

Shura participates in GCC meet

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura on Monday participated in the 14th meeting of GCC Shura, National and Umma councils organised via videoconferencing by Bahrain Kingdom's Deputies Council.

The Sultanate was represented at the meeting by Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

The meeting discussed a number of topics related to the GCC-Europe Committee,



The meeting also reviewed an annual report filed by the chairman of the 13th regular meeting on updates from heads of legislative councils and affiliated committees through 2020.

The meeting endorsed the proposal to form a cooperation committee with parliaments of Latin America states, as well as continuous convening of meetings among GCC, Latin America and Caribbean councils on the sidelines of the International Parliamentary Union's conference.

At the end of the meeting, the participants sent greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of the 50th National Day. They wished His Majesty the Sultan well-being and the Sultanate further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Omani-Chinese Investment Forum attracts 85 firms

35 projects are scheduled for the Sino-Oman Industrial City, including 12 heavy industrial projects, as well as 12 additional light industrial projects



enhancing trade relations and exchange between the Sultanate and China and highlighting investment opportunities in the Sultanate.

Al Balushi, said, "The Sultanate and China have strong civilisational relations that extend throughout history. Today, Chinese investments represent an important portion in the economic relations between the

two countries, as Oman Wanfang invested in 2018 — a consortium of six Chinese private companies — an amount of \$10.7 billion in building an industrial city with an area of 12 square kilometres in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD). Ten Chinese companies have signed land lease agreements to set up various projects with a total investment of more than \$3 billion".

He added that 35 projects are scheduled for the Sino-Oman Industrial City, including 12 heavy industrial projects, as well as 12 additional light industrial projects that include the production of solar energy units with a capacity of 1 gigawatt, in addition to manufacturing oil and gas equipment and pipelines and drilling products.

HepointedoutthattheSultanate today enjoys the potentials that make it an attractive investment environment, including new investment legislations and laws, the incentives offered by industrial, economic and free zones, and the natural potentials that make the Sultanate's location a link between the Asian and African markets. — ONA

275 new COVID-19 cases, six deaths reported

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday reported 275 new confirmed cases of COVID-19, bringing the total number of COVID-19

cases in the Sultanate to 122,356.

MoH also reported six new COVID-19-related deaths, bringing the total death toll to 1,386.

The total recovery cases reached 113,577, which is 92.8 per cent of the total cases reported so far.

Thirty-three people were

hospitalised over the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 256, including 122 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). — ONA

Refund of Internet Café Authorization Financial Guarantee

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) invites the entities applied for authorization for Provision of World Wide Web (Internet) Access Service Provision in Public Places (internet café) before 13th June 2016 and deposit a financial guarantee of R.O 100/- is requested to approach TRA at the emails below and provide the following:

- 1- Official letter to request refunding the guarantee.
- 2- Copy of Bank Receipt.
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telecomlicense@tra.gov.om

maher.alaamri@tra.gov.om

TRA will not accept a refund request after 26th June 2021.

Should you require further clarification, you can contact TRA at the emails shown above or call 24222188 or 24222097.

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Sultanate, Pakistan hold consultation session



MUSCAT: A session of consultation was held between the Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan via video conferencing on Monday.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs chaired the Omani side, while the Pakistani side was chaired by Sohail Mahmood, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

The session discussed the bilateral relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them in various fields to serve joint interests of both countries. The session also exchanged viewpoints on various regional and international issues and the efforts exerted to solve issues through peaceful means. — ONA

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Average monthly expenditure of Omani family on medical care reaches RO 9

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has issued the Health Statistics Bulletin under the title “A Pioneering Health System with International Standards”.

According to the health bulletin, the percentage of government spending on the health sector in the Sultanate by the end of 2019 reached 5.7 per cent out of the total government spending while the contribution of the health sector to the GDP at the current prices stood at 2.9 per cent, reaching RO 843.5 million.

The bulletin shows that the average monthly expenditure of the Omani family on medical care reached RO 9, with the Governorate of Muscat ranking first in terms of expenditure on medical care, recording 1.5 per cent of the total monthly expenditure in 2018-2019.

It also points out that the number of healthcare institutions in the Sultanate has reached 1,610 of which 58 per cent are private clinics, reaching 937 clinics, compared to 83 public hospitals and 590 health complexes and centres.

The data also show that the percentage of hospital beds against the country's population decreased at the end of 2019, recording 15 beds per 10,000 inhabitants in the same year,

compared to 15.6 beds per 10,000 inhabitants in 2015.

The Health Statistics Bulletin shows that the total number of medical cadres in the public and private sectors in the Sultanate, including doctors, dentists, nurses and pharmacists by the end of 2019 reached 34,062 with about 9,602 out of the them being doctors. There were 7,045 doctors in the government sector, with 2,557 doctors in the private sector. The number of dentists reached 1,494, including 371 dentists in the government sector and 1,123 dentists in the private sector. There were 20,323 nurses, with 16,245 in the government sector, and 4,078 nurses in the private sector. The number of pharmacists in the Sultanate until the end of 2019 reached 2,643 pharmacists, with about 848 in the government sector and 1,795 in the private sector.

