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OMAN OBSERVER



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Sultanate attends UN General Assembly meet on COVID-19

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, headed the Sultanate's delegation to the extraordinary session called for by the United Nations General Assembly to discuss repercussions of COVID-19. The Sultanate's delegation in the virtual meeting included Ambassador Mohammed bin Awadh Hassan, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and a number of officials from the Ministry of Health and members of the permanent delegation at the UN. **DETAILS ON P5**

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NATIONAL TRIATHLETE
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CLINCHES OMAN
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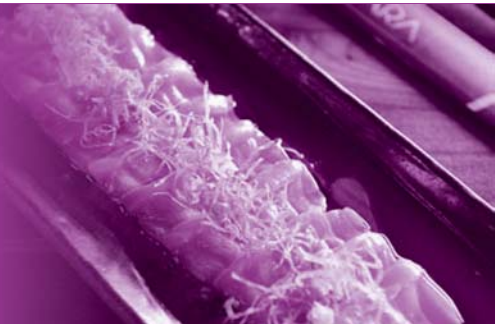
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OPEC+ DECISION
A POSITIVE STEP
FORWARD: OMAN



P19

THE
BEST OF
JAPANESE
KITCHEN



■ OMAN

HM GREETINGS TO FINLAND PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sauli Niinistö of Finland on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his greetings along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to the President and the friendly Finnish people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

LOW PRESSURE SYSTEM TO BRING RAINS

MUSCAT: The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre weather analysis said a trough of low pressure (Al Reham Trough) is expected to affect the northern parts of the Sultanate from Monday. There are chances of rain occasionally accompanied by thundershowers with fresh winds, hail precipitation and flash floods over the Governorate of Musandam on Monday morning, extending gradually over North Al Batinah and Al Buraimi governorates. The governorates of South Al Batinah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah will be affected by the trough on Tuesday and Wednesday following the passage of the trough, a moderate to fresh northeasterly wind is forecast to affect most of the Sultanate, leading to a noticeable drop in temperature.

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KUWAIT HOLDS PARLIAMENTARY POLLS UNDER SHADOW OF VIRUS **P6**


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Oman welcomes outcome of efforts to resolve Gulf crisis

MUSCAT: The Sultanate has welcomed the statement issued by Kuwait regarding the positive results of the reconciliation efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis that were previously led by late Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, and later by Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait and President Donald Trump of the United States of America.

FINAL AGREEMENT
The decision reflected the keenness of all parties for solidarity and Gulf and Arab stability to reach a final agreement that achieves permanent solidarity between all countries, including

the development and prosperity of all peoples of the region.

This statement follows the Kuwaiti foreign minister's announcement of a fruitful outcome of the ongoing discussions to resolve the Gulf crisis, and the commitment of all parties to political stability in the region.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al

Busaidy, Foreign Minister, appreciated Kuwait for and its sincere and continuous efforts to achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the region towards reunification, understanding and harmony between brothers.

Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Saturday that a

resolution of the Gulf crisis is in sight, with all nations involved "on board" and final agreement expected soon, "The only way towards reaching an agreement that is sustainable is through such consultation", he said on a sidelines of a security conference in Manama.

— Agencies

HIS DREAM RECORD IS OCEAN'S DEEP



Omar al Ghailani comes from a family of sea lovers with several of the men in his family having a career in the naval industry. While they all share the same love and adoration for the ocean, his dream perhaps is the hardest to achieve. He spends most of his days filling his lungs with oxygen, holding to that air as he dives deep into the water. Beneath the ocean, he loves seeing not only fishes and the corals. It is his passion to discover the secrets of the deep but he also sets his eyes into setting a record in free-diving. **DETAILS ON P18**

Caution is the word at beaches!

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

It was a typical weekend as the seashores across the country were busy with people taking advantage of the pleasant weather following the announcement of opening of beaches last week.

Yet caution remained the buzz word as every visitor to the beaches was found wearing masks and maintaining social distancing except a few who were loitering carelessly in groups. Families — both citizens and expatriates — were found to be more disciplined than ever before.

"It's very important to wear the mask. It is required to protect ourselves and others. It is the single biggest tool against the virus" said Abdullah al Riyami, who came to Qurum beach with his family.

On the whole, all the people whom the *Observer* spoke to felt beach-goers should be at their best to be responsible to ensure that they do not become a source for another wave of the pandemic.

"We love coming to the beach, playing some games, eat some food and go back in a relaxed mood. The opening of the beaches and parks will now give us opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities", said Abhilash Keluskar, an Indian national, who was at the beach with his

It's very important to wear the mask. It is required to protect ourselves and others. It is the single biggest tool against the virus

ABDULLAH AL RIYAMI

kids and wife.

All the visitors, mostly families, were excited to be at the beaches with many enjoying food and parents playing with their tiny tots, although the masks remained a handicap while running around.

"There is no way to ensure zero risk of infection. So it is important to understand the potential risks and adopt prevention measures to protect yourself and to help reduce the spread of the infection, said Ameer Mirza, who hails from Pakistan.

For Ali Mohamed Mustafa from Egypt, lack of parking space was the concern as roadside slots were full with vehicles.

"I had to park my car almost half a kilometre away and walk down with my children to reach the beach", he said. **TURN TO P5**

Surge in single-use plastic threatens environment

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Even though nature is on a correction mode in terms of production and consumption of goods during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of plastic in various forms has again been a matter of

concern for one and all.

Pre-pandemic, the restaurants were harping on stylist cutleries. The pandemic not only had forced big and small restaurants to close during the peak of the disease, but it has also set a new norm of dining in with ceramic plates, stainless steel cutleries,



glassware and cloth napkins were totally missing from the table.

They are now replaced with disposable plastic utensils inside the restaurants and for those who still feel the risk of COVID-19, prefer takeaways, packed restaurant food in plastic boxes

of different shapes and sizes.

In the given situation and in some cases, dining inside a restaurant is proving to be slightly cheaper than the takeaways. Asked for the reason a restaurant owner said, "There has been a trend for takeaways these days. **TURN TO P5**



Sayyid Badr participates in the IISS Manama Dialogue 2020

MANAMA: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, participated in the 16th edition of the IISS Manama Dialogue 2020 being hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain on December 4-6. The IISS Manama Dialogue 2020 is the Middle East's premier security summit. It brings together PMs, defence ministers, foreign ministers, national security advisers and military and intelligence chiefs to hold discussions on the security policy, foreign policy as well as the challenges facing the Middle East region. On the sidelines of the summit, Sayyid Badr met with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al Zayani. They reaffirmed the depths of the fraternal relations binding the Sultanate and Bahrain voicing their desire to enhance these relations in various fields. They discussed several matters of common concern. Sayyid Badr also met with Kimberly A Reed, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM). The two sides discussed ways for fostering economic, trade and financial cooperation between the Sultanate and the US.

High air fares leave stranded expatriate workers in the lurch

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvvp

Even as the Omani government has announced the waiver of all fees and fines to facilitate the exit of those stranded expat workers from the country, their travel back home has been hit by spiraling air fares.

While travel agents claim that the 'unexpected' increase resulted from less number of flights to different destinations in the South Asian countries, workers who are availing the 'exit scheme' lament that the current fares have imperiled their return travel.

"Even though I have applied for the necessary documents from the embassy, my travel is becoming uncertain due to the high air fare to my hometown," said Shiv Kumar, who lost his job following the closure of his company.

As he has to find money for tickets for his family of four including two children, he fears whether he would be able to use the facility announced by the Omani government.

The Ministry of Labour has announced the exit scheme for those who have been staying in the Sultanate without valid documents and want to leave for their home countries permanently by year end.

While Shiv Kumar is one among many left in the lurch with uncertainty clouding their travel due to the high fares, travel agents do not find any reprieve coming soon.

The fares, they point out, started rising after the curbs on private airlines following the air bubble agreement between the two countries extended to December 27 and cut in the number of passengers to half.

"Most of the destinations carry higher than usual fare mainly because of less number of flights operating to various



Fares to Indian cities of Kochi, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai are high because of bubble and limited flights. Similarly, fares to Dhaka are also high due to the bubble agreement and increase in the number of people going to the country using the exit scheme

SUNIL D'SOUZA
CEO, TravelPoint

destinations, and under air bubble agreement. Once normal schedules are restored then you would have better air fares," said Sunil D'Souza, CEO, TravelPoint.

Even though normal schedules were disrupted due to COVID-19 pandemic, expats could fly to their respective destinations through repatriation flights operated by the government or

charter flights hired by private companies and social service agencies. This was further aided by the bubble agreement by the two countries.

But Sunil expects that the situation will return to the normal from January with more airlines operating in different sectors providing relief to travellers.

"Fares to Indian cities of Kochi, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai are high because of bubble and limited flights. Similarly, fares to Dhaka are also high due to the bubble agreement and increase in the number of people going to the country using the exit scheme," he said.

In the second week of November, the number of seats available on flights under a bubble agreement with India was cut by half after some passengers tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in Muscat.

Currently only national airlines Oman Air, SalamAir, Air India and Air India Express are allowed to operate.

Ticket rates were much lower when private airlines like IndiGo and GoAir were operating in October to some of the destinations in India.

SAF Museum reopens from today

MUSCAT: The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum will open its doors from Sunday to visitors, citizens and residents by following the health safety requirements of the Ministry of Health, based on the decision of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that allowed the opening of some activities, including museums and castles.

The museum will remain open between 8 am and 1.30 pm.

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, that was inaugurated in 1988, offers information about this museum from the



galleries and their exhibits such as weapons, photographs and historical documents.

The museum contains an

outside exhibition, which includes military equipment such as vehicles, tanks and aircraft, and ships.

Job Opportunity (for Omani national only) Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Muscat Finance Company (SAOG) is pleased to announce a brilliant and challenging Job opportunity for a Senior Management Executive Position of 'Deputy Chief Executive Officer' exclusive for a suitably qualified and experienced Omani national

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recruitment@mfcoman.com

Visitors can apply for night-stay permits at Daymaniyat Islands

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Based on the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19), visitors can now apply for night stay permits and visit Daymaniyat Islands Natural Reserve.

The visitors must adhere to the precautionary measures and conditions necessary to prevent the spread of the disease, the Environment Authority said. Permits can be applied through the authority's e-services system.

Visitors to the Daymaniyat Islands Natural Reserve will have to pay an entrance fee, as the Environment Authority looks to encourage sustainable tourism and boost the local economy.

The authority also released regulations on camping, hunting, and visiting times that will help



to protect the biodiversity of the reserve. The entry fee for Omanis is RO 1 for adults and 100 baisa for children under 16, while for expatriates it is RO 3 for adults and RO 1 for children under 16. According to Article 1 of the decision 62/2019, entry to the park or camping overnight is prohibited without the ministry's permission.

Camping at the island during

the bird nesting season from May 1 to the end of October every year is also prohibited.

The decision also prohibits any attempts to collect fossils or relics or stones, or any other natural assets from the area. Lighting the fire in places or areas other than designated or without permissions is also banned. The decision bans any activities or actions

that would harm coral reefs and neighbourhoods or disturbing the nesting birds or turtles. Leaving fishing nets in coral reefs, bringing pets or any other animals or any plants or seeds to the reserve are also banned.

Diving within the limit of the reserve is banned unless there is a permit from the authority. It also prohibits conducting studies and research and collecting samples for any reason, except with permission.

The use of cameras and drones also needs permission. Only employees of the reserve will be allowed to use arms or weapons. Visitors can also pay RO 30 for three months, RO 50 for six months. For Omanis, diving fees are RO 3 for adults while for expatriates it is RO 6.

For Omanis, diving and camping fees for a night are RO 5 and RO 10 for expatriates.

CBSE Board exams will be in written mode

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 5

Board examinations will be conducted in written mode and not online, India's Central Board of Secondary Education said last week.

The decision will be binding on students of Indian schools in Oman.

Given that practical examinations may not be possible for many students due to the pandemic, alternatives are being considered for the 2020-21 examination cycle.

"No final decision has been taken regarding the dates for the conduct of board exams, and consultations with stakeholders are still in process," said the statement from a CBSE spokesperson. "The exams, as and when they are conducted, will be in the written mode and not in online mode."

The statement added that "in



case students are not able to do practicals in classes before the exams, alternatives to practical exams will have to be explored".

About 50 per cent of questions in class 12 English sample question papers were multiple-choice questions. Students are advised to go through the sample papers released by the board to get an idea about the difficulty level and marking pattern for the subject.

Grace period to correct status of expat workers begins

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The month-long grace period to correct the status of their expatriate employees will come into effect from Sunday, as part of the efforts to regulate the labour market.

Highlighting its importance, Redha bin Juma al Saleh, OCCI chairman, said in a statement that the decision comes at an important stage in which private sector companies seek to restructure their operations to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, which has cast a shadow over the labour market."

Al Saleh said, "The decision of the Ministry of Labour comes in line with the efforts of

the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) to help develop new business models and transform as per the changes taking place both locally and globally. It is important for businesses to employ technology and restructure their activities and contribute to the development and regulation of the labour market."

He called on all business owners to develop strategies by investing their skills and capabilities in the human capital and by using innovative technologies to increase the productivity of companies and reduce costs within the objectives of Oman 2040 Vision."

The Ministry of Labour has announced that employers will get a grace period to correct the status of their expatriate employees between December 6 and January 6.

The decision, which was announced on Tuesday, allows modifying the professions of the non-Omani workforce from the banned sectors to other professions or vice versa and permitting the amendment of occupations at different professional levels in accordance with the requirements of the profession.

Transfer of non-Omani manpower data from one activity to another in the same establishment according to the licensing requirements of the business.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Fulmar Trading & Contracting, CR 1108341, announces it has lost 5 invoice books, written from outside the numbers (1/2/3/4/6) and that they include invoices from (1-200) & (251-300).
The company, thus, waives liability arises as a result of these invoices.

To Whom It May Concern



Fulmar Trading & Contracting L.P, Commercial Registration No. 1108341, brings to your attention that Mr. Ahmed Mahir Al Asran Amir who holds the Civil Card No. 121288442 is no longer representing the company as of 20/10/2020 and that the company shall bear no responsibility arising from others dealing with the aforesaid in its name. Those who have claims against the aforesaid person shall whatsapp the company on 92601001 within a month from releasing this advertisement, after which the company shall not consider any claim should arrive.

