal to create a new company with Walmart Inc and Oracle Corp to oversee TikTok's US operations after Trump ordered it to sell the popular short video app's US unit or face a ban.

US trade curbs have choked off access by Huawei,

the world's biggest maker of mobile telecommunications equipment and smartphones, to commercially available chips, leaving it short of the components that power its high-end phones.

Jefferies analysts said in a note on Monday that China would likely decline in terms of Biden's policy priorities, as he focuses first on domestic issues, and that a blanket US ban on China's semiconductor industry would be less likely under Biden.

Still, many executives said Trump's actions had exposed how vulnerable the Chinese technology industry was. They said shoring it up was now a policy priority for the country.

Beijing has in recent months announced a new "dual circulation" model of growth to

steer China's economy. This sees it reducing its reliance on overseas markets and technology by, for example, spending billions of dollars to encourage a domestic chip industry.

"It is possible that China and the United States may have a chance to negotiate to ease some of the technology issues," said a senior staff member at one of the blacklisted Chinese companies who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

"But it is difficult to change the long-term trend," he added. "The Trump administration has awakened the Chinese industry and development in the domestic industrial chain will continue to form a certain degree of independence." — **Reuters**



An oil tanker is seen at a crude oil terminal in Ningbo Zhoushan port, Zhejiang province, China. — **Reuters**

Brent crude tops \$40

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Monday, with Brent topping \$40 a barrel, after Joe Biden clinched the US presidency and buoyed risk appetite, offsetting worries about the impact on demand from the worsening coronavirus pandemic.

Brent crude had climbed 91 cents, or 2.3 per cent, to \$40.36 a barrel by 0946 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$38.04, up 90 cents, or 2.4 per cent.

"Oil prices surged on Monday benefiting from a risk-on stance and a weaker US dollar driven by Joe Biden becoming president-elect," said Giovanni Staunovo, an oil analyst for UBS.

Biden will convene a coronavirus task force on Monday to examine the No 1 problem confronting him when he takes office in January. Oil prices remain under pressure by renewed lockdown measures in Europe aimed at containing a rise in COVID-19 cases.

Keisuke Sadamori, IEA director for energy markets

and security, said the new lockdowns appear set to push the outlook for global oil demand toward the downside.

"Major parts of the European continent are in lockdown. This would surely work toward the negative side," he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar weakened, hitting a 10-week low and boosting commodities priced in the greenback as they became more affordable for investors holding other currencies.

Key members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) are wary of Biden relaxing measures on Iran and Venezuela, which could mean an increase in oil production that would make it harder to balance supply with demand.

However, ING analysts said the return of Iranian oil supply is more likely to happen at end-2021 or in 2022. China, the world's top crude importer, posted a 12 per cent decline in October imports compared with September.

— **Reuters**

Oslo refuses another Norwegian Air bailout



Passengers board a Norwegian Air plane in Kirkenes. — **Reuters**

OSLO: Norway's government refused on Monday to mount another bailout for struggling low-cost carrier Norwegian Air Shuttle which said the "slap in the face" meant its future was uncertain.

"Norwegian asked for help in the billions (of kroner) and the government believes, that in the current situation, this is not the best use of taxpayer money," Commerce and Industry Minister Iselin Nybo said. "Such aid could also be deemed anti-competitive," he added in a statement. — **AFP**

SoftBank H1 net profit surges to \$18 billion

TOKYO: Japan's SoftBank Group said on Monday its first-half net profit more than quadrupled, sealing a strong recovery after a massive annual loss, as tech stocks rally and the firm sheds assets to shore up its finances.

Net profit for the six months to September came to 1.88 trillion yen (\$18 billion), up from 421.6 billion yen a year earlier.

The profit surge was mainly driven by gains on its investments, which topped two trillion yen for the period. However, it said it would not offer a forecast "as it is difficult to foresee consolidated results due to numerous uncertain factors".

SoftBank reported a nearly \$9 billion net loss in the previous full fiscal year, but quickly returned to the black in the first quarter.