As for Omanisation in the health sector, the data point out that the percentage of national workforce in the Sultanate's health sector increased by 7 per cent in 2019, compared to 2015. The Omanisation percentage among doctors reached 31 per cent until the end of 2019.

The percentage of national workforce in nursing was up by 11 per cent, compared to 2015 while the percentage of Omanisation



among nursing staff in the private sector remains 3 per cent in 2019, with about 60 per cent of doctors in the Ministry of Health being non-Omanis. The percentage of Omani doctors in the private sector is only 5 per cent.

In terms of the population, the number of doctors in the Sultanate decreased from 21.4 doctors per 10,000 people in 2015 compared to 20.8 doctors per every 10,000 people in 2019. The number of nurses decreased from 46.3 nurses per every 10,000 people in 2015 to 44 per every 10,000 people in 2019.

As for the indicators of health in the Sultanate, the bulletin shows that the percentage of

immunisation coverage for children in 2019 reached 100 per cent while the doses of tetanus immunisation provided to pregnant women reached 17,033 first doses and 38,878 second doses or more.

The new cases of malnutrition related to protein deficiency decreased from 854 cases in 2015 to 491 new cases in 2019 while the rate of malnutrition cases for children under the age of five decreased from 2.2 cases per every 1,000 children in 2015 to 1.2 cases per every 1,000 children in 2019.

The bulletin also points out that the percentage of new births attended by skilled health professionals reached 98.6 per

cent while the maternal mortality rate decreased from 17.5 cases of death per every 100,000 live births in 2015 to 10.3 cases of death per every 100,000 live births in 2019.

However, the deaths due to complications of pregnancy, child birthing and postpartum increased in the public hospitals from 5 cases in 2015 to 6 cases in 2019.

As for the non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the Sultanate, the bulletin shows that the year 2019 witnessed the registration of 6,430 new cases of diabetes, with about 54 per cent of them being females. The number of inpatients with tumors in the Sultanate reached 5,386 with about 63 per

cent of them being malignant tumors.

In terms of infectious diseases, the bulletin shows that varicella (German smallpox) was at the forefront of diseases reported in 2019 with 10,139 patients; followed by 1,338 patients with malaria. Other infectious diseases, such as the food poisoning, binary infectious source, affected 606 patients. There were 368 patients with pulmonary tuberculosis, 260 patients with hepatitis, 134 cases with viral hemorrhagic fever (VVHF) and 109 cases with dengue fever.

As for deaths, the NCSI bulletin shows that the diseases of the circulatory system topped the causes of death in the Sultanate, with 955 cases of deaths in 2019, followed by respiratory diseases with 630 cases of deaths. Tumors caused 504 cases of deaths and infectious and parasitic diseases caused 341 cases of deaths. About 287 cases of death were caused by the side effects of postpartum period.

The data also point out that infant mortality rate decreased from 9.5 cases per every 1,000 live births in 2015 to 7.9 cases in 2019 while the mortality rate for children under the age of five years decreased to 10.1 cases in 2019, compared to 11.5 cases in 2015. — ONA

New educational channel launched

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education launched a new educational channel 'Mawred' on YouTube on Monday.

The channel is aimed at supporting the Ministry's new 'blended education' policy for the academic year 2020/2021, and in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The channel will publish a wide range of educational classes that were conducted by expert teachers from across various governorates of the Sultanate.

“Access to the channel is



limited to teachers and students only, and it is necessary to use the e-mail granted to them from

the ministry to access the channel and take advantage of it,” the ministry's statement added.

Specially-abled children make most of online classes

KABEER YOUSUF

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One of the concerns while initiating online classes for the regular students as well as specially-abled children was that how the latter would cope with the remote education programme.

But leaving aside the apprehensions, these children are making tremendous progress thanks to the inclusive education programme, presence of their family members and the comfort of their homes.

“Specially-abled children are showcasing amazing response to online sessions as we witnessed in the past few months,” says Head of a Centre for Special School.

She feels that the main advantage of online classes for specially-abled is the comfort of their very familiar environment, that is their homes, the presence of their parents, shadow, siblings and others who encourage them learn.

“Since the training is being given to parents along with kids and as they are closely comprehending and continuing the training at home, the online system is producing immense results and they are more exited to attend classes on their own.”

“With the hybrid system in schools and online classes for specially-abled children, we are able to monitor our children and have a closer interaction with the parents of the children and pay

more attention in their day to day affairs,” said Fauziya al Shibli, teacher at a public school.

Online education has proven to be rather a boon to the children for now, they are more versed with the laptop/tab, meeting apps, controlling the gadgets in terms of muting or unmuting and clarifying doubts on their own.

“Earlier, a special child who was unaware of how to operate computers nowadays started responding to teachers' instructions like unmuting their mic and speak openly to the teacher and follow other guidelines given by the teachers,” says a child psychiatrist.

“We have a trained team of professional special educators, speech therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and behavioural therapist with a suitable environment for learning and during these pandemic times, this section has been functioning in a blended mode of learning and the parents are extremely satisfied with the progress of their child,” says Amita Sharma, Director at Al Injaz, Section for Special Needs.