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Subject	PRE-QUALIFICATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION & COMMISSIONING SERVICES FOR MAJOR SEAFOOD CANNERY PLANT WITH RELATED FACILITIES AT DUQM FISHERIES COMPLEX	
Grade	First & Excellent grade only.	
Submission date	14th of January 2021	
Mode of Submission	Soft copy only by email	

Document Collection

Interested bidders can obtain the pre-qualification documents from ISFC website at www.isfc.om/tenders/ or send email request to tenders@isfc.om

Document Submission

All firms must submit their pre-qualification documents by email before 10:00 a.m. on the last date for submission to:

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 International Sea food Company SAOC
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Following evaluation of the Prequalification submissions, an approved bidders list will be recommended, and this will be followed by a closed competitive bidding procedure. Only those firms meeting the specified prequalification criteria will be invited to submit a bid.

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Mahout

A popular fishing spot!

The Sultanate's terrains are distinguished for their natural beauty and birds and history. The Wilayat of Mahout is located in Al Wusta Governorate and borders Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi from north, Adam from north-west, Al Duqm from south-west and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali from north-east.

The wilayat comprises 32 villages stretched across the area which are: Haj, Al Joba, Al Sail, Sirab, Al Najda, Al Khalouf,

Mdaira, Sadaira and others.

The wilayat includes three islands which are Mahout, Al Rrak and Aab. The Mahout island houses mangrove trees, Aab is home to sea birds like seagull, Snowy Egret and flamingo.

The wilayat is stretched along many coasts. No wonder that Mahout is a popular fishing spot with its expansive seafront with white sand and a haven for seagulls and other birds. The wilayat stretches along main coasts that are Bar

Al Hakaman, Al Khalouf, Ras Al Azakher and Ras Khabbat Sirab.

It is endowed with a natural appeal that makes it a potential tourist destination in its own right. Tourists already flock to the tranquil beaches, which provide ideal settings for camping and leisure.

Mahout is also well-known for wadis like Al Joubah, Madirah and Al Sail. A road network connecting Mahout's coastal villages and its tourist attractions with

other wilayats contributes greatly to the growth of tourism in the area.

Last year, The Royal Oman Police (ROP) opened a new police station and service building in the wilayat.

The new ROP building will provide security services for the citizens and residents, in addition to other services related to passports and residency, civil status and vehicles technical check-up.



Health minister heads Oman's delegation to UN special session on COVID-19

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, headed the Sultanate's delegation to the extraordinary session called for by the United Nations general assembly to discuss repercussions of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Sultanate's delegation in the virtual meeting included Ambassador Mohammed bin Awadh Hassan, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and a number of officials from the Ministry of Health and members of the permanent delegation at the UN.

The meetings covered general discussions about the implementation of the general assembly's decisions on COVID-19 and how vaccines and medical equipment can be

obtained.

The two-day meetings, run from New York, began with speeches from the chairman of the UN general assembly and the Secretary-General of the UN, thanking the representatives of countries for their participation.

They pointed out that the UN accords full attention to international cooperation and stressed the significance of member states' response to curb COVID-19 globally.

In his speech before the gathering, Dr Al Saeedi pointed out that the world has never witnessed such a phenomenon that brought about exception conditions in the global arena since the start of this year.

The number of confirmed infection cases around the world crossed 63 million, resulting in more than one million deaths and



very serious economic and social upheavals, said Dr Al Saeedi.

He added that the government of the Sultanate undertook all necessary procedures to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic and stem its propagation.

Dr Al Saeedi said that Oman intensified preventive measures

Oman intensified preventive measures and secure testing and free mediation to all segments of society, in addition to necessary support to the private health sector, keeping deaths at a very low level

DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL SAEEDI

Minister of Health

and secure testing and free mediation to all segments of society, in addition to necessary

support to the private health sector, keeping deaths at a very low level.

He explained that the pandemic, its accompanying economic impacts, prompted many non-medical procedures (like lockdowns, closure of businesses and borders) that posed serious challenges to countries and governments. He said that solutions in the next stage have to focus on fostering preventive measures (socially and institutionally) so that countries could live with the pandemic till the day that an effective medication is made available.

To ensure that it could get the target quantities of top quality vaccines against COVID-19 as soon as they are made available, the Sultanate opened consultation and negotiation channels, including the Global Alliance

for Vaccine (Gavi) for the fair distribution of COVAX vaccine, said Dr Al Saeedi, noting the significance of supporting limited-income countries. He pointed out that Oman's policy endorsed the principle of focusing on general health.

It is worth noting that the meeting comes as part of the global response, under the purview of the UN, to eliminate COVID-19 which paralysed and undermined the life of whole societies, endangered their economies and devastated the sources of the livelihood of individuals.

The Sultanate spares no effort in supporting the United Nations Organisation and other international agencies and institutions for the sake of achieving strategic partnership which benefits the whole world and enhances human rights.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Surge in single-use plastic threatens environment

Even though the customers have started dropping in our restaurants, many of them prefer takeaways. This has generated a huge demand for disposable plastic packets to parcel food items."

"For parcels, we need more packets because we have to pack each and every item in separate ones. We are paying slightly higher in the wholesale market as well," he said.



Ahmed al Shanfari, who takes a keen interest on environment, finds a cumulative effect of dining in disposable utensils

inside the restaurant or taking the food away to be consumed at home, on nature.

"This way or that way, all

these plastics have to merge into nature. We need to adopt some cautious approach even though this is a necessity in the current situation of COVID-19 pandemic," he said, and added that the demand for disposable plastic utensils in the food sector has multiplied several times.

He called for an approach in which such disposable plates and utensils are made of tree leaves or used paper. "Since they are biodegradable, their disposal is easy."

The impact of high consumption of such plastic materials in a short span of time would be very serious as the world has already been facing the challenge of reducing the use of 'single-use' plastic packets, he said, and added that Oman, being a nature-friendly country, has to adopt a proactive approach to handle the situation.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Caution is the word at beaches!

Mounted Royal Oman Police personnel were seen patrolling the beaches to ensure that people followed social distancing and other safety measures.

"All the visitors are paying attention to the rules and everybody is staying with their groups, everybody is social distancing with each other, so it's not that bad," said an ROP official who was patrolling the Qurum beach.

However, parks did not witness any crowd as they used to be before the outbreak of the pandemic.

In a decision last week, the Supreme Committee tasked with COVID-19 situation has allowed beaches, parks, cinemas, and touristic attractions to reopen.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Interior stated that food courts, kindergartens and nurseries, exhibition halls, conference rooms, game arcades and parlours, shops selling and renting camping equipment, visa application centres, and rehabilitation and treatment clinics in the country could reopen.

Healthy soils for food security: Sultanate observes WSD

Soil is a living resource, home to more than one quarter (25 per cent) of our planet's biodiversity, and its protection is of utmost importance to ensure the future of agri-food systems and the provision of key ecosystem services.

While there is increasing focus on the importance of biodiversity for food security and nutrition, especially above-ground biodiversity such as plants and animals, less attention is being paid to the biodiversity beneath our feet. Since 95 per cent of our food comes from soils, it is imperative that we keep them healthy by protecting the biodiversity that they hold so as to allow them produce more nutritious and safer food.

The 5th of December of each year marks World Soil Day in celebration of healthy soils for a food-secure future. This year's campaign "Keep soil alive, protect soil biodiversity" urges us to focus our attention on the



CONSIDERING THAT SOILS ARE AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASING AGRICULTURE YIELDS AND INCOME, THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND WATER RESOURCES HAS BEEN STUDYING VARIOUS METHODS TO IMPROVE THE PRODUCTIVITY AND FERTILITY OF OMAN'S SOIL



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

workers below ground — from tiny beneficial microbes like bacteria to agile millipedes and slimy earthworms — all of which contribute to processes that are indispensable to life on Earth.

Up to 90 per cent of living organisms live or spent part of their lifecycle in soils, yet we know only 1 per cent of this hidden universe. Soil organisms are responsible for many critical

ecosystem processes, on which humans depend: from supporting plant growth, to storing carbon and being a vast reservoir for pharmaceuticals.

The Omani people throughout history have relied on using soil for residential and agricultural purposes to construct their homes, and to secure their food and subsistence needs respectively. According to studies conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately 7 per cent of the Sultanate's land is suitable for cultivation. Considering that soils are among the most important factors that contribute to increasing agriculture yields and income, the ministry has been studying various methods to improve the productivity and fertility of Oman's soil. In addition, it has adopted measures which aim to preserve and conserve the health of soils in the

face of a multitude of challenges which include, but are not limited to, climate change and soil salinity.

As various challenges continue to impede soil health and in turn food security in many parts of the world, FAO is encouraging the adoption of more resilient and efficient production systems such as Conservation Agriculture (CA) to prevent losses of arable land while regenerating degraded lands. If the world's small-scale farmers are to continue achieving food security, soils must be protected in order to sustain agricultural production. For this, FAO promotes sustainable soil management through initiatives such as the Global Soil Partnership, which positions soils on the Global Agenda through promoting collective action and developing a strong interactive partnership based on enhanced collaboration and fostering synergies between all stakeholders.



The mother and sister of Palestinian teenager Ali Abu Alia mourn during his funeral in the village of Mughayir near Ramallah, on Saturday. — AFP

Massive Palestinian funeral for killed teenager despite virus curfew

RAMALLAH: Hundreds of Palestinians attended the funeral on Saturday of a teenager killed in clashes with the Israeli army, defying a curfew imposed on the occupied West Bank to stem the coronavirus.

Ali Ayman Nasr Abu Aliya, 13, died on Friday after he was “shot with live rounds in the stomach” during clashes in the village of Mughayir, north of Ramallah, the Palestinian health ministry said.

The boy, whose death drew Palestinian condemnation and was deplored by the United Nations and the European Union, was hit during a protest against the construction of a Jewish settlement.

A funeral cortege joined by hundreds of mourners took the body from a hospital in Ramallah to Mughayir where Abu Aliya was buried. His body, draped in the Palestinian flag and a traditional keffiyeh headscarf, was carried shoulder high by mourners, who also waved yellow flags of the Fatah movement of president Mahmud Abbas. The mourners defied a weekend curfew imposed by Palestinian authorities to stem the rise in coronavirus cases to pay their respects. The West Bank has recorded 71,703 COVID-19 infections, including 678 deaths, since the first cases emerged earlier this year. — AFP

Kuwait holds parliamentary election under shadow of virus

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwaitis hoping for reform went to the polls on Saturday in a parliamentary election overshadowed by COVID-19, with facilities laid on for citizens infected with the disease to vote in special polling stations.

The emirate has enforced some of the strictest regulations in the Gulf to combat the spread of the virus, imposing a months-long lockdown earlier this year.

While some of those curbs have been eased, over-the-top campaign events that traditionally draw thousands for lavish banquets were absent from this year’s election, while masks remain mandatory and temperature checks are routine when venturing outdoors.

Infected people or those under mandatory quarantine are usually confined to home, with electronic wristbands monitoring their movements.

But in an effort to respect their right to vote, authorities designated five polling stations — one in each electoral district — for them to cast their ballots, among the 102 across the country.

And on Saturday authorities set up security barriers around the polling stations to prevent gatherings, with designated lanes



A woman casts her vote at a polling station during parliamentary elections in Jahra City, on Saturday. — Reuters

for entry and exit. Mask-clad voters, who were also forced to wear gloves, were subject to temperature checks before entering the facilities where election officials stood behind glass barriers.

ONLINE CAMPAIGN

This year’s campaign has mainly been fought on social networks and in the media.

The usual themes are a constant

though, from promises to fight corruption and plans to address youth employment, to housing and education among others.

Some Kuwaitis have expressed their desire for change and reform in their country, where 70 per cent of the 4.8 million population are foreigners.

“We want change, new blood, to encourage the youth,” said Hoda al Hassan, who cast her ballot in the

Al Rawda area of Kuwait City.

“I also hope that the parliament will resolve the issue of the ‘bidoon’ and that of the demographic imbalance,” she added.

Yousef Ahmed Safar, who voted in the Al Nazha area, said he too hoped for reform. “We want to improve our situation, including in employment and housing, as well as the issue of combating corruption,” he said. — AFP

IS shadow follows families as Iraq closes camps

AL QAYYARAH, IRAQ: Tuqqa Abdullah and her Iraqi family have wandered from one displaced people’s camp to the next in the past three years, buying time and hoping they will one day be able to go home. Just 14 when her father took the family to the then IS stronghold of Mosul, she has inherited a legacy that might take generations to overcome.

In the meantime, her options are running out. When Iraqi forces captured Mosul in the dying days of the three-year-old IS caliphate in 2017, Abdullah’s father and older sons were killed. The surviving family members were among many thousands of relatives of suspected IS members moved into temporary camps.

Last month, Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi launched the closure of the remaining camps, arguing that the families belong at home. But many of their occupants remain barred from returning by their local communities, who associate them with the group that imposed its brutal rule over large



Tuqqa Ahmed, who says is a relative of men accused of being IS militants, prepares a meal in the tent she recently set up in Al Jadaa 5 camp in Al Qayyarah. — Reuters

swathes of northern Iraq.

When the Al Jadaa 1 camp where Abdullah and her family were living shut down, they did not head back to their village near the northern town of Al Qayyarah but went instead to Al Jadaa 5. “We have nowhere to go if this camp closes,” said Abdullah, who shares a tent with her mother, grandmother

and younger siblings.

The Baghdad government says it has closed all but three of the 47 camps outside the Kurdistan region and hopes to shut those three by early next year, rejecting allegations by humanitarian aid groups that the process is too hasty. It is not clear when the 26 camps in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan

region will close.

In the recent spate of camp closures, Ahmed Khleif and his family also sought shelter at the Al Jadaa 5 camp, even though it is only about 15 km from their home. “If Jadaa closes, we have nowhere to go. Only suicide is left,” Khleif said. The governor of Nineveh province where the Al Jadaa camps are located, Najm al Jabouri, said some families of alleged IS members were able to go home but that a compromise with some tribal leaders over returns had yet to be reached. “We still have about 1,000 families or more for whom it is difficult for them to return to their places of origin,” Al Jabouri said.