Masahiko Ishino, an analyst at Tokai Tokyo Research Institute, said the firm had displayed "a steady performance" in line with robust gains in the global equities markets.

Founder Masayoshi Son



A man talks on the phone as he stand in front of an advertising poster of the SoftBank telecommunications company in Tokyo. — **Reuters**

has transformed the telecoms company into an investment and tech behemoth with stakes in some of Silicon Valley's hottest start-ups through its \$100 billion Vision Fund. He has battled opposition to his strategy of pouring money into start-ups — including troubled office-sharing firm WeWork — which some analysts say are overvalued and lack clear profit models. Son has insisted his strategy

is sound, and that SoftBank's portfolio is broad enough to weather the storm.

"There were people who concluded that the Vision Fund was over" because of WeWork, Son told reporters on Monday. "No way! It only started."

He said the company will now focus on the "AI revolution" and will invest in listed companies, which he called the "real contenders" in the artificial

The company will now focus on the 'AI revolution' and will invest in listed companies, which he called the 'real contenders' in the artificial intelligence sector

MASAYOSHI SON
Founder, Softbank Group

intelligence sector.

The firm said its SoftBank Vision Fund saw strong results thanks to recovering stock markets and increases in portfolio firms where "exits have been decided or have new funding rounds, or (which) are benefiting from the accelerated adoption of digital services during the COVID-19 crisis". — **AFP**

EU going ahead with Boeing tariffs against US

BRUSSELS: The EU said on Monday it is pushing ahead with up to \$4 billion in tariffs against the US over illegal state aid to Boeing, the bloc's top trade official said.

"The US has imposed tariffs following the WTO ruling in the Airbus case. Now, we have a WTO ruling also in our Boeing case, allowing us to impose our tariffs and that's what we are doing," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis, told reporters.

The decision was the latest twist in the 16-year trade battle over aircraft subsidies that turned increasingly sour under the protectionist instincts of US President Donald Trump, who is to leave office in January.

Some had suggested that Europe might delay the tit-for-tat levies after the election of Joe Biden, seen as more sympathetic to the EU and more of a multilateralist.

Instead, Dombrovskis urged the US to pursue a comprehensive deal on aviation subsidies worldwide and to bring the row to a close. "As it has been stated on numbers of occasions from the EU side, we're ready to suspend or withdraw our tariffs anytime when the US suspends or withdraws their tariffs," Dombrovskis said.

— **AFP**



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ANNOUNCEMENT

HAMSAT Saham Al Mumiza Trading Company registered at the Commercial Registry Secretariat in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No 1214141 announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No (30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments on all. Anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Sohar International School LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1192463, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **500,000.000** to **250,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

RAWASI Al Majd Modern Trading and Contracting - announces its registration with the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Trade and Industry under No 1162541 announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a Limited Partnership in accordance with Article No (30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments and on all anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Trade and Industry within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