The teaching methods for the differently-abled children are diverse. They are taken on a virtual tour to the supermarkets and make them buy things, calculate the total sum and pay money, they are also taken to see dolphins, they are made to coordinate with people in India and show them rivers, dams and the like.

While the little ones are given these experiences, the older and better skilled children are taken to different lessons on zoom platform

For smaller kids who have difficulty sitting and focusing in front of computers, the teachers give instructions to mothers in varied areas such as how to seat them, enlighten on various activities that keep them focused, and the like which is, according to the teachers, ‘challenging but happening’

“The success of the online classes can be attributed majorly to the mothers who are tirelessly working with us. It wouldn't have happened without them. And in many cases, siblings are also contributing a lot especially when both parents are working,” adds Shibli, a child psychiatrist from a known private school.

“There is a good improvement in specially-abled children whose siblings are motivating and participating in giving physical training. This is contributing in their overall development,” adds a physiotherapist.

Socio-emotional skills are the areas which can be immensely affected for a special child who is deprived of going to school and meeting friends and teachers. The platform called ‘Fun with friends’ is an online platform where kids are brought together and they have friendly chats and have free time of interactions with their classmates whom they have been missing seeing in the school.

Total deposits in banking sector grow 5 per cent to RO 24.3 billion

MUSCAT: The total deposits held with other depository corporations (ODCs) reached RO 24.3 billion at the end of September 2020, increasing by 5 per cent from September 2019, according to the data released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The total private sector deposits increased by 9.5 per cent to RO 16.4 billion by the end of September 2020.

The monthly statistical bulletin issued by CBO indicated that Oman's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 13.4 per cent during the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period of last year, according to preliminary data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The nominal contraction in the economy was driven by a 20-per cent decline in the hydrocarbon



sector, as well as the decline on non-hydrocarbon sector by 9.9 per cent during the second quarter of 2020.

The Omani oil price averaged \$47.2 per barrel during the first nine months of 2020 which is lower by 26.8 per cent over the corresponding period of last year. Moreover, the average daily oil production decreased by 1.8 per cent to 952,900 barrels during this period. According to the latest data released by the NCSI, the Sultanate's Consumer Price

Index (CPI) witnessed a year-on-year (Y-o-Y) negative growth of -0.7 per cent during January-September 2020.

The combined activities of conventional and Islamic banks provide a comprehensive picture of financial intermediation through the banking sector in Oman. The total outstanding credit extended by other depository corporations (ODCs) grew by 2.1 per cent to RO 26.4 billion at the end of September 2020. Credit to the private sector rose by 0.3 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 22.8 billion. Of the total credit to the private sector, the non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) received a share of 46.3 per cent and 45.1 per cent respectively while financial corporations received 5.1 per cent and other sectors the remaining 3.5 per cent. — ONA



Al Mazyouna



ON PATH OF PROGRESS



The Wilayat of Al Mazyouna is located on the northwestern part of Dhofar Governorate, bordering Yemen, 280 km away from Salalah. The wilayat is considered as the largest wilayat in terms of population density in the governorate. The wilayat has features of a modern city formed with integrated government services, including the governor's office, municipality, social affairs office, notary, public prosecution, consumer protection, manpower, trade and industry, water directorate and offices of PACI

and information. Last year Al Mazyouna Public Park, one of the parks constructed by Dhofar Municipality represented by the Department of Parks and Afforestation, was opened to the public. At the beginning of this year, the Tender Board approved a tender for the Ministry of Health to establish a new hospital in the wilayat to the tune of RO 15.4 million. There are also several niyabats not connected geographically with the Wilayat of Salalah but come under its administration,

including Harweeb, about 184 kilometres from Salalah. The administrative centre of the niyabat was built on April 21, 1990 on an area of 33,250 square metres in Al Najd area. It is located in the northwestern part of the Wilayat of Rakhyout, about 184 km away from Salalah. Tusnat administrative office was established on April 21, 1990 on an area of 33,250 square metres. Tusnat is located on the border with Yemen to the south of the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna. It is located about 290 kilometres from the city of Salalah and

represents a modern community gathering point that expands each year. The administrative centre of Metan was established on an area of 33,250 square metres. It is located in the north-west of Dhofar Governorate on the outskirts of the desert of Empty Quarter and north of Al Mazyouna. It is situated 360 km away from Salalah. The Metan office borders the Republic of Yemen and is an important geographical location with beautiful sandy beaches which gives it a special importance. The wilayat embraces historic

inheritance which includes folk arts and traditional food. The people of the wilayat practise several conventional crafts including livestock breeding, frankincense extraction, land caravan trading, weaving and leather industries. The wilayat offers commercial facilities, including banking services that play a significant role in flourishing the trade movement. The government has provided incentives for all investors including income tax exemption, exporting commodities without licence.



GCC countries surpass 1 million COVID-19 cases

DUBAI: The six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have recorded more than 1 million cases of infection with COVID-19, according to a Reuters tally of data published by each government. The tally in the energy producing region of more than 50 million people stood on Monday at 1,001,182 infections, with 9,162 deaths.

Saudi Arabia, which has the highest regional count at more than 355,000 infections and 5,780 deaths, has seen a downward trend in daily case numbers since early July when it was registering around 4,000 cases a day for a few weeks. Saudi partially lifted its suspension of international flights mid-September and has said it will lift all restrictions on citizens' foreign travel on January 1.