Near the town of Gayyara where Al Jadaa camp is situated, Abdulkareem al Wagaa, head of Al Jabouri tribe, was among tribal leaders who decided the fate of relatives of IS members in a meeting in 2016. He says only those who pledged allegiance to, took pride in or benefited from the group are barred from home. — Reuters

TEHRAN: Iran’s top security body called on Saturday for unity on the country’s nuclear policy following a public row between the government and parliament over a controversial bill.

The bill “for the lifting of sanctions and protection of the Iranian people’s interests” was approved by the powerful Guardian Council on Wednesday and has to be signed by President Hassan Rouhani to become law.

Having drawn heated opposition from the government, the bill calls on the administration to end UN inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities and to “produce and store 120 kilogrammes per year of uranium enriched to 20 per cent”.

Both steps would run counter to commitments made by Tehran in a landmark deal with major powers in 2015 and would likely complicate efforts to get Washington back on board after outgoing US President Donald Trump abandoned it in 2018.

In a statement published by

The bill “for the lifting of sanctions and protection of the Iranian people’s interests” was approved by the powerful Guardian Council on Wednesday

Iranian media on Saturday, the supreme national security council said that the bill “does not produce any specific issue for national interests”.

“In contrast, what is against national interests and a cause for concern is this ruckus which has damaged the position and status of the country’s legal bodies,” it said. The body condemned “recent remarks and attitudes” which have “sacrificed national for partisan interests, have no benefit for the country and send the wrong message” to Iran’s foes. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ANKARA

Turkey in weekend lockdown as virus cases soar

Turkey has entered its first full weekend lockdown since May after coronavirus infections and deaths hit record highs in recent days. The country of 83 million people on Friday recorded 32,736 new cases, including asymptomatic ones, the highest number since the beginning of the pandemic in March. The total death toll rose by 193 on Friday, touching a daily record level seen earlier this week, to 14,509.

Turkish television showed largely empty squares and streets



on Saturday in the largest city Istanbul, the capital Ankara and the third largest city Izmir, with only a few people and vehicles out and about. — Reuters

NASIRIYAH

Iraqis renew protests in solidarity after violence

Protesters hit the streets in several Iraqi cities on Friday, one week after clashes between supporters of a controversial cleric and anti-government demonstrators left nine people dead. On November 27, followers of Moqtada Sadr turned out in a show of force in the Iraqi capital, southern hotspot of Nasiriyah and other cities. While the massive Baghdad protest ended peacefully, Sadrists in Nasiriyah clashed with the dwindling numbers of anti-government demonstrators who



have been rallying there since October 2019.

Last week’s clashes left nine people dead, medics said, including several who died of their wounds days later. — AFP

DUBAI

Vessel attacked off Yemen coast: UK authority

A vessel was attacked off the coast of war-torn Yemen, a UK-based maritime organisation said on Saturday, days after an explosion rocked an oil tanker docked at a Saudi port. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), citing reports from ships in the vicinity, said it was aware of an attack late on Friday against a merchant vessel, without giving further details. It later released a statement the incident was over. “Incident is now complete. Vessel and crew are safe.”



The report comes 10 days after a Greek-operated vessel docked at Saudi Arabia’s port of Shuqaiq was rocked by an explosion in an attack that a Riyadh-led military coalition blamed on Yemeni fighters. — AFP

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



MODI HOLDS MEETING AHEAD OF TALKS WITH PROTESTING FARMERS

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a meeting of top ministers on Saturday as part of efforts to break an impasse with protesting farmers, tens of thousands of whom have been parked at entry points to the capital for over a week.

The meeting came hours ahead of a fresh round of talks between the government and farmers' leaders in New Delhi.

The protesting farmers are demanding a rollback of the three laws they say will impact their income, benefit big corporations and dismantle a procurement system that guarantees them minimum prices for their produce and protects them from market vagaries. — **dpa**

■ SAMUT SAKHON



THAI RESEARCHERS UNEARTH RARE WHALE SKELETON

Thai researchers have unearthed a rare partially fossilised skeleton belonging to a Bryde's whale believed to be around 5,000 years old at an inland site west of Bangkok. The 12.5 metre long skeleton was found by a cyclist, who spotted part of a vertebrae coming out of the ground, in early November. Excavation has been going on since then.

"This whale skeleton is thought to be the only one in Asia", said Pannipa Saetian, a geologist in the Fossil Protection division of the Department of Mineral Resources. — **Reuters**

■ MANILA



POLICE THREATEN SOCIAL DISTANCING VIOLATORS WITH CANING

Philippine police have threatened to cane people who violate social distancing protocols as the Southeast Asian nation fights the spread of the coronavirus during the festive season. The Philippines celebrates one of the world's longest Christmas seasons, starting as early as September, and crowds have started to flock to sprawling malls and shopping centres despite the pandemic. Police General Cesar Binag, commander of the coronavirus task force, told a news conference that police and soldiers would patrol in public areas in the capital Manila, the hotspot of COVID-19 cases, carrying 1 metre rattan sticks to measure distancing. — **Reuters**

Afghan reconciliation council meets to seek political consensus

KABUL: The Afghan National Reconciliation Council on Saturday launched its first-ever general assembly of the leadership committee in a bid to gather a much-needed political consensus for the fragile peace process.

The head of the council, Abdullah Abdullah, said the launching of the assembly was an important step in gathering political support for the process, and the advice of the members of committee — who are top Afghan political leaders — were highly desired as part of the process.

"We must not have a profit-seeking vision to the peace process. In war, no one will benefit", Abdullah said in the meeting, while thanking the Taliban for agreeing to take part in talks.

Meanwhile, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the first phase of the talks though was tough, but completed, and the process was now in its second phase.

"The process now needs continued advice, and we should agree on what steps to take



An Afghan National Army soldier demonstrates his skills during a graduation ceremony in a military base in the Guzara district of Herat province recently. — **AFP**

further", Ghani added. Prominent political leaders attending the meeting have all announced their support for the process.

Among other responsibilities, the committee was charged with leading the 21-member, Doha-based Afghan negotiating team

in the face-to-face talks with the Taliban.

Prior to the meeting, a spokesman for Abdullah, Mujib Rahimi, said that the committee would provide a stable political backup for the Afghan negotiating team.

The talks are part of an agreement reached between the militants and the United States in February in an effort to end nearly two decades of war in Afghanistan and open the way for the withdrawal of all international forces from the country. — **dpa**

18 Chinese miners killed in underground gas leak

BEIJING: Eighteen miners were confirmed dead on Saturday after a carbon monoxide leak at a coal mine in south-western China, state media reported, with rescue efforts under way to reach five others still trapped underground.

Twenty-four miners were caught up in the accident at the Diaoshuidong mine in the city of Chongqing after the gas leak occurred on Friday, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

As of Saturday morning, one survivor and 18 victims had been found, said CCTV, citing the local emergency rescue command headquarters.

The accident occurred while workers were dismantling underground mining equipment, CCTV reported. The mine had been closed for the previous two months. Investigators were working to determine the cause of the accident, the official Xinhua news agency said. An earlier accident at the mine claimed the lives of three people in 2013, according to Xinhua. — **AFP**

S Korea urges vigilance as COVID-19 clusters emerge in third wave

SEOUL: South Korean authorities urged vigilance on Saturday as small coronavirus clusters emerged in a third wave, centred in the Seoul area, with infections near nine-month highs. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 583 new coronavirus infections, down from the 629 reported on Friday, which was the highest since the first wave peaked in February and early March.

After implementing tighter restrictions on Saturday, the government is to decide on



A couple wearing face masks walks along a street in central Seoul. — **AFP**

Sunday whether to further tighten curbs in a country that had seen initial success through aggressive contact tracing and

other steps. Infections of the virus that causes COVID-19 averaged 487.9 this week, up 80 cases from the week before.

This wave of infections is different from the first two, which were driven by large-scale transmission, said KDCA official Lim Sook-Young. "The recent outbreaks are small, multiple and is spread in people's everyday lives", Lim told a news briefing.

"Please keep in mind that the current wave is not limited to a specific group or place but may be around our homes, family and acquaintances." — **Reuters**



Royalists hold an image with portraits of Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn, as they wait for the arrival of the royal couple ahead of a candlelight vigil to remember the birthday of Thailand's late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, outside the Grand Palace in Bangkok, on Saturday. — **Reuters**

Thousands pay tribute to Thai royals amid calls for reform

BANGKOK: Thousands of people gathered in Bangkok on Saturday to show their devotion to the Thai monarchy on the birthday of King Maha Vajiralongkorn's late father, after months of street protests led by a youth movement demanding reform to royal powers.

King Vajiralongkorn led a candle lighting ceremony in front of the Grand Palace in Bangkok to pay tribute to his father King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in 2016 after reigning for seven decades — during which he was seen by many as a symbol of national unity.

The king was joined by thousands of loyalists, wearing the royal colour yellow and waving national flags. In recent months, the monarchy in Thailand has become a target for a youth-led protest movement that accuses the current king and the government led by a former army chief Prayuth Chan-ocha of expanding royal powers to a level not

seen since the absolute monarchy ended in 1932.

The protesters broke long-standing taboos by openly criticising King Vajiralongkorn for taking direct control of two military units and the wealth of the Crown Property Bureau, valued in tens of billions of dollars. Saturday's ceremony was one of the biggest shows of royalist support since protests surged in July. "The king has always been there to take care of people's happiness, and without the king there would be chaos", Wanchote Kunprasert, 65 told Reuters. Another man who was holding a portrait of King Bhumibol said that the respect for the monarchy is deeply ingrained in Thai culture and dismissed the protests that call for its reform.

"The monarchy has been with us for centuries, how can you change that by just a few months of protests", said Sirinan Jungwatmunee, 63.

— **Reuters**

Japanese space probe releases capsule with asteroid samples for Earth

TOKYO/SYDNEY: After a space trip of more than 5 billion kilometres, the Japanese space probe Hayabusa 2 has released a capsule with samples from the asteroid Ryugu which is expected to pass through Earth's atmosphere and land later on Saturday.

The capsule successfully detached from the probe at a distance of 220,000 kilometres above the Earth, the Japanese space agency Jaxa said. It contains collected material that is 4.6 billion years old, that is from the earliest times of the solar system, the Mission Manager, Makoto Yoshikawa of Jaxa, explained earlier in the week.

The capsule is expected to enter the Earth's atmosphere in the evening and slow down as it gets very hot, and then deploy a parachute when it is about 10 kilometres above the ground at 1730 GMT. The capsule, which is only 40 centimetres in size, is supposed to float back to Earth



The capsule successfully detached from the probe at a distance of 220,000 kilometres above the Earth, the Japanese space agency Jaxa said.

and land between 1747 and 1757 GMT in the desert near Woomera in southern Australia, after which it is to be brought to Japan for analysis starting in June.

The probe had collected samples from the surface of Ryugu and, for the first time, from an area below the surface of an asteroid.

Researchers hope the analysis of the samples will help them trace the origins of the solar

system. It could also contain organic material which could be "the source of life on Earth", Yoshikawa said.

It is possible that similar asteroids impacted with our planet once and in that way brought water to Earth.

The spectacular landing manoeuvre marks the end of the mission that began in December 2014 with the launch of the Hayabusa 2 from Japan. — **dpa**



A nurse wearing a face mask proceeds to a vaccination against the coronavirus by Sputnik V (Gam-COVID-Vac) vaccine at a clinic in Moscow on Saturday. — AFP

Moscow rolls out Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine to most exposed groups

MOSCOW: Moscow began distributing the Sputnik V COVID-19 shot via 70 clinics on Saturday to the most exposed groups, marking Russia's first large-scale vaccination against the disease, the city's coronavirus task force said. The Russian-made vaccine will first be made available to doctors and other medical workers, teachers and social workers because they run the highest risk of exposure to the disease.

"You are working at an educational institution and have top-priority for the COVID-19 vaccine, free of charge," read a phone text message received by one Muscovite, an elementary school teacher, early on Saturday and seen by Reuters.

President Vladimir Putin has ordered a nationwide voluntary vaccination programme to begin next week. He said Russia will have produced 2 million vaccine doses within the next few days. The head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), Kirill Dmitriev, said in an interview with the BBC on Friday that Russia expects to give the vaccine to about 2 million people this month.

"Over the first five hours, 5,000 people signed up for the jab — teachers, doctors, social workers, those who are today risking their health and lives the most," Mayor Sergei Sobyanin wrote on his personal website

Moscow Mayor says first 5,000 people signed up for the jab
Some scientists concerned about the speed of vaccination

on Friday. Russia has already vaccinated more than 100,000 high-risk people, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said earlier this week during a separate presentation to the United Nations about Sputnik V.

The Sputnik V vaccine is administered in two injections, with the second dose is expected to be given 21 days after the first

TATIANA GOLIKOVA
Deputy Prime Minister

Among the first people signing up to the Moscow roll-out, Nadezhda Ragulina, an administrator at a Moscow clinic, said she wanted the vaccine as she had witnessed many COVID-19 patients.

"This is my decision... Some people close to me also have had an experience (of COVID-19). That's why I want to protect myself, my relatives, to obtain the immunity," she told Rossiya-24

state TV channel. Moscow, a city of around 13 million people, has been the epicentre of Russia's coronavirus outbreak.

It reported 7,993 new cases on Saturday, up from 6,868 the day before and well above the daily tallies of around 700 seen in early September. The age for those receiving shots is capped at 60. People with certain underlying health conditions, pregnant women and those who have had a respiratory illness for the past two weeks are barred from vaccination.