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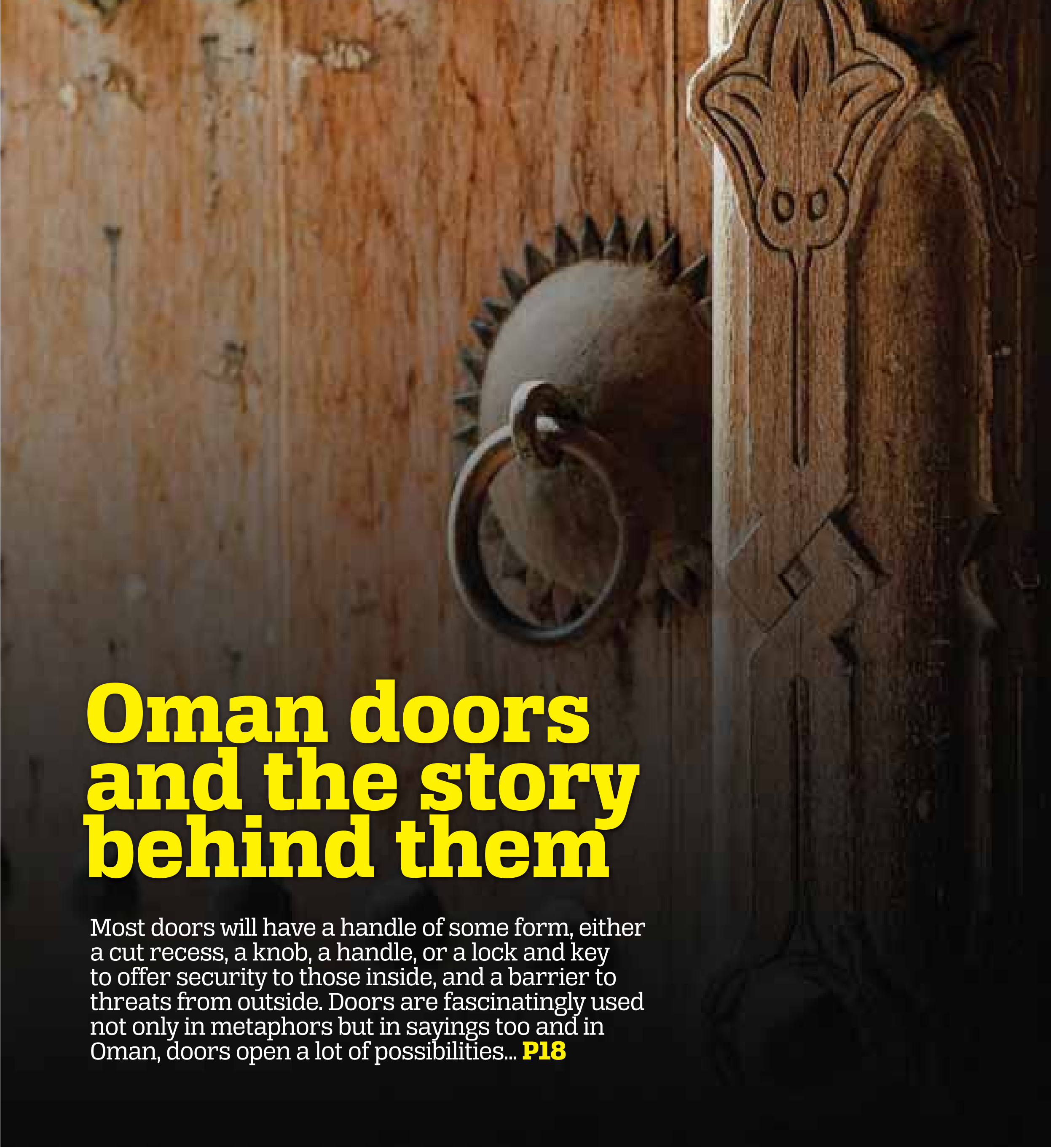
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Oman doors and the story behind them

Most doors will have a handle of some form, either a cut recess, a knob, a handle, or a lock and key to offer security to those inside, and a barrier to threats from outside. Doors are fascinatingly used not only in metaphors but in sayings too and in Oman, doors open a lot of possibilities... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

DIGITAL TRENDS



DIVERSITY, STREAMING RESHAPE VIDEO GAMES FOR A NEW GENERATION

In the quarter of a century since Sony launched the groundbreaking PlayStation, video games have exploded into the biggest form of entertainment in the world, and analysts say the growing diversity of billions of players is reshaping the industry... **Story on Page P20**

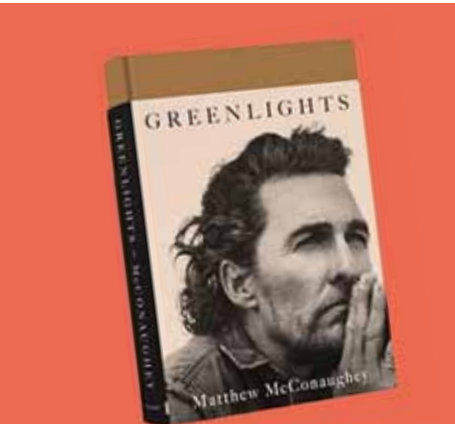
LOCAL ATTRACTIONS



5 PLACES TO EXPERIENCE OMAN'S WILDLIFE

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

READ



GREENLIGHTS

BY MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY

The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years.