The country of around 34 million people recorded 224 new cases on Sunday. Cases in the United Arab Emirates, with the second highest infection count, rose steadily since early August to a high of 1,578 new daily cases in late October. New daily cases in the country of 9.8 million have since dropped back to around 1,200.

Kuwait's daily case numbers have fluctuated between 900 and 400 a day since early May, and cases in Qatar have seen a steady fluctuation between 200 and 300 new cases a day since early August. Oman saw a surge in new cases around early October, but daily reported numbers have fallen since. Cases in Bahrain, which has the GCC's smallest population of around 1.5 million, have been falling since mid-September.



Palestinian children have their temperature checked as they arrive at a kindergarten in Gaza city while wearing face shields due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

GAZA CASES SOAR

A sharp rise in coronavirus infections in the Gaza Strip could overwhelm the Palestinian enclave's meagre medical system by next week, public health advisers said on Sunday.

Gaza, where the dense and poor population of 2 million is vulnerable to contagions, has logged 14,000 coronavirus cases and 65

A sharp rise in coronavirus infections in the Gaza Strip could overwhelm the Palestinian enclave's meagre medical system by next week, public health advisers said

deaths, mostly since August. Seventy-nine of Gaza's 100 ventilators have been taken up by COVID-19 patients, said Abdelraouf Elmanama, a microbiologist who is part of the enclave's pandemic task force.

"In 10 days the health system will become unable to absorb such a hike in cases and there might be cases that will not find a place at intensive care units," he said, add-

ing that the current 0.05 per cent mortality rate among COVID-19 patients could rise.

Gaza's Hamas rulers have so far imposed one lockdown. A long-standing Israeli blockade, which is supported by neighbouring Egypt, has crippled the Gazan economy and undermined its public health apparatus. Israel says it is trying to keep weapons from reach-

ing Hamas, against which it has fought three wars and whose facilities it struck earlier on Sunday in retaliation for a Palestinian rocket launch against one of its southern cities.

"We are not giving Hamas any 'coronavirus discounts,'" Israeli cabinet minister Izhhar Shay told Army Radio. "We will continue responding as appropriate." But Shay said Israel was enabling international humanitarian aid to reach Gaza, adding: "This is the level that we can preserve in the coronavirus context."

Abdelnaser Soboh, emergency health lead in the World Health Organization's Gaza sub-office, cautioned, however, that "within a week, we will become unable to care for critical cases". The infection rate among those being tested was 21 per cent, with a relative increase in carriers over the age of 60, he said. "This is a dangerous indicator since most of (those over 60) may need to be hospitalised," Soboh added.

Meanwhile, Iran recorded 13,053 new cases of coronavirus and 475 related deaths over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said on Sunday. That took the total death toll to 44,802 and the tally of cases to 854,361 in the Middle East's worst-hit state.

On Saturday, Iran introduced tougher restrictions for two weeks to stem a third wave of coronavirus infections, including closing non-essential businesses and travel curbs. Some Iranian authorities have warned that daily coronavirus deaths could reach 1,200 if the nation failed to respect health protocols. — Reuters

Fired missile at site in Jeddah, claim Yemeni fighters

RIYADH/DUBAI: Yemeni Ansar Allah forces fired a missile that struck a Saudi Aramco oil company distribution station in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea city of Jeddah, the fighters' military spokesman said on Monday.

There was no immediate Saudi confirmation of the claim. The Ansar Allah spokesman, Yahya Sarea, said foreign companies and residents in Saudi should exercise caution as "operations will continue".

The strike had been carried out in response to the Saudi-led coalition's actions in Yemen, he said. He posted a satellite image with the label "north Jeddah bulk plant-Saudi Aramco".

Google Maps shows a facility matching that image and description on the northern

outskirts of Jeddah. State-owned Aramco did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Aramco's oil production and export facilities are mostly in Saudi's Eastern Province, more than 1,000 km across the country from Jeddah. "The strike was very accurate, and ambulances and fire engines rushed to the target," Sarea said, adding that the attack was carried out with a Quds-2 type winged missile.

Saudi Arabia finished hosting this year's G20 summit on Sunday. Yemen has been mired in conflict since the Saudi-led coalition intervened in March 2015 to restore the Yemeni government ousted from power in the capital Sanaa by Ansar Allah forces in late 2014.

The Ansar Allah group says they are fighting a corrupt system.



A combatant mans a recoilless gun as forces loyal to Yemen's government clash with Ansar Allah fighters around the strategic government-held "Mas Camp" military base, in Al Jadaan area about 50 kilometres northwest of Marib in central Yemen, on Sunday. — AFP

Over the almost six-year-old war, Ansar Allah forces have carried out many missile and drone strikes on civilian airports and oil infrastructure in Saudi, as well as

on the capital Riyadh. The Saudi-led coalition says it intercepts many attacks, and has responded with air strikes on Ansar Allah-held territory. — Reuters

Israeli minister invites Lebanon's Aoun to direct border talks

TEL AVIV: Israel's Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz has invited Lebanese President Michel Aoun to direct talks in Europe on their countries' disputed maritime border, a rare outreach between nations still technically at war.