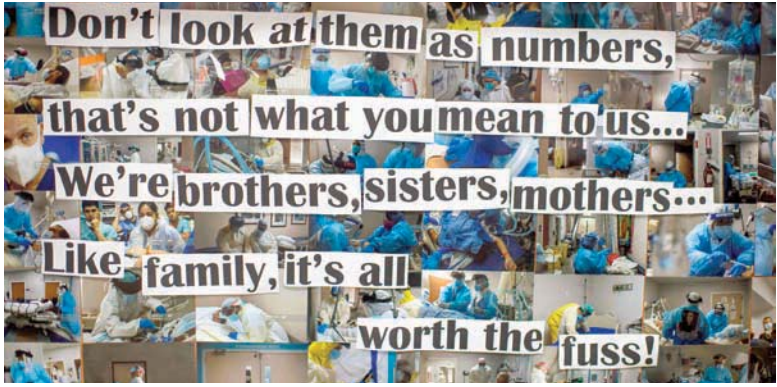
Russia has developed two COVID-19 vaccines, Sputnik V which is backed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund and another developed by Siberia's Vector Institute, with final trials for the both yet to be completed. Scientists have raised concerns about the speed at which Russia has worked, giving the regulatory go-ahead for its vaccines and launching mass vaccinations before full trials to test its safety and efficacy had been completed. The Sputnik V vaccine is administered in two injections, with the second dose is expected to be given 21 days after the first, Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said on Friday. — Reuters

US JUDGE ORDERS TO RESTORE 'DREAMER' IMMIGRATION PROGRAMME

WASHINGTON: A US judge ordered the Trump administration on Friday to fully reinstate a programme that protects from deportation immigrants who came to the country illegally as children. The administration must allow newly eligible immigrants to apply to the so-called DACA programme, Judge Nicholas Garaufis of the US District Court in Brooklyn wrote. Over the summer, the administration had issued a memo limiting the programme to those who were already enrolled.

Then-president Barack Obama instituted DACA by executive order in 2012 to help some of the more than 10 million people estimated to be living in America without documentation. DACA protected an estimated 700,000 people known as Dreamers, offering protection at renewable two-year periods, including authorisation to work. It applied to people who were brought into the United States illegally as children and then grew up here. — AFP

US sets new record of 225,000 cases in one day



A collection of pictures is displayed in the COVID-19 ward at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas, on Friday. — AFP

WASHINGTON: For the second day in a row, the United States on Friday notched a record number of coronavirus cases in 24 hours, reaching 225,201 new infections, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

In that same period, the country recorded 2,506 COVID-related deaths, according to real-time data provided by the Baltimore-based university at 8:30 pm (0130 GMT Saturday).

The United States — the country with the most coronavirus cases and deaths in the world — has seen a dramatic resurgence in its epidemic in recent weeks.

It had surpassed 200,000 new daily cases three times in the past month, peaking at more than 210,000 between

Wednesday and Thursday.

US health officials warned of a surge after millions of Americans travelled to celebrate last week's Thanksgiving holiday despite pleas from authorities to stay home.

For two weeks, the US has regularly topped 2,000 deaths per day, as it had in the spring at the height of the first wave of the country's outbreak.

The number of people hospitalised with COVID-19 is also steadily increasing, especially in the most populous states of California, Florida, New York and Texas, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

The United States has recorded more than 14.3 million COVID-19 cases and 278,000 related deaths since the start of the pandemic. — AFP

Protesters return to French streets to denounce police violence

PARIS: Thousands protested in Paris on Saturday to denounce police violence and President Emmanuel Macron's security policy plans which the demonstrators say would crimp civil liberties. In one incident, police fired tear gas and charged after fireworks were launched at their lines. Hooded youths smashed one store window.

There were violent clashes between protesters and police in a similar protest last week. In a U-turn earlier this week, Macron's ruling party said it would rewrite part of a draft security bill that would curb rights to circulate images of police officers after it provoked a strong backlash among the public and the political left.

The protesters marched through the French capital under the close watch of riot police, waving banners that read "France,



A demonstrator holds an umbrella and a sign reading "For your safety you will have no more freedoms" during a protest against the "Global Security Bill" in Paris, on Saturday. — Reuters

land of police rights" and "Withdrawal of the security law".

"We're heading towards an increasingly significant limitation of freedoms. There is no justification," said Paris resident Karine Shebabo. Another protester, Xavier Molenat, said:

"France has this habit of curbing freedoms while preaching their importance to others."

The beating of a Black man, music producer Michel Zecler, by several police officers in late November intensified public anger. — Reuters

LIMA

Peru repeals farm law after days of protest

Peru's Congress on Friday repealed a farming law that had triggered days of roadblocks and other protests by striking workers. The protesters erupted with joy and immediately began lifting the blockades that had choked many stretches of the north-south Pan-American Highway.

"We did it!" protesters chanted at one blockade site in Ica, around 250 kilometres south of Lima. There, an estimated 2,000 trucks and buses had been



stuck for days. The strikers were demanding wage increases and the repeal of a decades-old law, recently extended until 2031, that sought to boost farm exports and gave exporters tax breaks. The strikers also said it set their wages unfairly low. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Biden hints at scaled down inauguration

US President-elect Joe Biden on Friday gave a preview of what his January inauguration will look like, noting that the event will not be typical due to the pandemic. "I think you're going to see something that's closer to what the convention was like, than the typical inauguration," Biden told reporters in Wilmington, Delaware, referring to the 2020 Democratic National Convention, which was held primarily online. "First and foremost, my objective is to keep America safe and still allow people



to celebrate," he added. Biden hinted that the large, in-person events that are usually held during a presidential inauguration, including a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC, will likely not take place. — dpa

WASHINGTON

Trump orders troop pullout from Somalia

President Donald Trump has ordered the removal of most US military and security personnel from Somalia, where they have been conducting operations against the Al Shabaab militant group, the Pentagon said on Friday. After ordering major troop reductions in Iraq and Afghanistan recently, Trump's new move reflects his drive to disengage US forces from what he calls endless wars abroad, making good on a campaign pledge in the final weeks of his presidency.



Trump "has ordered the Department of Defence and the United States Africa Command to reposition the majority of personnel and assets out of Somalia by early 2021," the Pentagon said in a statement. — AFP

Gender equality is unfinished business...

Recent celebrations in respect of the achievements of women in the Sultanate have been well-presented, well-received, and offered due praise, respect, and acknowledgement. However, often such events do tend to create a positive profile for a week or two, and then we ‘put them back in the box,’ until next year at the same time, when we ‘trot out’ a few more.

Let us not... this time! Not when the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Portugal’s Antonio Guterres has described, “achieving gender equality is the greatest human rights challenge in our world!”

Let us work at celebrating the role of the women in our societies, their achievements, their strength, their commitment, their diversity, their ingenuity, their resilience, and let us not forget the simple matter of their beauty, poise, elegance, and subtlety. They are a wonderful contradiction, being delicate, soft, and warm always, granite like when they need to be, and sharper than any stiletto when they must be. They see and hear everything, and are sensitive to the moods and emotions of others in a manner that we men can never hope to imitate, and even when we do try to respond with kindness or empathy, it rarely stretches from the heart to the eyes. With a woman though, there is, and will always be, a depth of compassion a heartbeat away, enhancing all those other qualities.

Now it is wonderful that we do



Ray Petersen
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LET US WORK AT
CELEBRATING
THE ROLE OF THE
WOMEN IN OUR
SOCIETIES

celebrate women’s days and weeks, but why do we have to? Well, demographically, men still rule the world! Most world leaders are men, most politicians and elected or nominated officeholders are men, most corporate leaders and ‘masters of industry’ are men. Men still dominate the world in the spheres of political and fiscal governance, and they, according to Ziena Jalil, a leading diversity advocate, “decide who sits at the table.”

The UN has identified gender equality as a relatively short-term fix, yet in its annual equality study released recently, the World Economic Forum (WEF) estimated it would take 257 years for the economic gender gap to close. That was a sharp rise from a 2018 estimate of 202 years. “None of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children,” the report said.

The financial sector has repeatedly advocated greater gender equivalence, with the prestigious McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) estimating that with complete gender parity, a 25 per cent increased global output relative to a business-as-usual scenario, is likely. Not possible... likely.

The Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) is a powerhouse US lobby and think-tank group, and their statement that, “The magnitudes of the correlations are not small.

The largest gains are for the proportion of female executives,

followed by the proportion of female board members, while the presence of female CEOs has no noticeable effect on firm performance.” Proving therefore, that it is not the matter of having a token presence, but a meaningful corporate pathway for women.

Institutional, “because it’s the way it’s always been.” Cultural, “because that’s the way it’s always been.” Misogynistic, “because that’s how it’s going to be.” These are not reasons, but utterances of the apostles of Friedrich Nietzsche, who said women with “scholarly inclinations had something wrong with them,” or Napoleon Bonaparte who wrote, “Nature intended women to be our slaves, our property.”

Misogyny is not new, but Fumiko Enchi, paraphrasing Sun Tzu said, “Nothing more than an attempt to get the better of a vastly superior opponent.”

Let us see organisational and institutional sectors embrace policies that are genuinely gender inclusive, respectful, diverse, and encouraging, to deny cynicism and scepticism, and to understand that, as in all things, you will be enriched by greater gender equity in the workplace.

It is said that when a baby girl is born, her wings are clipped... Don’t you dare! When women do better, economies, societies, communities, families, and couples do better.. Make gender equality, and gender equity, your unfinished business.

RULE OF LAW

Hungary, Poland dig in heels in row with EU

MARTON DUNAI

Hungary and Poland dug in their heels in a dispute with the European Union over efforts to link the disbursement of more than a trillion euros of funds with rule-of-law provisions, dashing tentative hopes that a compromise could soon be agreed.

Hungary and Poland have for weeks blocked the release of funds worth a total 1.85 trillion euros (\$2.25 trillion) from the EU’s seven-year budget and a post-COVID development fund, cash sorely needed by member states trying to emerge from their coronavirus-induced recession. Warsaw and Budapest, both under investigation by the EU over their push to curb judicial and media freedoms, object to the bloc’s attempt to make the funds conditional on respect for the rule of law and democratic norms.

EU diplomats had discussed attaching an explanatory declaration to the funding package to make the linkage more acceptable to Budapest and Warsaw, a move initially welcomed by Poland. But on Friday both

For us, this solution — attaching some statement like a reminder on a sticky note attached on a piece of paper — won’t work

VIKTOR ORBAN
Hungarian Prime Minister

countries rejected that initiative. “For us, this solution — attaching some statement like a reminder on a sticky note attached on a piece of paper — won’t work,” Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban told public radio. “Hungary insists that these two things should

be separated.” Orban said there was no rush to get an agreement on the EU budget this year, adding: “Leave the legal status quo unchanged and everything will go smoothly and quickly.”

Polish government spokesman Piotr Muller said on Twitter that Warsaw’s stance on the issue was unchanged. Speaking in Brussels last Thursday, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Jaroslaw Gowin said Warsaw — a major beneficiary of EU funds — understood the need for compromise. The chairman of EU leaders, Charles Michel, said on Friday the bloc could not compromise on respect for rule of law, which he said was in its DNA, though he “wanted to remain optimistic” that the standoff could be resolved quickly.

According to a poll by think-tank Median published this week, around half of Hungarian voters accept Orban’s assertion that the EU is using the funds issue to force Hungary to accept more lenient regulations on immigration. Orban has long accused the EU of being dominated by a liberal mindset that he says aims to dilute national identities and cultures, partly through encouraging mass immigration. His critics say he has systematically eroded democratic freedoms in Hungary during his decade in power by curbing the independence of the media, NGOs and universities.

Political analysts said Orban may prefer to hold firm in his battle with the EU despite the potential harm to Hungary’s own economy as he seeks to divert voters’ attention from a scandal that hit his ruling conservative Fidesz party.

The party’s leader in the European Parliament, Jozsef Szajer, resigned from the assembly and from Fidesz last week after details emerged of how he had fled a party in Brussels by clambering down a gutter. — Reuters

GOING HUNGRY

Garment workers cut back on food as pandemic hits wages

MATT BLOMBERG

Garment workers stitching clothes for major fashion brands are “going hungry” and taking out loans to feed their families due to pay cuts imposed during the coronavirus pandemic, according to global labour rights advocates. Among workers who have held onto their jobs, one in five experience hunger on a daily basis following a 20 per cent decline in average wages in the global garment industry, the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) said in a report last week.

“Most workers are currently unable to feed their families adequately and they are bracing themselves for worse times ahead,” said Penelope Kyritsis, strategic research director at the WRC. “The most important action for brands is to mobilise funds to sustain garment workers’ incomes through the remainder of the crisis,” she said.

The garment industry, which employs tens of millions of people worldwide — mostly women, has been ravaged by the pandemic and workers have lost some \$5.8 billion in wages as retailers shut shops and cancel orders. Leading brands have been “leveraging desperation” to demand price cuts from struggling manufacturers, the



Workers stitch garments at a factory of an apparel shop in the city of Jaipur, India. – Reuters file photo

MOST WORKERS
ARE CURRENTLY
UNABLE TO FEED
THEIR FAMILIES
ADEQUATELY

US-based Center for Global Workers’ Rights said in a report in October.