FASHION



BRITAIN'S MOST FASHIONABLE MAN?

His daughters-in-law Kate and Meghan are regularly lauded for their fashion sense, but 71-year-old Prince Charles, well-known for patching-up and mending his clothes, has probably been considered a less likely British style icon - until now... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP AWARENESS WEEK

Celebrated on the second week of November, the goal for this week is to raise awareness of the importance of human-animal relationships, and to highlight both the benefits of, and potential problems associated with, these relationships.



Oman doors and the story behind them

STORY BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN

“The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are, and not be questioned,” said Maya Angelou, reaffirming that our safety and security lies at home, behind closed doors.

“Faith and fortitude may open doors, but destiny and history leave them open for us.” They are defined as “hinged, sliding, counterbalanced, or otherwise movable barriers, that allow ingress to, and egress from, an enclosure,” and Oman features some of the most attractive doors, and doorways, “ingress and egress that would often, otherwise, feature a barrier.” In other words, a doorway without a door is a doorway, while a doorway with a door is a doorway. Confused? Don’t be, it’s just another of those anachronisms from history that certainly is conspicuously old fashioned, and as charming as the Arabian Nights.

According to an ancient Dutch proverb, “He who is before his door, has put the most difficult part of his journey behind him.” He will find that doors are usually pivoted, folding, or hinged, with hundreds of different forms of sophisticated pivots, or simple leather straps were effectively cut to make long-lasting hinges. Doors though can be slid-

ing, and even revolving, while who can ever forget the rolling stone doors of the ‘Indiana Jones Chronicles,’ they are so incredibly dramatic! Most will have a handle of some form, either a cut recess, a knob, a handle, or a lock and key to offer security to those inside,

I look at a door and I see the story behind it. I see because I will not linger before the door, but through it. I look at a doorway, and I see possibilities, and I see the light through a doorway

and a barrier to threats from outside.

It is said that “Old ways will not open new doors,” and while philosophically true, doors are still just doors. The earliest records are Egyptian, from ancient tombs, and a biblical reference too can be found from referring to the doors of King Solomon’s Temple doors, all those years ago, though each artistic period, or civilisation, has also left its mark

on door styles from the Chinese, tall, wide and imposing; The Greeks adored carved stone doors with motifs, while the Romans favoured the much lighter beaten bronze. The 15th century Italians used all manner of materials, but began to imprint motifs, usually angelic, and even stories within their sanctuary barriers, and artistry continued to be a European fancy until the Renaissance period of the 16th century, when carved doors made a re-emergence.

Anyway, enough about the facts, history, and ‘stuff.’ The door, or doorway as I see it, is a doorway to somewhere else, and especially here in Oman, I look at a door and I see the story behind it. I see because I will not linger before the door, but through it. I look at a doorway, and I see possibilities, and I see the light through a doorway, and I see that for each new challenge, each new adventure. “Gazing wistfully at the closed door,” said the famous words, “he didn’t see the door that was open.” Well, that’s is surely not going to be me.