Israel and Lebanon opened negotiations on the border dispute under US and UN auspices last month to clear the way for offshore oil and gas exploration.

Last week, Steinitz on Twitter accused Lebanon of undermining the talks by continuously shifting its position and trying to widen the disputed area under negotiation.

That sparked a Twitter re-

sponse from Aoun, who rejected Steinitz's charges that Lebanon had been inconsistent.

Steinitz, in a series of tweets directed at Aoun on Monday, in both Hebrew and Arabic, said he had been "enjoying the dialogue that has developed between us in recent days".

"I am convinced that if we could meet face-to-face in a European country in order to have open, or secret, negotiations, we would have a good chance of resolving the maritime border dispute once and for all." There was no indication on whether Aoun intended to respond to or accept the offer. — AFP

NOUAKCHOTT

Mauritanian ex-president Abdallahi is dead

Mauritania's former president Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, the West African state's first democratically elected president, died overnight, his family members and the president's office said on Monday. The politician died at a private clinic in the capital Nouakchott after suffering heart complications, according to his relatives.

Born in 1938, Abdallahi became the first democratically elected head of state in Mauritania in April 2007.



But he only governed for 15 months before Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, a general, deposed him in a military coup. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkey blasts 'unauthorised' German search

Turkey on Monday said the German navy had conducted an "unauthorised" search on a Turkish-flagged vessel in a bid to enforce an arms embargo on Libya but only found humanitarian aid.

The European Union's Operation Irini, tasked with enforcing a United Nations arms embargo to Libya, has been headed by Turkey's regional rival Greece since last month.

The German frigate stopped and searched the commercial

vessel without permission on Sunday evening off the coast of Greece's Peloponnese peninsula, the Turkish foreign ministry said.

Operation Irini issued no immediate comment, but five EU powers involved in efforts to end the conflict in Libya — including Germany — issued a joint statement on Monday threatening sanctions against "all Libyan and international parties" that harm the strife-torn country's peace process. — AFP

BELGIUM

Cop on trial over Kurdish toddler's death

A toddler's clothes were hung before the court in the Belgian city of Mons on Monday in protest against what activists say is a "dehumanising" anti-immigration policy that cost a two-year-old her life. Inside, a police officer went on trial for firing the shot that killed Mawda, one of two dozen Iraqi Kurdish migrants packed into a van in an attempt to reach Britain from France that ended in tragedy in May 2018.

But, for refugees' rights groups supporting her grieving parents,



Europe's "criminalisation" of undocumented immigration is in the dock alongside him.

The hearing was suspended shortly after it began while the court sorted out some translation problems. — AFP

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



SC SLAMS STATES FOR VIRUS SURGE, WARNS DEC MAY BE WORSE

India's Supreme Court on Monday excoriated regional governments including New Delhi over the surge in COVID-19 cases and warned the situation could worsen further if authorities did not effectively deal with the pandemic. The court which took up the issue on its own, sought status reports from New Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Assam, which have recorded a spike in cases, about the management of patients and steps taken to ease the situation.

"We are hearing of a huge spike in the current month. We want a latest status report from all states. Worse things may happen in December if states aren't well prepared," the three-judge bench said, according to broadcaster NDTV. The judges were particularly concerned about Delhi, which has been topping India in the number of infections and deaths. — dpa

■ HONG KONG



YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN CUSTODY AFTER GUILTY PROTEST PLEA

Three young Hong Kong dissidents including Joshua Wong were remanded into custody on Monday after pleading guilty to inciting a rally during last year's pro-democracy protests.

Hong Kong was convulsed by seven straight months of huge and often violent democracy rallies last year in which millions took to the streets.

Wong, 24, was prosecuted alongside fellow activists Ivan Lam and Agnes Chow over a protest which took place last summer outside the city police headquarters.

Once inside Wong pleaded guilty to inciting and organising an illegal assembly. Lam pleaded guilty to incitement while Chow, 23, admitted inciting and joining the protest. All three were remanded into custody pending sentencing on December 2, meaning a jail term is all but guaranteed. — AFP

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIA HITS HALF MILLION VIRUS CASES

Indonesia hit a grim milestone on Monday in surpassing more than half a million cases of the coronavirus, as hospitals across the country's most populated province edged closer towards capacity. Indonesia now has 502,110 infections and 16,002 deaths from COVID-19, the highest numbers in Southeast Asia, having struggled to contain the spread since its first case in March.

Public health experts say shortfalls in testing and contact tracing and a consistently high positivity rate indicate the real numbers are likely to be significantly higher. In the capital Jakarta, where relatively loose social restrictions will remain in place until December 6, some met the milestone with glum resignation.

"The government isn't serious and the people are getting fatigued," said Ahmad Rozali, a clothes trader at Tanah Abang market. — Reuters

26,000 child casualties between 2005 and 2019 in Afghanistan

KABUL/GENEVA: The conflicts in Afghanistan have killed and wounded 26,025 children between 2005 to 2019, Britain-based charity Save the Children said in a report released on Monday. In 2019 alone 874 children were killed and 2,275 others were wounded in Afghanistan - a number that consists of 30 per cent of the total killed or maimed children in conflict-hit zones across the world, the group said.