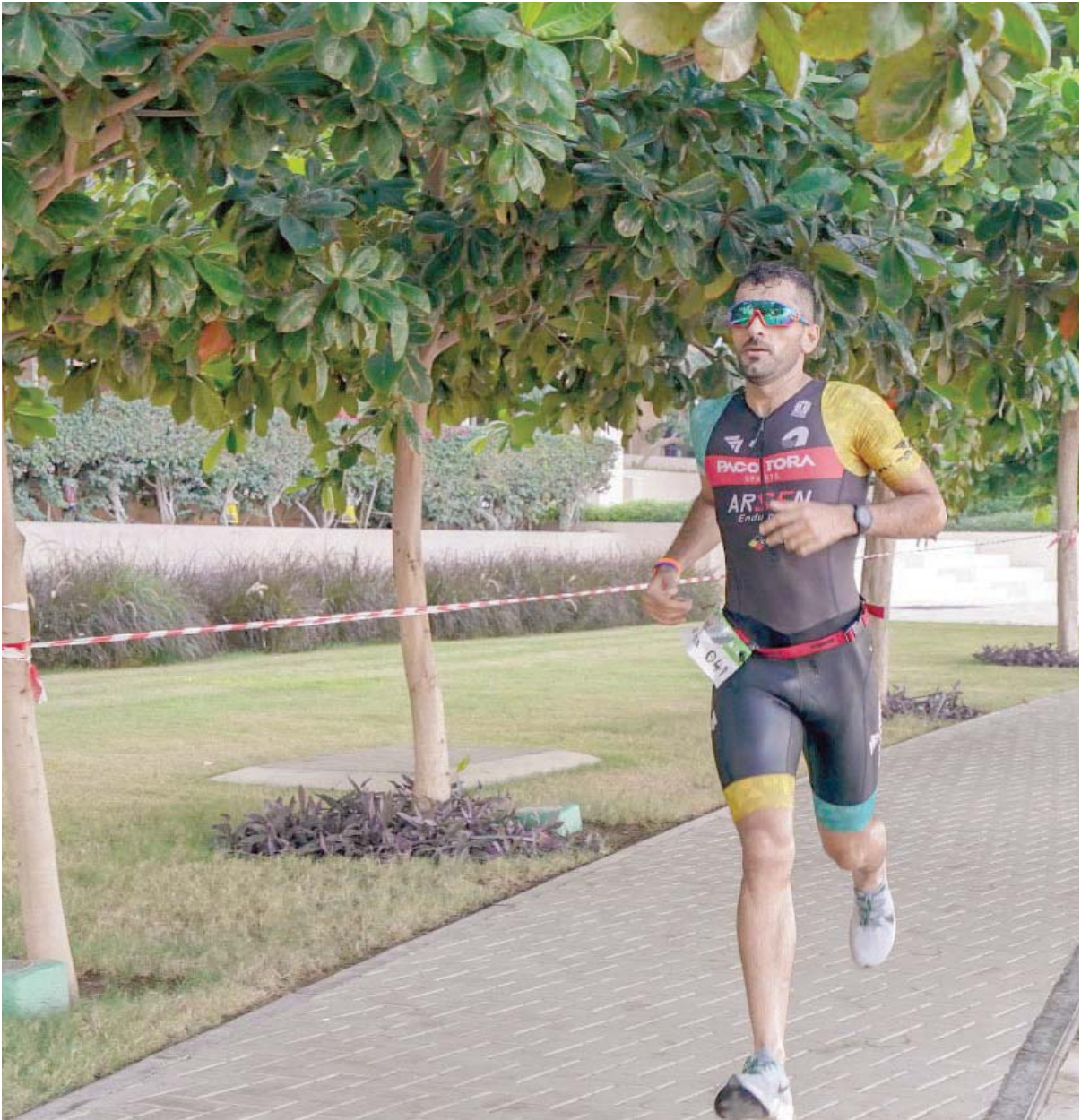
Factory bosses, meanwhile, have used the pandemic as cover to terminate unionised workers, according to labour advocates. The new report, which polled about 400 workers in nine countries — Cambodia, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Lesotho and Myanmar — found that

three-quarters of them had borrowed money to buy food this year.

“Given the well-documented risk that debts can lead to severe labour exploitation, including forced labour for low-wage workers, this is a worrying trend,” the WRC said. Almost 90 per cent of the workers said they and their families were eating less, with most expecting to cut back even further.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

sport



NATIONAL TRIATHLETE
AL MASROORI CLINCHES
OMAN OPEN TITLE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The national triathlete Mohammed al Masroori clinched the title of the Oman Open Triathlon Championship on Friday at Al Musannah Millennium Resort.

Al Masroori managed to win the title after tough competition among other 50 triathletes from local and expatriate participants. He ended the races of all the three competitions including running, cycling and swimming in a timing of 2 hours, 21 minutes and 9 seconds.

The local triathletes delivered impressive performance in the championship as the podium consisted of two Omanis and the third place went to Essam al Busaidy who finished the race in two hours, 25 minutes and 52 seconds.

The fourth place awarded to Abdullah al Hasani and Suleiman al Alawi managed to end the competition in fifth place. The second place award went to Gari from UK as he completed the race in a timing of two hours, 24 minutes and 40 seconds.

After formation of the Oman Triathlon Committee (OTC) last year, the first domestic event organised on successful note and under full implementation

The local triathletes delivered impressive performance in the championship as the podium consisted of two Omanis and the third place went to Essam al Busaidy who finished the race in two hours, 25 minutes and 52 seconds

of the preventive measures due to the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The triathlon event consisted of the swimming distance of 1.5 kilometres along with 40 km cycling and 10 km run. The tournament was a golden chance to shape Omani referees as well who officiated in the



championship.

More than 15 national referees took a course prior to the event and delivered by Tunisian lecturer Mohammed al Munaif. The graduated Omani umpires will support OTC in the upcoming triathlon competitions.

RANKING SYSTEM

Mohammed al Obaidani, the Chairman of OTC, said after completion of the first edition of Oman Open Triathlon. “The main target from this domestic event was to declare ranking system for the Sultanate and to record points of the national

triathletes. This aim was achieved and the local triathletes points registered under the international ranking system. Another crucial point from the event is that the national triathletes participation was more than the expatriates which reflect the awareness of the “Triathlon” on Omanis,” he

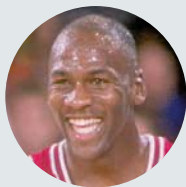
added.

Al Obaidani ended his statement on affirming that OTC plans to secure Omanis presence at the 2028 Summer Olympics. “We are working very hard for this future plan and definitely we need support from everyone to accomplish this objective”.



Cannavaro on brink of exit again

Fabio Cannavaro's reign at Guangzhou Evergrande appears to be all but over after the eight-time Chinese Super League champions ended the season under the Italian without silverware.



Jordan jersey fetches record price

A jersey worn by former basketball star Michael Jordan has fetched a record \$320,000 at a Beverly Hills auction, the company that organised the sale said on Friday.



Klopp frustrated with Brexit issues

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp spoke of his frustration at Brexit's impact on English football, with the German concerned tough new transfer rules being implemented.

Kulaibi, Muhannad impress at Sprint Challenge Championship



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

As many as 85 swimmers took part at the Sprint Challenge Championship on Saturday at the Olympic swimming pools in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The domestic event for the Oman Swimming Association (OSA) organised under restricted medical protocol and the event was the first after an absence of local tournaments and activities for more than nine months.

The tournament comprised from five categories including: U-10, 11-12 years, 13-14 years, 15-17 years and above 18 years. The participant swimmers came up with a thrilling performance in all the categories and the national swimmers including

Abdulrahman al Kulaibi and Muhannad Awlad Thani recorded personal best time.

The championship was attended by the national swimming head coach Srdan Filipovic. At the 18 years and above category for 50m freestyle, the national team swimmer Abdulrahman al Kulaibi claimed the first place award while swimmer Merja came second and swimmer Stoy Word finished in third place. For the backstroke style, the national swimmer Khalid al Jahdhami clinched the first place award while Nawaf al Qasmi grabbed the gold medal of butterfly style.

At the junior category of 15-17 years, the national swimmer Muhannad Awlad Thani bagged the gold medal of the 50 metre-

The participant swimmers came up with a thrilling performance in all the categories and the national swimmers including Abdulrahman al Kulaibi and Muhannad Awlad Thani recorded personal best time

freestyle while Darwish al Balushi and Omar al Balushi ended in the second and third place respectively.

At 50-metre breaststroke, swimmer Omar al Balushi grabbed the gold medal and Adam al Raisi ended in the second place while Abdulrahman al Badi took third place award.

At 50-metre backstroke, Muhannad Awlad Thani grabbed first place title while Tariq al Balushi bagged the title of the butterfly style.

All the competitions were monitored by the international referee Ali al Ajmi as the General Referee while Hamed al Busaidy as assistant for him.

After the end of all the competitions, Mumtaz al Balushi OSA board member and board

treasurer, awarded the trophies and medals to the top winners in presence of Ali al Shedi, the head of competitions, and Masoud al Matroushi, board member.

TOP PERFORMANCE

The OSA Chairman, Taha al Kishry, affirmed that the tournament succeeded through large number of swimmers who took part. "Obviously, this huge participation at this event is very attractive to organise more events and championships in the coming months. This is the first local event during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and a dedicated thanks to all the umpiring team, technical and admin teams of the national teams and to the media representatives for the top efforts to success the OSA activities,"

al Kishry said. The national swimming head coach, Srdan Filipovic, said that the event was a vital after long break of the local activities.

"I am glad with this return to the domestic events and championship. This event is ranked as crucial station for the forthcoming preparations and part of the training process of the national swimmers. I am impressed with some of the national swimmers performance during the events including Abdulrahman al Kulaibi and Muhannad Awlad Thani who made new personal best time. I hope to have more local events and championships as this will support in shaping the swimmers properly to the forthcoming events," he added.

Prajapati helps Muscat to victory; Aqib powers Alpha to easy win

MUSCAT: Opener Kashyapkumar Prajapati struck a solid 84 not out, helping Muscat CT to a comfortable 5-wicket victory against Al Turki NMC in a Premier Division 50-over encounter at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Muscat made the right decision to bowl first, dismissing Al Turki for a modest 182 in the 49th over. Sindo Michael (34) and Gustav Burger (28) were the only notable scorers. Pacers Rajesh Ranpura and Munis Ansari bowled well, taking two wickets each.

Muscat was in a spot of bother at 3 for 2 in the first over bowled by Hemalkumar Tandel before Prajapati found a capable ally in Ayaan Khan, putting on 73 for the fourth wicket before the latter fell for 33. Wasim Ali and Sandeep Goud departed without a significant

contribution before big-hitting Naseem Khushi arrived to slam a quickfire 27 off 19 including two big sixes as Muscat sealed the win in the 32nd over. Ajay Lalcheta and Tandel bagged two wickets each.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): Al Turki NMC 182 all out (Sindo Michael 34 - 1x4, Gustav Burger 28 - 2x4, 1x6, Rajesh Ranpura 2-9, Munis Ansari 2-23) lost to Muscat Ct 183 for 5 in 31.5 overs (Kashyapkumar Prajapati 84 - 12x4, 1x6, Ayaan Khan 33 - 6x4, 1x6, Naseem Khushi 27 not out - 3x4, 2x6, Ajay Lalcheta 2-28, Hemalkumar Tandel 2-60) by 5 wickets.

Aqib powers Alpha to big win

In another Premier Division game on Saturday, Oman star Aqib Ilyas whacked a sizzling 122 to power Arm Alpha to an emphatic 124-run victory



Muscat CT's Kashyapkumar Prajapati

against AER at the same venue. Alpha then bowled exceptionally well to bundle out AER for 148 in 40.5 overs thanks to superb spells by Bilal Khan (3

bowlers, taking 4 for 52 to keep Alpha in check.

Brief scores (Premier Division): Arm Alpha 272 for 9 in 50 overs (Aqib Ilyas 122 - 8x4, 4x6, Ubaid Ullah 31 - 2x4, Kaleemullah 27 - 1x4, 2x6, Ghazanfar Iqbal 4-52) thrashed AER 148 all out in 40.5 overs (Azmatullah 30 - 2x4, Rubella Abdus 27 - 3x4, 1x6, Imran Rijvi 21 - 2x4, 1x6, Bilal Khan 3-39, Sanuth Ebrahim 3-21, Khalid Rasheed 2-04) by 124 runs.

KUMAR HELPS AWTAD TO VICTORY

Pradeep Kumar's 4 for 29 was instrumental in steering Awtad International to an exciting 4-wicket win over ACT in a 50-over A Division League on OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

ACT failed to post a fighting total on the board, folding up for a disappointing 142 in the

38th over. Only Qasim Ali (35) and Ghufran Anjum (25) were able to spend some time on the crease as Kumar led the Awtad charge with a game-turning spell.

Awtad slumped to 36 for 3 in the 9th over but fought on to surpass the target in the 33rd over, scoring 144 for 6. Opener Arun Pushpan topscored with a resilient 47 off 71 while Muhammed Waqas chipped in with a fluent 29 not out. Hafiz Irfan and Rajesh Devashya picked up two wickets each.

Brief Scores (A Division): ACT 142 all out in 37.2 overs (Qasim Ali 35 - 2x4, 2x6, Ghufran Anjum 25 - 4x4, Pradeep Kumar 4-29) lost to Awtad International 144 for 6 in 32.4 (Arun Pushpan 47 - 5x4, Muhammed Waqas 29 - 5x4, Hafiz Irfan 2-23, Rajesh Devashya 2-36) by 4 wickets.



New Zealand's Trent Boult bowls during the third day of the first Test against West Indies in Hamilton. — AFP

Bowlers push NZ to brink of first Test victory

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's bowlers twice ripped through the West Indies batting lineup on Saturday and pushed them to the brink of a comprehensive first Test victory at the end of the third day at Seddon Park in Hamilton.

Only some counter-attacking resistance from Jermaine Blackwood (80 not out) and Alzarri Joseph (59) took the tourists to 196 for six in their second innings and kept them from becoming the fifth team to be dismissed twice in one day.

They were bowled out for 138 in their first innings after lunch, still 381 runs behind New Zealand's 519 for seven declared and Kane Williamson had no hesitation in imposing the follow-on.

Jason Holder's team then slumped to 89 for six in their second innings and with wicket-keeper Shane Dowrich unable to bat due to a finger injury, risked their heaviest Test defeat.

However, Blackwood, who also provided some resistance with Holder in the first innings, took every chance offered to him and combined with Joseph in an unbeaten 107-run partnership to frustrate the home attack.

The visitors still trail by 185 runs. West Indies had started the day at 49 without loss in their first innings in response to New Zealand's massive total and while John Campbell hit the first ball from Tim Southee to the boundary, things then rapidly went downhill.

They lost their first three wickets for just the addition of two runs, which set a pattern for their day, when

they produced small partnerships only to lose wickets in bunches in the face of a disciplined and clinical bowling performance.

Sensing victory later, however, New Zealand's attack lost some of their discipline and Blackwood and Joseph, who brought up his first Test half century with a six off Trent Boult, capitalised. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND first innings: 519-7 dec

WEST INDIES first innings (0/n: 49-0):

K Brathwaite c Blundell b Boult.....	21
J Campbell c Williamson b Southee....	26
S Brooks c Taylor b Southee.....	1
D Bravo b Jamieson.....	9
R Chase lbw Wagner.....	11
J Blackwood c Latham b Southee.....	23
J Holder (not out).....	25
A Joseph c Mitchell b Southee.....	0
K Roach b Jamieson.....	2
S Gabriel lbw Wagner.....	1
Extras (B-8, LB-7, W-1, NB-3).....	19
Total (For 9 wks, 64 overs).....	138
Fall of wickets: 1-53, 2-55, 3-55, 4-79, 5-79, 6-119, 7-119, 8-135, 9-138.	
Bowling: Southee 19-7-35-4, Boult 17-5-30-1, Jamieson 13-3-25-2, Wagner 15-3-33-2.	