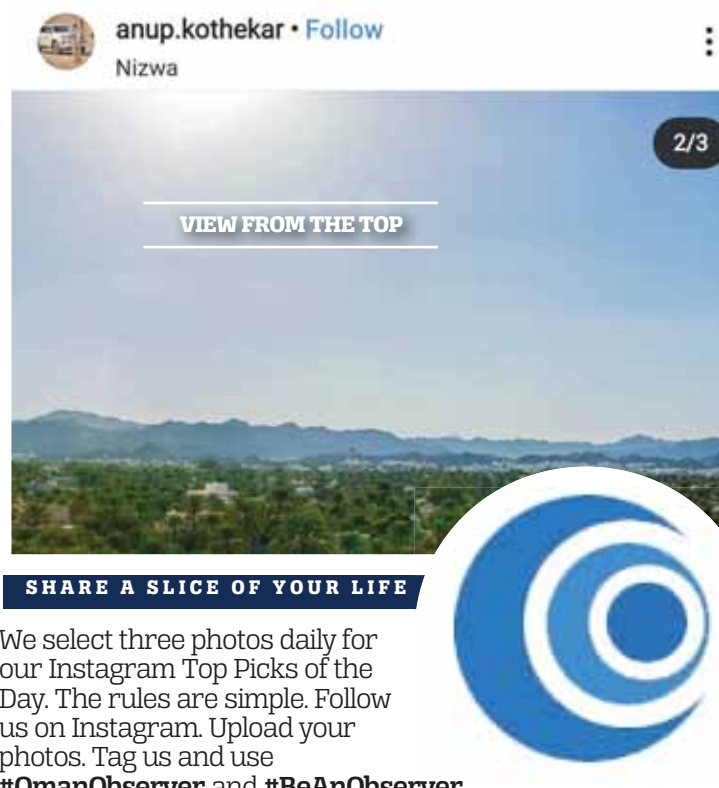
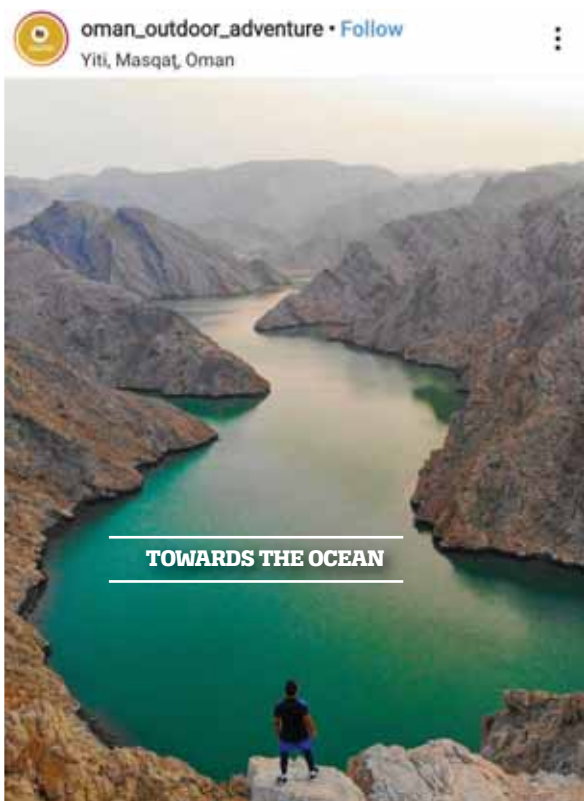
My wife and daughter are often ‘chivvying’ me along to keep up in the old towns and cities of Birkat Al Mouz or Harat Al Yemen, but I just cannot help it, my imagination goes wild, it ‘takes wings,’ and I almost feel that I am in those magical lands and magical times of yore. These are wonderful feelings that inspire me to think in a romantic vein, and I can only believe the adage that “The only things between the known, and the unknown, are doors.”





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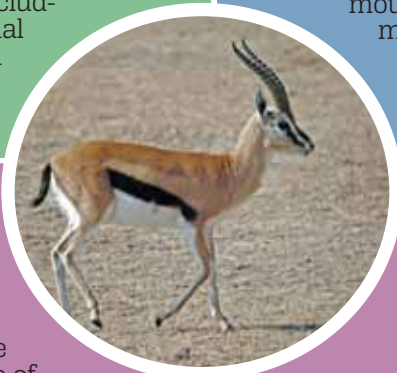
5 Places To Experience Oman's Wildlife

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

Oman is at the crossroad of the world's important wildlife highway. Every year, millions of birds make a stopover in the country not only to escape changing weather from their home countries but also lavish in the country's natural offerings. It's not just the birds however that find their way to the Sultanate. From the gentle giants of the oceans to sea turtles, Oman is rich in biodiversity. Here are five of the country's best locations if you want to enjoy seeing Oman's wildlife.