These children, according to the report, were killed and wounded as a result of the direct conflicts between pro- and anti-government forces. Earlier a report by the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said that in the first nine months of this year a total of 5,939 civilians were killed and wounded - 31 per cent of whom were children. In the meantime, a 2019 analysis by Save the Children shows that Afghanistan was the deadliest place for children among 11 countries that were considered as the most dangerous places for children.

Meanwhile, UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi urged ahead of a donors conference starting on Monday that the international community must continue aiding Afghanistan or face the risk



Internally displaced Afghan girls read the Quran at a mosque, amidst the spread of the coronavirus disease during Ramadhan in Kabul on May 10. — Reuters file photo

of "disastrous consequences".

Grandi's appeal also comes after his visit to the Asian nation that is struggling with growing violence, a US pullout and flagging peace talks.

Grandi said the future of millions of Afghans depends on the outcome of peace negotiations and on the international community's commitment to develop the

country, including at the two-day donors conference in Geneva.

"Failure on either account would see Afghanistan slide backwards with disastrous consequences, including further displacement possibly on a large scale," Grandi warned in a statement.

He said the nearly 300,000 Afghans who have been displaced

inside the country because of conflict this year remain in "acute need" of humanitarian support.

The same goes for the nearly three million previously displaced and the nine million people who have lost their livelihoods due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Grandi also said it was urgent to conclude peace negotiations

These children, according to a report, were killed and wounded as a result of the direct conflicts between pro- and anti-government forces

between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which are fighting to topple it and retake the power they lost during the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

The peace talks are flagging and a withdrawal of some of the US forces that the Trump administration announced this week are further weakening the Kabul government.

TALIBAN RIGGING DRONES

The Taliban have deployed small drones to drop bombs on government forces in some recent attacks, Afghanistan's spy chief said on Monday, illustrating a new fighting method used by the insurgents. Ahmad Zia Shiraj, who heads the National Directorate of Security (NDS), said Taliban fighters were using hobby drones and rigging them with explosives.

— dpa/AFP

Thai woman alleges abuse in school, then faces storm of criticism

BANGKOK: A row over a Thai woman who held up a placard alleging sexual abuse in schools has put a spotlight on harassment in the education system even as she draws threats of legal action for misrepresentation and attacks for soiling Thailand's image.

The issue is the latest on which discussion has become more vocal as an anti-government protest movement seeking reform of the monarchy also emboldens people in a society where conservatism has often constrained criticism of the powerful.

"I hope my case will raise awareness for people in society, for students in schools,



Nalinrat Tuthubthim has her mouth covered with tape as pro-democracy protesters rally in Bangkok on Saturday. — Reuters

for adults who send children to schools, for teachers and for the Ministry of Education," Nalinrat Tuthubthim, 20, said. Nalinrat, now a university stu-

dent, had made allegations on social media of being sexually harassed at school several years ago. But she grabbed attention at the weekend when she dressed in a high-school uniform at a protest in Bangkok, put black tape over her mouth and held up a placard that read: "I have been sexually abused by teachers. School is not a safe place."

Detractors criticised her for not being a real high-school student and she was bombarded with abusive messages. Some shared screenshots of her Instagram account showing recent pictures in which she had modelled revealing outfits.

— Reuters

Philippine health care worker hopes COVID-19 vaccines will revive overseas job dream

MANILA: Philippine health care worker Vince Umali received a blow when the coronavirus pandemic derailed his plan to work in Canada this year, but he hopes to revive his dream of an overseas job after breakthroughs in the race to develop COVID-19 vaccines.

Thousands of health care workers usually leave the country each year in search of better-paid jobs in countries like the United States and Canada, as well as in the Middle East. But in April the government barred nurses, doctors and other medical workers from leaving, saying they were needed to fight a coronavirus crisis at home.



"I hope the vaccine could be released by the first quarter of next year so my plan of being able to work abroad would be more feasible," said Umali, 26, who works as an occupational therapist in a private hospital. — Reuters

S Korea's COVID-19 cases rise as tighter curbs to take effect

SEOUL: South Korea reported another daily rise of more than 200 new coronavirus cases on Monday, a day before tighter social distancing rules to blunt a third wave of infections take effect. The daily tally of 271 new cases fell from 330 reported on Sunday after hovering above 300 for five straight days, a level not seen since August, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA).

Officials have said the numbers tend to drop during the weekends due to less testing. The government further strengthened distancing rules for the capital Seoul and nearby regions on Sunday, three days after re-imposing curbs ahead of an annual national college entrance exam

scheduled for December 3. The latest measure will close bars and nightclubs, limit religious gatherings and restrict on-site dining at restaurants and cafes from Tuesday.

"If we can't sever the links of infections, our anti-virus efforts and medical responses might become unsustainable," Vice Health Minister Kang Do-tae told a meeting on Monday. KDCA director Jeong Eun-kyeong said it had secured 20 million doses of potential coronavirus vaccines, enough for 10 million people, via an international allocation platform called the COVAX facility.