WEST INDIES SECOND INNINGS

K Brathwaite c Blundell b Southee.....	10
J Campbell c Latham b Boult.....	2
D Bravo c Southee b Wagner.....	12
S Brooks c sub (Conway) b Wagner.....	2
R Chase lbw Jamieson.....	6
J Blackwood (not out).....	80
J Holder lbw Mitchell.....	8
A Joseph (not out).....	59
Extras (LB-7, W-8, NB-2).....	17
Total (For 6 wks, 42 overs).....	196
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-25, 3-27, 4-27, 5-53, 6-89.	
Bowling: Southee 8-1-40-1 (1w), Boult 10-1-47-1 (1w), Wagner 11-0-62-2 (1nb), Jamieson 10-2-33-1 (6w), Mitchell 3-0-7-1 (1nb)	



New Zealand's paceman Tim Southee gets ready to bowl during the third day of the first Test in Hamilton. — AFP

OPEC+ decision a positive step forward: Oman

review these conditions and decide on the action required — whether to ease, maintain or strengthen the production cut based on the market situation.”

Significantly, Oman’s support for the latest decision is consistent with its ongoing alignment with OPEC+ efforts to help lift international oil prices, Al Riyami said.

“Our position has been clear from the inception of this alliance between OPEC and other producing nations, known as OPEC+. Together with our colleagues from OPEC+, we supported them in honouring the previous two accords, and were ready to back whatever was the outcome of the latest effort — whether it meant maintaining the status quo, easing the production cuts up to two million bpd, or rolling over the cuts to the first quarter of 2021. Regardless, our position was to support any decision that would take into account market conditions.”

Following news of Thursday’s decision, Oman Crude climbed to settle at \$49.41 per barrel on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), up from \$48.33 per barrel a day earlier — a level previously seen on March 6, 2020.

EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier arrives at Brussels-South railway station returning from London, in Brussels. — **Reuters**

issues — fisheries, ensuring fair competition guarantees and ways to solve future disputes. Sources from both sides said that French demands over fishing rights in British waters remained a key issue.

However, one EU diplomat said French President Emmanuel Macron was not the only one with reservations, and several member states had also raised concerns over how far Barnier had moved on competition issues, known as the level-playing field. “It’s not just Macron,” the diplomat said. Britain says the EU must respect its sovereignty because the 2016 Brexit referendum result was a vote to “take back control”.

But the EU says Britain’s proximity to the bloc means it cannot offer the “Canada-style” free trade deal that Johnson had been seeking.

Neither side has walked away from the talks yet, suggesting they still hold out some hope of securing a deal governing almost \$1 trillion of annual trade to avoid a disorderly end to more than 40 years of British membership of the European club. — **Reuters**

Omani tourism sector shows signs of recovery

There are some optimistic signs of recovery for the Omani tourism sector.

Although the percentage sounds and looks intimidating — with a sharp drop by 97.4 per cent in October 2020 incoming tourists vs October 2019 — the overall 7,000 tourists that decided to visit Oman are pure oxygen for the crippled hospitality industry players.

According to the Sultanate's National Center of Statistics and Information (NSCI), the visitors who preferred Oman for their short holidays were mostly from other GCC countries, showing a strong cultural bond with our neighbours.

However, far are the memories of a buzzing Port Mina Qaboos and the packed waterfront of Muttrah. Up until March this year, Oman was one of the most attractive cruise destinations in the region. Countless tourists from Europe, and in particular from Italy and Germany, used to shop around the small streets of the traditional markets.

Merchants had learned some words in their languages so that they could appeal with a “Buonasera bella Signora” to the beautiful Italian ladies looking for jewels and souvenirs. We are



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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THE HOTELS IN OMAN HAVE ATTRACTED THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO ENJOY STUNNING STAYCATIONS IN THE WORLD-CLASS HOSPITALITY PROPERTIES AND IN THE INTERIOR OF THE SULTANATE FOR A FRACTION OF THE USUAL PRICE

unlikely to see such a scene again until probably mid 2021.

The number of incoming flights has been marginal.

Such an unfortunate timing for this pandemic, given the majestic project of the new airport in Muscat. But looking at the bright side of the misfortune, the hotels in Oman have attracted the local community to enjoy stunning staycations in the world-class hospitality properties along the coastline and in the interior of the Sultanate, for a fraction of the usual price.

Amazing promotions have generated interest among Omani and foreigners alike and kept some of the household names afloat despite the deep crisis.

So, looking at October 2020 — dwarfed by October 2019 — does not really render justice to the gigantic performance compared to the more recent September 2020. In other words, hope is not over, and the industry is far from dead. The geography of Oman is one of the most spectacular in the world.

The Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Salim al Mahrouqi, spoke recently about the appeal that the mountains of Oman — especially Jabal al Akhdhar — have in the eyes of the local and regional population as well as international tourists.

Hotels such as Anantara and

Alila have been featured as some of the world's best and they are on the bucket list of many keen travel connoisseurs.

Meanwhile, according to a report issued by the UNWTO (United Nation World Tourism Organization) more than 70 per cent of the global tourism destinations have reopened.

Of aggregate 217 tracked destinations, 152 have eased restrictions on international tourism, a significant increment from September 1, when the total number was 115. The countries that are currently not accepting any tourists whatsoever is 59, down from 93 a month before.

There is hope in the tourism industry and signs are now showing more clearly.

For my birthday weekend in early December, I wanted to spend a night in a nice hotel by the beach here in Malaysia, where I have been ever since the beginning of the pandemic.

To my surprise, the hotel was fully booked. The kind receptionist informed me that they were also surprised by the sudden jump in bookings.

Bad news for my birthday staycation. Great news for the tourism sector.

(The columnist is a member of the International Press Association)



Madayn lectures focus on investment, cybersecurity

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised recently three awareness lectures on the topics of 'Advanced Investment Methods and Investment Evaluation Criteria', 'Omani Labour Law' and 'Cybersecurity'.

The programme on the 'Advanced Investment Methods and Investment Evaluation Criteria' was delivered by Salah al Zakwani, Chief Investment Officer (CIO) at Shumookh Investment and Services Company — Madayn's investment arm. Al Zakwani elaborated on the investment fundamentals, effective methods to attract new investors, and criteria for evaluating investment projects.

Moderated by Dr Jamil al Hinai, Dean of College of Law in University of Al Buraimi, the 'Omani Labour Law' programme defined the law, its concept and

sources, general characteristics of the law, sanctions, among other related topics. Moreover, Dr Abdullah al Kalbani from University of Al Buraimi presented the programme on 'Cybersecurity', which highlighted several aspects including computer evolution, cyberspace and cybercrime, digital drugs, and the reality of cybersecurity in Oman.

Madayn Industrial Academy was established in 2019 to offer training opportunities for the national cadres to enhance administrative, financial and technical skills, boost their skills and raise their productivity, provide value adding services to the investors in the industrial cities, and provide new job opportunities for the national cadres.

Madayn Industrial Academy organises a series of training programmes and events that address the trending topics and challenges locally and globally. The academy also organises training-for-employment in cooperation with the concerned bodies in this field.



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

Slight uptick in MSM Index

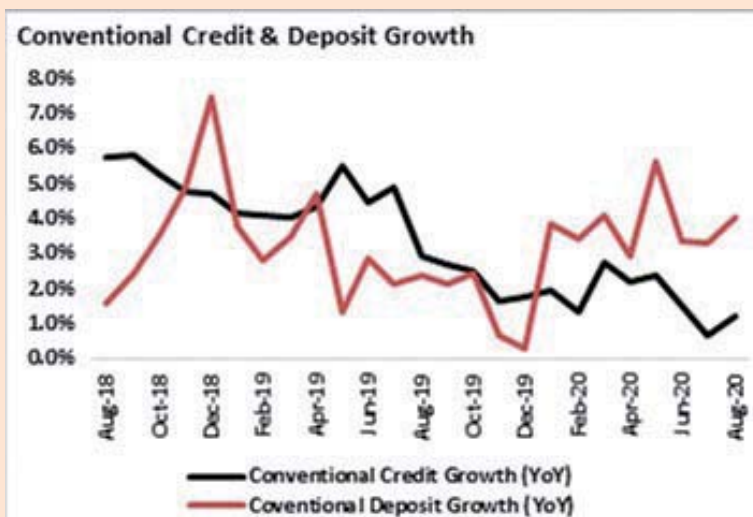
The MSM30 Index ended the week up by 0.45 per cent.

The Financial Index rose 0.04 per cent, while the Services and Industrial Indices ended the week lower by 0.49 per cent and 0.36 per cent respectively. The MSM Shariah Index also fell by 1.15 per cent. The market saw a net buy from foreigners worth \$1.87 million of securities.

As per CBO's latest statistics, Oman's conventional credit growth picked up to +1.3 per cent YoY in Sept'20 as compared to +1.2 per cent YoY Aug'20 and +0.7 per cent YoY in Jul'20.

Total conventional credit reached RO 22.24bn (+RO 62m on MoM basis or +0.3 per cent MoM). Conventional credit expanded largely on account of a 2.1 per cent MoM (+RO 67.5 million) increase in credit extended to Government & Public Enterprises, which form about 14.7 per cent of total conventional credit. Credit to non-residents also increased by about 26 per cent (up RO 34.4m).

However, private sector credit contracted by RO 39.5 million or 0.2 per cent MoM, forming about 84.5 per cent of the total. Conventional deposits growth also picked up to 4.5 per cent in Sept'20 from 4.0 per cent YoY in Aug'20 and 3.3 per cent YoY in Jul'20.



Total conventional deposits stood at RO 20.57bn (+RO 185.2m on MoM basis or +0.9 per cent MoM). Sector Loan-to-deposit (LTD) ratio decreased slightly to 108.0 per cent in Sept'20 as compared to 108.7 per cent in Aug'20 and 108.9 per cent in Jul'20.

Conventional deposits increased on MoM basis on account of expansion in all categories of deposits except private sector deposits: Government deposits rose 2.0 per cent MoM (RO 88.3 million), Public enterprises' deposits rose 19.0 per cent MoM or RO 218.4 million, and finally, non-resident deposits rose 6.8 per cent MoM or RO 29m. Private sector deposits fell by RO 150.5 million or 1.1 per cent MoM, but are up 10.2 per cent YoY.

The share of Government & Public Enterprises deposits,

which had dropped to 27.7 per cent in Jul'20, rose slightly to 27.8 per cent in Aug'20, and has now grown to 29.1 per cent in Sept'20 as compared to a simple average of 31.2 per cent over the trailing 12 months.

Islamic Banking financing (Banks & Islamic Windows) reached RO 4.193bn (+1.5 per cent MoM and +9.0 per cent YoY).

Islamic deposits reached RO 3.74bn (+2.4 per cent MoM and +7.1 per cent YoY). Islamic financing stands at 15.9 per cent of total Oman banking credit, and Islamic deposits form 15.4 per cent of total bank deposits.

Islamic Financing-to-Deposit Ratio contracted to 112.1 per cent vs. 113.0 per cent in Aug'20 and 115.5 per cent in Jul'20, on MoM deposit expansion outpacing credit growth.

Courtesy: U-Capital

Meethaq Islamic Banking opens new branch

MUSCAT: In line with its pioneering role in providing services and products compatible with the provisions and principles of Islamic Sharia, and in continuation of its efforts to expand its network of branches in the Sultanate, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat celebrated the official opening of its main branch at the Bank Muscat Head Office.

The event was held in the presence of Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, and a number of officials.

With the opening of the new branch, the total number of Meethaq branches in the Sultanate has reached 22 branches across all the governorates



Meethaq celebrates official opening of its main branch

of the Sultanate.

These include 11 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 11 branches in the other governorates.

Also, Meethaq has the largest Islamic banking network in the country and a network of 44 cash withdrawal and deposit devices. Moreover, Meethaq customers can also access the

extensive network of Bank Muscat ATMs and CDMs across the country.

Amor Said al Amri, Senior Regional Manager, Meethaq, said that the new branch is designed to create a unique ambience and banking environment in line with the Meethaq brand values of partnership, transparency and trust.

Toyota's 2021 Land Cruiser with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The legendary Land Cruiser has been the choice of pure 4WD SUV enthusiasts for many years. Its tough build, exceptional capability and engineering prowess to conquer any terrain, has earned the Land Cruiser the status of the 'Pride of the Land'.

Customers looking forward to owning the Toyota Land Cruiser can benefit with Cash Gift from RO 2,000 up to RO 2,600 and 5 Years/50,000 kms service (whichever is earlier). (Prospective buyers are advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and conditions apply.)

A global favourite that is integral to people's lives on virtually every continent, Toyota Land Cruisers can be spotted in every corner of the globe. With legendary ruggedness and power, the Land Cruiser features a host of innovations that extend its mastery over the toughest terrain.



Hailed as a timeless icon, the Toyota Land Cruiser has a loyalty unmatched by any other SUV. The product of over 60 years of global adventure, it is a sophisticated blend of off-road prowess, on-road comfort and unparalleled refinement. And it remains Totally Unchallenged.

Proudly carrying forward its undisputed legacy of phenomenal all-terrain performance and reliability, the Land Cruiser indeed, is one of the most technically advanced four-wheel drive vehicles ever produced and is equipped with a series of advanced dynamic and handling features.

TikTok keeps ticking in US as deadline for asset sale passes

SAN FRANCISCO: TikTok continued serving up short videos in the US despite missing a Trump administration deadline to come up with an acceptable deal to put its American assets into US hands.

Talks between TikTok parent ByteDance and government negotiators were continuing despite the missed deadline set by the Committee on Foreign Investment to carry out an executive order by President Donald Trump, according to a source familiar with the matter.

“The committee is engaging with ByteDance to complete the divestment and other steps necessary to resolve the national security risks arising from the transaction, consistent with the president’s August 14 order”, said a spokesperson for the Treasury, which oversees the committee.

TikTok declined to comment. ByteDance, based in China, had been given until midnight Eastern time on Friday to come up with a plan to sell its US operations to American buyers.

But after the deadline passed, users could still tap into the smartphone app for a seemingly endless stream of video snippets, a visit to the platform showed.