JABAL SAMHAN RESERVE

Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve is a nature reserve in the area of Jabal Samhan in Dhofar. It has an area of 4,500 square kilometres and has no permanent population. It is one of the last known homes of the Arabian leopard. The reserve is also home to several animal species, including the Arabian gazelle, the fox, the Indian crested porcupine, the Cape hare, the rock hyrax, the Nubian goat, the desert hedgehog, the Arabian wolf, and several bird species, as well as plants including the frankincense tree and acacia. Special permission is required to visit the Jebel Samhan Nature Reserve.



AS SALEEL NATURE PARK

Covering an area of 220 sq. kilometres, As Saleel Nature Park is located in the Al Sharqiyah Governorate in eastern Oman. It is located to the north of Al Kamil W'al Wafi Wilayat and 57 km from Sur. It consists of three basic geographical types. It is located to the north of Al Kamil W'al Wafi Wilayat and 57 km from Sur. It consists of three basic geographical types. The first is the alluvial plain and has a wide yard of acacia and gum Arabic trees, the second is the valleys that split the mountains and the third is the broad hills of these mountains. This Park is home to the Arabian gazelle, wild cats, Arabian wolves, red fox and Egyptian eagle, along with a variety of turtles and birds.

WADI SIREEN RESERVE

Wadi Sireen Reserve is located in the eastern Al Hajar Mountains Range some 45km south of Muscat Governorate in the centre of Oman. The Reserve is home to one of the rarest and most timid mammal in the world known as the Arabian Tahr, due to the wadi has the perfect environment for Tahr to live such as mountain cliffs and rocky slopes. The Arabian tahr, a very rare animal that has a short body, hooked horns, a dark line that extends along the back and reddish-brown hair. There are many other animals which share wadi Sireen's hospitality with the Arabian Tahr such as Arabian gazelle, Arabian wolf, Blanfor's fox, Red fox, Hedgehog, Deer, Jayakar's Oman lizard, common Kestrel, Egyptian vulture, Sand partridge, Oman saw-scaled viper and some kind of birds, in addition to many reptiles and invertebrates. The animals are found alone or in small family-like groups.



AL WUSTA WILDLIFE RESERVE

Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve is located in the city of Haima in Al Wusta, which is the middle region of Oman. It covers an area of 2,824 sq. kilometres and is home to the Arabian oryx, the Arabian gazelle, hares and ibexes. In the middle of a spectacular desert escarpment, this reserve is home to a small herd of reintroduced oryx. It offers a rare chance to see this magnificent desert antelope up close as there is a large herd of over 600 animals in the reserve's breeding centre. The reserve, access to which is by 4WD with prior permit only, is 50km off the Haima-Duqm road on a graded track marked 'Habab'.

FJORDS OF MUSANDAM

Musandam is the northernmost governorate in Oman. It is separated from the rest of the country by a piece of land from the United Arab Emirates, while its coastline is distinguished by rocky edges that form unique fjords. The most famous animals that live in the waters of Musandam are dolphins, especially Humpback dolphins and Bottlenose dolphins. Visitors can enjoy watching the dolphins on the local Omani Dhow in the waters of Musandam.



FASHION

Britain's most fashionable man?



HIS DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

Kate and Meghan are regularly lauded for their fashion sense, but 71-year-old Prince Charles, well-known for patching-up and mending his clothes, has probably been considered a less likely British style icon — until now.

"I've always admired the way you dress," Edward Enninful, editor-in-chief of British Vogue, told Charles in an interview for the fashion magazine's latest edition.

back seat to the females when it comes to fashion coverage.

Kate, wife of Charles's elder son Prince William, has previously featured on the cover of Vogue while Meghan, wife of William's younger brother Harry, has guest-edited the magazine.

Charles, who has long campaigned on environmental issues, was interviewed for Vogue about his commitment to sustainable fashion, something he



The praise for his timeless dress sense seemed to take the heir-to-the throne, who usually favours double-breasted suits accompanied with a tie and matching handkerchief, by surprise.