The agency aims to purchase at least 60 million doses this year and was in final talks with global drugmakers over the remaining



People wearing face masks walk along the Cheonggye stream in downtown Seoul on Monday. — AFP

40 million, she said. Some experts have accused authorities of failing to take stronger action earlier even though spikes in daily numbers and other benchmarks met

conditions set by the government for stricter curbs.

The Korean Society of Infectious Diseases, a major grouping of doctors, issued a statement on

Friday warning that infections could reach as many as 1,000 per day in coming weeks without effective measures, "overloading the tracing system, creating a vicious cycle of additional infections and depleting medical resources." Kang did not respond directly to such criticism, but said he "regretted having to step up distancing again just in three days."

"But pre-emptive action was inevitable to brace for next week's college exam and prevent a grand epidemic which would bring a serious impact on our daily livelihoods and economy," he said. Many business owners expressed concerns about their livelihoods, which have already been pummeled by a series of previous curbs. — Reuters



Travellers walk through Newark International Airport. – AFP

US airports screen millions of travellers

WASHINGTON/CHICAGO: The US Transportation Security Administration screened over 3 million passengers this weekend ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday, its busiest weekend since mid-March, as people ignored a call from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) not to travel. The CDC last Thursday urged Americans not to travel during this week's Thanksgiving holiday to mitigate the spread

of the coronavirus as cases of COVID-19 spike around the United States. US airline executives last week said they had seen a rise in cancellations and slower bookings as COVID-19 cases increase, though Southwest Airlines Chief Executive Gary Kelly on Thursday said he still expected the month of November to be better for bookings than October and September. — **Reuters**

Sarkozy appears in court, corruption trial suspended

PARIS: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy briefly appeared in court on Monday to face trial on corruption accusations before judges suspended the hearings until November 26 to assess the health of one of his co-defendants. Prosecutors allege Sarkozy offered to secure a plum job in Monaco for judge Gilbert Azibert in return for confidential information about an inquiry into allegations that Sarkozy had accepted illegal payments from the late L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt for his 2007 presidential campaign. Sarkozy, who led France from 2007-2012 and has remained influential among conservatives, has denied any wrongdoing in all the investigations against him. He and his centre-right party Les Republicains say they are politically motivated. Arriving through a back entrance wearing a dark suit and mask, Sarkozy confirmed his name and occupation as former president and lawyer. The judges then considered a request by Azibert's lawyer to suspend the trial because his client, who was not in court, was at high risk of contracting COVID-19 given a long-term heart condition.



Nicolas Sarkozy waves as he leaves the court room during a break of his trial for attempted bribery of a judge, in Paris on Monday. – AFP

The judges ordered an independent medical assessment by Thursday before deciding whether to go ahead with the trial by videoconference or to postpone it until after the pandemic. Investigators had from 2013 been wiretapping conversations between Sarkozy and his lawyer Thierry Herzog as they delved into allegations of Libyan financing in

Sarkozy's 2007 campaign. Prosecutors have said wiretaps showed that Sarkozy and Herzog had on multiple occasions discussed contacting Azibert, a magistrate at the Cour de Cassation, France's top appeals court for criminal cases, and well-informed on the Bettencourt inquiry. They allege that Sarkozy offered to help Azibert get the Monaco job in return for insider help. Sarkozy told BFM TV this month Azibert never got the job. Herzog and Azibert are both on trial with Sarkozy, charged with corruption and influence-peddling. They are also accused of "violating professional secrecy". They deny any wrongdoing. All three face up to 10 years in prison and hefty fines if convicted. Next March, Sarkozy is due in court on accusations of violating campaign financing rules during his failed 2012 re-election bid. The so-called "Bygmalion" case centres on accusations that Sarkozy's party worked with a friendly public relations firm to hide the true cost of his campaign. — **Reuters**

Biden to pick Blinken as US secretary of state, says ally

NEW YORK/WILMINGTON: Joe Biden will pick Antony Blinken as US secretary of state, a person close to the president-elect's transition said on Sunday, elevating one of his most seasoned and trusted aides as he prepares to undo President Donald Trump's foreign policy. Blinken is a longtime Biden confidant who served as No 2 at the State Department and as deputy national security adviser in president Barack Obama's administration, in which Biden served as vice-president. A second Biden ally said that Blinken was Biden's first choice. An announcement is likely on Tuesday. Blinken's appointment makes another longtime Biden aide with a foreign policy background, Jake Sullivan, the top candidate to be US national security adviser, the first source said. Bloomberg News first reported the expected roles. Biden's transition team declined to comment. Neither Blinken nor Sullivan responded to requests for comment.