The White House claims TikTok is a national security risk



The TikTok building in Culver City, California. — AFP

The US had already backed off enforcing a ban on TikTok, in compliance with a court order in favour of the social media sensation

because of potential links to the Chinese government through ByteDance.

TikTok has repeatedly defended itself against allegations of data transfers to the Chinese government, saying it stores user information on servers in the United States and Singapore.

The US had already backed

off enforcing a ban on TikTok, in compliance with a court order in favour of the social media sensation.

A US federal judge in late October issued an injunction temporarily blocking an executive order by Trump aimed at banning TikTok.

The judge’s ruling put the brakes on a Trump threat to knock TikTok offline by cutting it off from US businesses providing website hosting, data storage and other fundamentals needed to operate.

But TikTok influencers suing the president over the ban convinced US District Judge Wendy Beetlestone to issue the injunction against it.

It was the second restraint issued in favour of TikTok by US judges against a set of executive orders issued by Trump which sought to ban new downloads of the app beginning in September, and ban it outright by mid-November.

A temporary injunction issued in September in a separate suit filed by TikTok itself prevented the government from removing it from mobile application download platforms.

Judges in both cases said in rulings that the chances of proving in court that Trump overstepped his authority were good.

They also equated TikTok to films, photographs, and news wires with legal protections.

The Friday deadline was for ByteDance to come up with a deal to sell TikTok operations in the US. A tentative deal has been unveiled that would make Silicon Valley giant Oracle the technology partner for TikTok and a stakeholder in a new entity to be known as TikTok Global.

Oracle would manage data security through its cloud servers, while TikTok would retain control of its algorithms and technology, according to details of the proposed deal shared earlier this year. — AFP



A jewellery craftsman heating a decoration with a torch at the Makmur Gold workshop in Kota Bharu in Malaysia’s Kelantan state. — AFP

Malaysian goldsmiths mould a profit out of pandemic

KOTA BHARU: In a backroom workshop in Malaysia, goldsmiths with blowtorches and chisels sit at wooden desks as they melt and mould the precious metal into glittery jewellery.

Demand for the safe-haven commodity has soared during the coronavirus pandemic and it is not only professional investors who are cashing in, but small businesses too.

The Makmur Gold company, which is based in northern Kelantan state and mainly makes jewellery, has enjoyed brisk business this year even as the Southeast Asian nation’s economy fell into recession.

“We’ve seen good developments — during COVID, our sales were much better”, company Director Muhammad Nur Hisyam Che Mahmood said.

Gold surged this year as the pandemic accelerated and stock markets tumbled, hitting a record above \$2,000 an ounce in August, although it has since slipped back to about \$1,800.

Makmur Gold recorded strong sales of about 80 million ringgit (\$19.5 million) over the past eight months as buyers sought to park their cash somewhere safe.

The business sells goods directly to customers from its four outlets as well as online, offering items ranging from bracelets and rings to small gold bars.

Most of its gold is sourced in the form of jewellery from a small number of suppliers in the country or



Masri Hassan displaying gold bracelets for sale at the Maysarah Gold shop in Bentong in Malaysia’s Pahang state. — AFP

bought second-hand from customers, before being melted down and fashioned into new products.

In addition to regular customers, the business has agents who sell on its behalf and then keep a share of the profits.

One such agent is Tuan Zubaidah Tuan Abdul Rahman, who made half a million ringgit (\$120,000) in sales during three months of buying and reselling gold jewellery part-time.

“People are seeing that rather than hold on to their money in the bank, it is better for them to buy gold”, said the woman, who is also a teacher.

“People can wear it, and it can be a valuable asset.”

Nurse Nor Fazilah Jamaludin said she sold gold jewellery during the pandemic to increase her income.

Malaysians began rushing to buy gold in May as authorities allowed businesses to reopen after a six-week virus lockdown, said Steven Siow, president of the Federation of Goldsmiths and Jewellers Associations of Malaysia. — AFP

‘Millionaire’s tax’ for virus relief passes Argentina Senate

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina’s Senate passed a tax on about 12,000 of the country’s richest people on Friday, to pay for coronavirus measures including medical supplies and relief for the poor and small businesses.

In a session streamed live on YouTube, and after a long and polarizing debate, the so-called solidarity contribution was signed into law with 42 votes in favour and 26 against, as the pro-government alliance flexed its majority.

The government of President Alberto Fernandez hopes to raise P300 billion (\$3.75 billion) with the one-off levy, which earlier passed the Chamber of Deputies with 133 for votes to 115 against.

Argentina’s 44 million population has been badly hit by the



Argentina’s Vice-President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner during a virtual session of the senate at the Congress in Buenos Aires. — AFP

coronavirus, with more than 1.4 million cases and over 39,500 deaths, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University.

The pandemic has exacerbated already high unemployment and

poverty rates in a country which has been in recession since 2018.

Under the scheme — also dubbed the “millionaire’s tax” — people with declared assets greater than 200 million pesos will pay a progressive rate of up to 3.5 per cent on wealth in Argentina and up to 5.25 per cent on wealth outside the country.

Of the proceeds, 20 per cent will go to medical supplies for the pandemic, another 20 percent to small and medium-sized businesses, 15 per cent to social developments, 20 per cent to student scholarships and 25 per cent to natural gas ventures.

Director of the tax agency Mercedes Marcó del Pont said it will affect almost 12,000 taxpayers.

“The tax reaches 0.8 per cent of total taxpayers”, said one of the authors of the project, legislator Carlos Heller.

“Forty-two per cent have dollarised assets, of which 92 per cent is located abroad.”

He said the plan was “far from taxing productive activity.”

On the opposite side, Daniel Pelegrina, President of the powerful Argentine Rural Society (SRA), warned that Heller “wants to present it as a contribution of the richest, but we know what happens with all those unique taxes, they stay forever.”

The neoliberal Juntos por el Cambio coalition, of former president Mauricio Macri, said it was a “confiscatory” measure.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Federal student loan payments suspended

US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos on Friday said the suspension of federal student loans payments and accruing interest set to end on December 31 will be extended another month as the pandemic presents financial challenges to borrowers. “This temporary pause in payments will help those who have been impacted”, DeVos said in a statement.

“The added time also allows Congress to do its job and determine what measures it



believes are necessary and appropriate.” In March, the Trump administration suspended interest and payments on federal student loans for 60 days. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

US weapons exports rise 2.8pc to \$175 bn

Sales of US military equipment to foreign governments rose 2.8 per cent to \$175 billion in the latest fiscal year, officials said on Friday, with looser restrictions under President Donald Trump boosting purchases during his time in office.

The US State Department disclosed military sales figures for the 2020 fiscal year, which ended on September 30. Sales of US military equipment in the prior fiscal year had totalled \$170 billion. Sales of fighter

jets and guided missiles have risen in the past year as US allies sought to gain access to the latest technology from companies including Lockheed Martin Co and Raytheon Technologies. Major deals in fiscal 2020 included Japan’s purchase of 63 F-35 fighter jets from Lockheed Martin for as much as \$23 billion.

Both require US govt approval. The direct military sales by US companies jumped 8.4 per cent to \$124.3 billion in fiscal 2020 from \$114.7 billion. — AFP

SAN JOSE

Costa Rica aims for IMF talks over loan

Costa Rica aims to begin talks with the International Monetary Fund in the first few weeks of 2021 in search of a loan to help weather a funding crisis which the coronavirus pandemic has aggravated, a top official said on Friday.

The Central American country is seeking some \$1.75 billion from the IMF to bolster its finances as it faces the prospect of running up a budget deficit of more than 9 per cent this year, with public debt rising to 70 per



cent of GDP.

Austerity measures the government had proposed to win over the IMF caused major protests earlier this year and the government backed down from that plan in October. — Reuters

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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

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Top Story

BREAKING NEWS

86 new Covid-19 cases in Oman, Muscat crosses 1,000-mark

Oman Observer 19/04/2020
Muscat: The Ministry of Health (MOH) in Oman announced 86 new cases of Covid 19 on Saturday, bringing the total ...

Main Stories

Fishermen village in Ras Madrasah closed
19/04/2020

Turkey's coronavirus cases overtake Iran, highest in Middle East
19/04/2020

Oman launches project to cover internet in rural areas
19/04/2020

Huge government efforts to fight Covid-19
19/04/2020

Dubai extends 24-hour coronavirus curfew, Gulf countries implement more drastic measures
19/04/2020

WE ARE MAKING A SWITCH.

features

OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | editor@omanobserver.om



Coming from a family who loves the marine environment and exploring the ocean, Omar al Ghailani has set his eyes in setting a world record in freediving and he is on his way there as he recently won the CWT Bi-fins 85m category and bronze for overall performance at the AIDA Freediving World Competition 2020 held in Egypt... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SITES



THE WATERSCAPES OF MUSCAT

Oman is one of the most picturesque places on earth. The diverse geography of this place offers a variety of options for landscape photographers like me... **Story on Page P20**

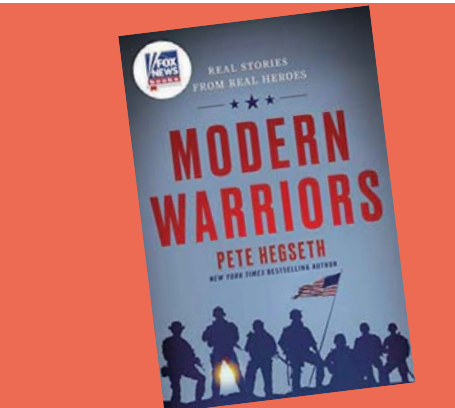
COOK LIKE A CHEF



SALMON TIRADITO

In today's recipe, Chef Rajesh is sharing one of the best way to prepare your salmon. This meal is very suitable for the people who are beginner to try sashimi... **Story on Page 19**

READ



MODERN WARRIORS

BY PETE HEGSETH

The Fox News host and former combat veteran interviews soldiers about the different kinds of battles they encountered.

FASHION



COVID-CONSCIOUS CHANEL STREAMS FASHION SHOW FROM LOIRE CHATEAU

Decked out in looks fit for a pre-revolutionary banquet, dozens of models paraded elaborate Chanel styles for the fashion house's latest show, beamed out to audiences... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRATE



MINERS' DAY

Miners' Day was established to celebrate and recognise those who take part in this dangerous profession, to help our lives be comfortable and full of conveniences. The simplest way to celebrate Miners' Day is just to take a look around you and realise how many of your life's comforts are dependent on the minerals pulled out of the earth.



His dream record is ocean's deep

BY AMER AL MASHANI

Omar al Ghailani came from a family of sea lovers with several of the men in his family getting a career in the naval industry. While they all share the same love and adoration for the ocean, his dream perhaps is the hardest to achieve.

He spends most of his days filling his lungs with oxygen, holding to that air as he dives deep into the water. Anything less than 100 metres for him has been doable. Beneath the ocean, he loves seeing not only fishes and the corals. It is his passion to discover the secrets of the deep but he also sets his eyes into setting a record in freediving.

"Personally, the love of discovering the secrets of the sea is equal to discovering the secrets of myself", Omar said.

He added that he was always captivated by the language and creatures of the sea.

As a freediver, he has seen countless marine creatures that non-swimmers haven't seen in person. To be a lover of the ocean means learning how to co-exist not only with the friendly ones but the challenging kind.

One of the most beautiful creatures he has seen, as he explained, is the sea-horse. While sharks also had sown fear into the hearts of many, he weirdly refers to them as his friends.

He said, "People have spread a lot of wrong information about some sea creatures. Sharks, for example, do not always attack people. They are not without reason ferocious. They can also sense danger as we do", he said.

BACKGROUND

With several of his family members having a naval background, his love for the sea blossomed because he kept hearing their discussions at home. His young mind was fascinated by the talks about the ocean that when he finally was old enough to explore the waters on his own, he felt at home deep beneath the water.

Omar eventually became the first diving coach in freediving in the Sultanate of Oman. His first freediving experience happened in Kuwait in 2008 when he registered for a diving course there.

"This course made a huge difference in my life. It taught me how to evolve myself in freediving correctly and how to apply all the safety disciplines", Omar said.

As a professional freediver, he has established himself as one of the best in the freediving world when he set and broke several records in different diving categories not only in the Gulf or Arab countries but including Asian championships. The last championship he participated in was the AIDA Freediving World Competition 2020 (COVID-19 Special Edition) held in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. He won gold in the CWT Bi-fins 85m category and bronze for overall performance.

THE TRAINING CONTINUES

"Months before the competition, I was committed to daily training, and I don't

waste a day without training. All this effort wasn't in vain. This record meant a lot to me because it was achieved during exceptional difficult circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but I always say that difficult environment creates champions," he said.

"I had lung injury two days before the competition. Thanks to Allah, the recovery was very fast and I was able to return to the competition", he added.

The main equipment that diver wears is the diving suit, fins, glasses and some of the divers use weights. The best fins are the carbon fins

The last championship he participated in was the AIDA Freediving World Competition 2020 (COVID-19 Special Edition) held in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. He won gold in the CWT Bi-fins 85m category and bronze for overall performance

because they are light and highly flexible and give very excellent performance as it reduces the physical effort. Whenever the fins are of good quality, the better the diving performance.

Diving contributed to developing Omar's personality in several aspects, the most important is respecting every environment. To be in the depth of another environment gave Omar the chance to meditate on Allah's creatures. It taught him patience and raised his awareness of safety.

"My level of mental strength increased as well as physical strength. Diving taught me that I have a high ability to reach the goal, no matter how difficult it is", he said.

He added, "Technology helped me to improve my diving skills through the diving watch that become one of the essential tools that divers should possess. The diving watch helps me to know the duration of the dive, the depth that I have reached and the speed of the dive. These are important details to improve my diving performance", Omar said.