"I thought I was like a stopped clock... people come round after 25 years to dressing like I do," he said with a laugh.

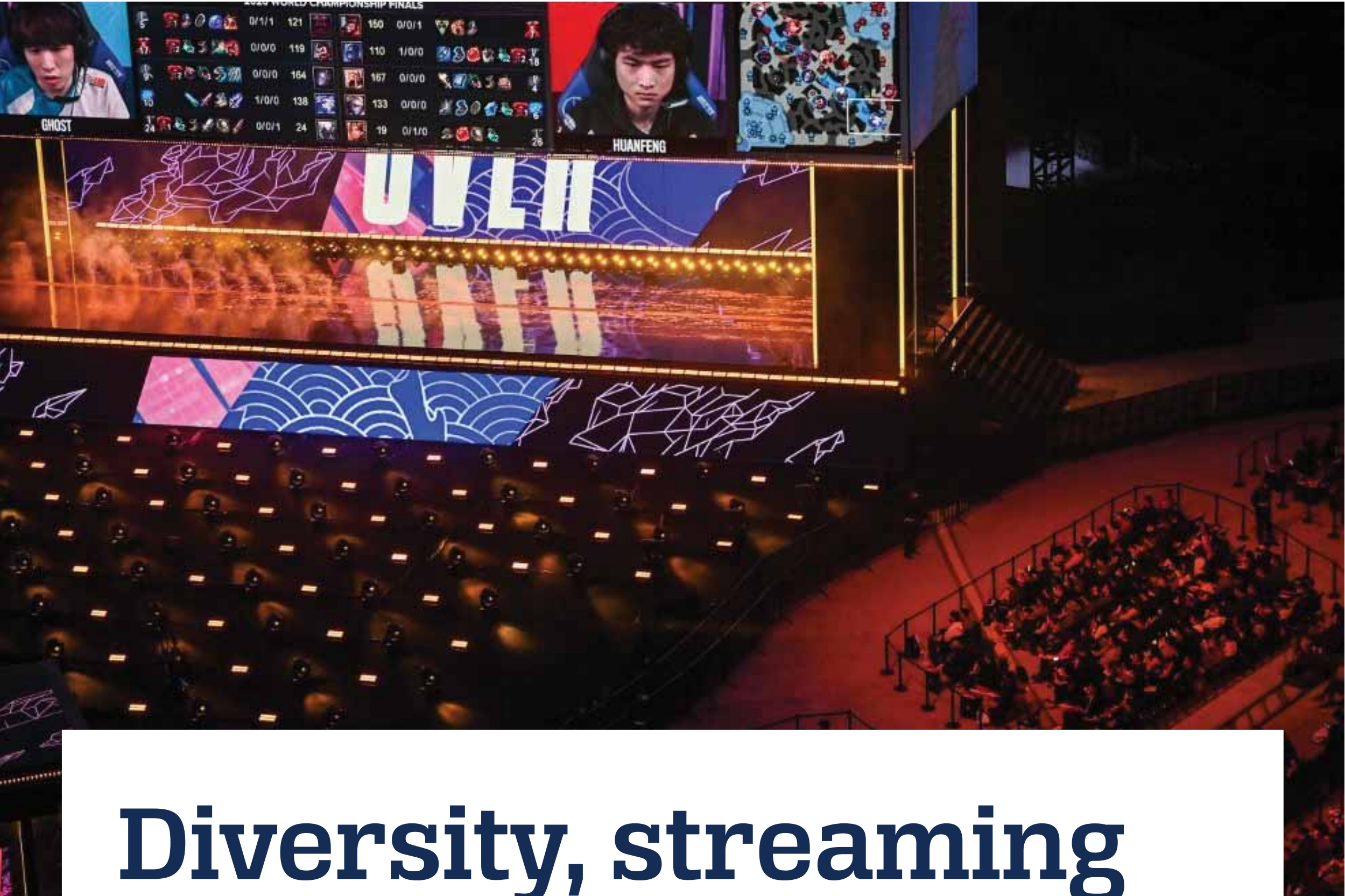
"I'm very glad you think it has style. I mind about detail and colour and things like that."

The male members of Britain's royal family have usually taken a

said he had always taken to heart.

"I'm one of those people who hate throwing anything away. Hence, I'd rather have them maintained, even patched if necessary, than to abandon them," he said, calling on manufacturers and consumers to be less wasteful.

He added: "But it seems to me there are huge opportunities, particularly now, within the whole sustainable fashion sector, to counter this extraordinary trend of throwaway clothing — or throwaway everything, frankly." — **Reuters**



Diversity, streaming reshape video games for a new generation

In the quarter of a century since Sony launched the groundbreaking PlayStation, video games have exploded into the biggest form of entertainment in the world, and analysts say the growing diversity of billions of players is reshaping the industry.

The Japanese tech giant and its American rival Microsoft are preparing to launch their latest consoles next week, competing in a \$160 billion global market — bigger than film and music combined.

Earlier, seen as niche entertainment usually marketed to young men, gaming has benefited from a 1990s push to attract more customers, analysts say, with the PlayStation leading the way in breaking down gender, age and class barriers.

"In the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a strong move towards the democratisation of gaming. Twenty-five years ago, gaming was still considered by most people a marginal form of entertainment", said Guilherme Fernandes, a market consultant at the gaming and esports analytics firm Newzoo.

After the PlayStation came Microsoft's Xbox in 2001 and Nintendo's Wii in 2006, followed by the smartphone revolution as gaming's popularity skyrocketed.

There are 2.7 billion gamers worldwide, Newzoo estimates, and nearly half are women.

Gamers have also become older in many major markets — the age range of the average gamer in the United States is 35-44, according to the Entertainment Software Association.

Affordability has also brought in a bigger audience, experts say. Sony caused a stir with a surprisingly low price for the first PlayStation, which proved a commercial success.



"If we correct for inflation, consoles are so much cheaper today than they were in the 80s and 90s. It was really... an upper-middle-class kind of entertainment at that point," said Mikael Jakobsson, research coordinator at the MIT Game Lab.

The impact was clear in the United States, he said, "where the PlayStation started to appeal to lower-middle-class, working-class people in a way that previous console generations just hadn't".

The spread in recent years of inexpensive yet highly capable smartphones has further broadened audiences, with people playing games on their mobile devices and connecting over social media.

UGLY UNDERBELLY
With games becoming a more universal pastime, the impression that they were the domain of young

The Japanese tech giant and its American rival Microsoft are preparing to launch their latest consoles next week, competing in a \$160 billion global market — bigger than film and music combined

men has been challenged.

"Developers are increasingly taking diversity seriously, expanding the number of female and minority lead protagonists in their games," said Newzoo's Fernandes.

That shift, however, has been far from smooth, and came after years of warnings that misogyny, bullying and other toxic behaviour were rampant in gamer culture.

The industry was forced to act after the first high-profile wave of harassment in 2014, dubbed Gamergate, which started after an ex-boyfriend falsely accused American game developer Zoe Quinn of seeking favourable reviews in exchange for sex.

Quinn — who goes by non-gendered pronouns — faced rape and death threats, and their personal information was leaked online.

Women in the industry and feminist figures were also threatened by people angered by efforts to improve female representation in games.

Game giants were accused of tolerating or turning a blind eye to the abuse.

"It can sometimes be difficult to explain just how vicious, violent, and cruel" Gamergate was, Anita Sarkeesian, a media critic and target of some of the abuse, wrote on the website Polygon last year.

Major game firms have denounced such behaviour and made diversity pledges, including more women and people from underrepresented communities as protagonists.

Despite the efforts, critics say such abuse and content remain a problem in the industry — among players as well as gaming companies.

Ubisoft, one of the world's biggest game makers, dismissed some of its top executives this year after a wave of accusations of sexism and harassment shook the firm. — AFP