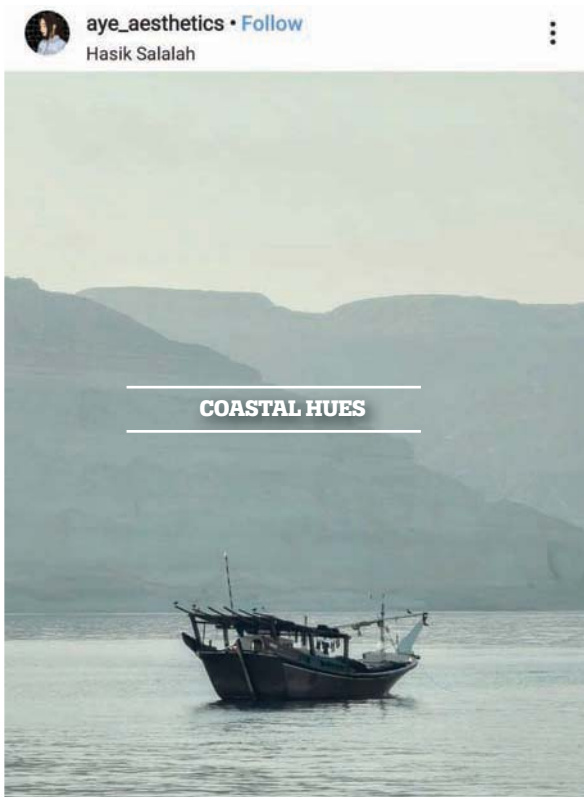
While he has done several diving expeditions in many countries and different seas inside and outside Oman, Omar looks forward to diving in the Bahamas where the strongest diving championships in the world are held. He also looks forward to setting and breaking more records and ultimately putting the Omanis among the ranks of the best freedivers in the world.





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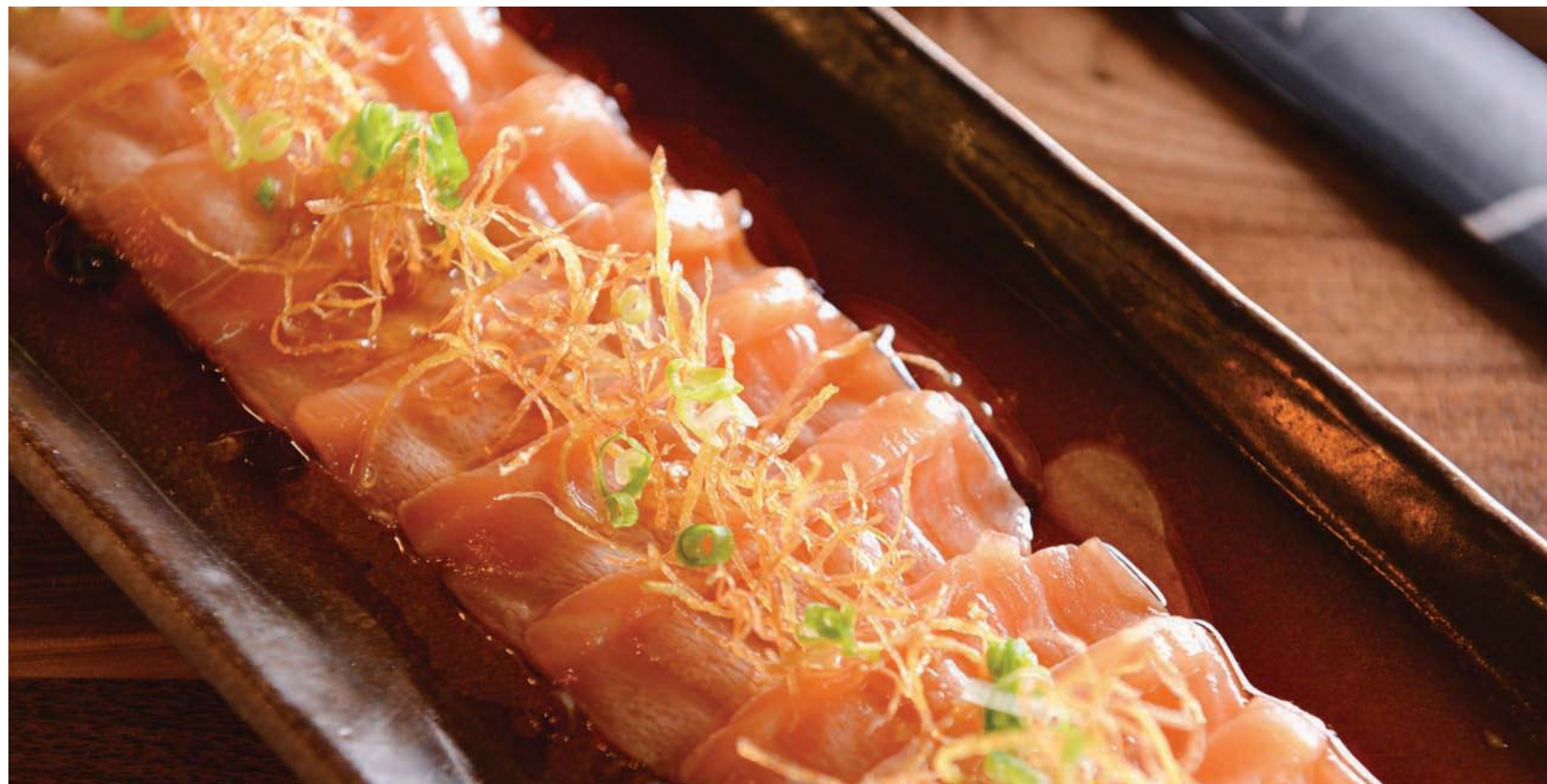
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SALMON TIRADITO



THE BEST OF JAPANESE KITCHEN

Takara is located inside the Intercontinental Hotel Muscat and is one of the country's best Japanese restaurants offering some of the most delicious and authentic Japanese flavours to the Sultanate. The restaurant currently has different promotions from Hana Nights that allows ladies to spoil their appetite every Tuesdays to Unlimited Ala Carte Weekend Lunch.

Omega-3 fatty acids in salmon increase cell membrane fluidity, helping inhibit inflammation. Omega-3 can also improve fat metabolism and reduce your body's production of triglycerides (a type of fat). This meal is very suitable for the people who are beginner to try sashimi. In today's recipe, Chef Rajesh is sharing one of the best way to prepare your salmon.

PREPARATION METHOD

PONZU SAUCE PREPARATION

Mix kikkoman soy sauce, rice vinegar and lemon juice in a bowl and keep in refrigerator. Ponzu sauce is ready.



PROCESS OF SALMON TIRADITO

Slice salmon thinly. (2-3mm thick, 3cm width, 5cm long in size)
Arrange the sliced salmon in a plate.
Gently apply/rub chopped garlic on sliced salmon and pour 20ml of Ponzu sauce on salmon to well marinate. Keep the plate in the refrigerator until other things to get prepared.
Cut ginger in fine julienne.
In a pan add oil in medium heat and put ginger and fry until golden brown. Remove from the oil immediately once you see the ginger golden brown.
Take out the salmon plate from the freezer, keep aside.
Heat the pan in high flame and add sesame oil and olive oil until you see the smoke comes from the oil. Then pour the hot oil on top of the salmon.
Garnish with fried ginger, spring onion and sesame seed.

ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF RAJESH THAPA

Executive Chef

Head Chef

TAKARA Japanese Restaurant

Born in Nepal, Chef Rajesh Thapa, at a very young age has been inspired by the local chefs of Kathmandu. It is from these chefs that he first learned his culinary experience.

After years of mastering many of the Nepalese styles of cooking, he moved to Dubai in 2008 and began venturing into multi-cuisine speciality and working with some of the best 5-star hotels in the country. Working in different restaurants, he eventually gravitated towards Japanese culinary. He would spend the next 10 years working with Jumeirah Group where he pre-opened several of their world-renowned restaurants. As the head chef of Takara, he has dedicated his time into making sure that he prepares not only the freshest ingredients but the best that Japanese dishes have to offer. One of his missions is to train other chefs to become better especially at the Japanese style and art of cooking and inspiring the next generations of Head Chefs.



INGREDIENTS:

PONZU SAUCE

60ml Kikkoman soy sauce
30ml Rice vinegar
20ml Lemon juice

100gm Salmon thin slice (10-12 slice)
1 Clove garlic (Fine chopped)
20ml Ponzu sauce (prepared)
20ml Sesame oil
20ml Olive oil

GARNISH

5gm Spring onion or chives (finely chopped or julienne)
5gm Sesame seed
80gm Ginger (Fine julienne cut)

FASHION

COVID-conscious Chanel streams fashion show from Loire chateau



Decked out in looks fit for a pre-revolutionary banquet, dozens of models paraded elaborate Chanel styles for the fashion house's latest show, beamed out to audiences on Thursday evening from the hall of a 16th century Loire Valley chateau.

Some luxury brands, including Chanel, had tentatively returned to the

the court jester.

With hulking fireplace behind them and beneath heavy-set chandeliers, models walked through a black and white stone hallway. The lozenge motif was echoed on gowns, including a mesh dress and a chequered black-and-white full tweed skirt.

Some styles were enhanced with fur-style trimmings on cuffs and



catwalk with live audiences, but governments have since brought in fresh restrictions on movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic in France and elsewhere.

So the French label turned the Chateau de Chenonceau into a glamorous online showcase for its Metiers D'art collection — a display of its finest craftsmanship under designer Virginie Viard, who succeeded the late Karl Lagerfeld.

Medieval-style tunics in tweed or rich velvet populated the runway, followed by bejewelled dresses fit for Renaissance princesses. Some dresses and skirts were worn over leggings, giving styles a modern twist — with a hint of

lapels while models more elaborate pearl necklaces, and some sported heraldic symbols recalling the fleur-de-lis on knitted tops.

American actress Kristin Stewart, one of the faces of Chanel in its advertising campaigns, looked on from inside the hall, as a lone front row spectator.

Known for its arched bridge over the River Cher, the Chateau de Chenonceau was shaped by the women who first lived there, including noblewoman Diane de Poitiers, royal mistress to King Henry II, and Catherine de Medici, the king's widow.

It is also known as the Chateau des Dames.

— Reuters

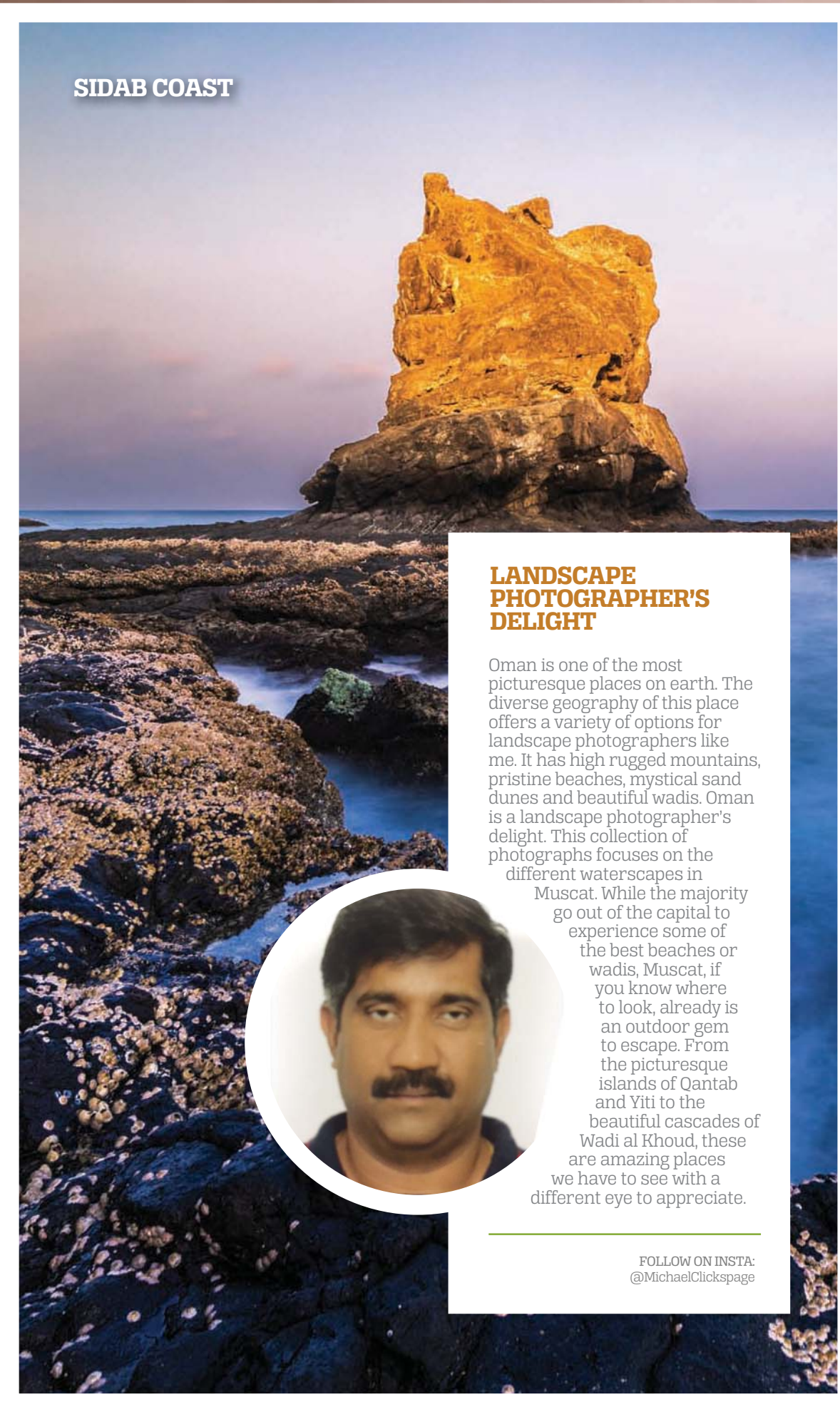


THE WATERSCAPES OF MUSCAT

Photos by Michael D'Souza



YITI



SIDAB COAST

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER'S DELIGHT

Oman is one of the most picturesque places on earth. The diverse geography of this place offers a variety of options for landscape photographers like me. It has high rugged mountains, pristine beaches, mystical sand dunes and beautiful wadis. Oman is a landscape photographer's delight. This collection of photographs focuses on the different waterscapes in

Muscat. While the majority go out of the capital to experience some of the best beaches or wadis, Muscat, if you know where to look, already is an outdoor gem to escape. From the picturesque islands of Qantab and Yiti to the beautiful cascades of Wadi al Khoud, these are amazing places we have to see with a different eye to appreciate.



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QANTAB



SIFAH



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