Antony Blinken

While neither are household names, Blinken and Sullivan have helped Biden formulate a strategy that will include immediate outreach to US allies who have often been antagonised by Trump's "America First" approach, and to demonstrate a willingness to work together on major global prob-

lems like the coronavirus epidemic and its economic fallout. Biden has vowed to rejoin a nuclear deal with Iran if the country returns to compliance, return to the Paris climate accord, abandon plans to leave the World Health Organization and end a US rule that bans funding of aid groups

Blinken is a longtime Biden confidant who served as No 2 at the State Department and as deputy national security adviser in president Barack Obama's administration, in which Biden served as vice-president

that discuss abortion. Each move would reverse Trump's policies and some could take place quickly after Biden takes office on January 20. Biden is also likely to name Linda Thomas-Greenfield as US Ambassador to the United Nations, media outlets reported on Sunday. Thomas-Greenfield is Black, an expert on Africa policy and held a top diplomatic post in the administration of former president Barack Obama. — **Reuters**

LEISURE TIME



US President Donald Trump drives a golf cart at the Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Virginia, US, on Sunday. – Reuters

Brussels warns on press freedom

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Monday responded to a question about France's draft security law by warning that news media must be able to "work freely". French journalists and press freedom advocates have protested against the planned law, which would limit the right to film or photograph on-duty police officers. "The commission does not comment on draft laws, but it goes

without saying that in a period of crisis it is more important than ever that journalists must be able to do their jobs freely and in complete safety," EU spokesman Christian Wigand said. "As is always the case, the commission reserves the right to examine the final legislation in order to verify that it conforms to EU law," he added. On Friday, the French parliament approved an amended secu-

rity law, one clause of which would criminalise the publication of images of police officers with the intent of harming their "physical or psychological integrity". In practice, this law would restrict the publication of photos or videos taken of police officers' faces while carrying out their duties in public spaces, and in many cases an officer's face would have to be blurred. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

2 billion doses of vaccine for poor nations

Nearly 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines will be shipped and flown to developing countries next year in a "mammoth operation", the UN children's agency UNICEF said on Monday, as world leaders vowed to ensure the fair distribution of vaccines. UNICEF said it was working with over 350 airlines and freight companies to deliver vaccines and 1 billion syringes to poor countries such as Burundi, Afghanistan and Yemen as part of COVAX, a global COVID-19 vaccine allocation plan with the World



Health Organization (WHO). "This invaluable collaboration will go a long way to ensure that enough transport capacity is in place for this historic and mammoth operation," said Etl-eva Kadilli, director of UNICEF's Supply Division, in a statement. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

RENNES

French soldiers on trial for trainee's death

Seven soldiers went on trial on Monday over the death by drowning eight years ago of a trainee officer during an initiation ritual at France's most prestigious military academy. Jallal Hami, 24, drowned in the night of October 29, 2012 while crossing a swamp as part of a training ritual meant to teach the Saint-Cyr officer school's traditions to new recruits. Of the seven, five were trainee officers at the time, and two part of the school's leadership team, including a general.

The night of Hami's death, new recruits were told to swim across a swamp for 43 metres while wearing helmets in water with a temperatures of 9 celsius in an exercise meant to simulate a beach landing. To the blast of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" — made famous by Francis Ford Coppola's war movie "Apocalypse Now" — the recruits jumped into the cold water. Several quickly struggled and went under, gasping for air and clutching at others. — **AFP**

ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia PM gives ultimatum to Tigray forces

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed gave Tigrayan regional forces 72 hours to surrender before the military begins an offensive on the regional capital of Mekelle. "We urge you to surrender peacefully within 72 hours, recognising that you are at the point of no return," Abiy said in a message posted on Twitter on Sunday evening. Tigrayan forces could not immediately be reached for comment. A military spokesman said earlier that advancing Ethiopian troops plan to surround Mekelle



with tanks and may shell the city to force surrender. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which is refusing to surrender its rule of the northern region, said its forces were digging trenches and standing firm. — **Reuters**

Build others, celebrate their success...

What we think is right often may not be so for others. Our rightness is based on our values taught by our family and culture, but quite often we also begin to cultivate our own degree of analysing to come down to a conclusion.

Judging others is a common habit of human beings and it is there for animals too, except the difference is they judge as a defensive technique and not as a time pass or habit.

It seems we have become more so during the COVID-19 days. We seemed to be looking for anything to blame on. Our boredom and restrictions which are all for our own good has taken its toll – we can see it in our online posts and articles we read.

If someone does not reply to our messages or return our calls we lose patience and judge them even before finding out what could be the reason. It is interesting to note how we think we are better than others and what is worse is that we choose to express ourselves on social media. These are the changing times and although it is a virus that has brought the world to this status collectively it is teaching us many other things.

The message is very clear – it shook the world to get the attention and then for the last many months we have been going through lessons in transition.



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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How life can be, could be, should have been and would have been. Just like psychiatrists and psychologists believe we go through stages when one is hit by a tragedy, in this experience too we have been going through shock, denial, and acceptance and not to forget fear. However in this experience we have a tendency to point fingers at others. Someone has to take the blame – It is always someone else's fault.

It seems there is always a need for a villain in the scheme of things. But life teaches us there really is no person who is completely negative. It is a few inborn qualities and the environmental factors that make a person respond in a certain way to situations. Then there are others who are seeking situations only to enlarge them even before they know the facts.

It seems the world is losing patience and maybe that is yet another lesson this era is teaching us. There is discipline too as we are practicing currently – such as how we had been staying away from the beaches even though we enjoy such a long coastline.

So instead of finding faults, let us appreciate what others are trying to cope with and when they want to innovate, let us support and when they succeed, let us celebrate them.

We need hope and positivity more than ever, but it is not to say that there

is a need for false hope. The world needs mentors and supporters because no one is perfect but we can strive to be better than yesterday, each day. So we can be the critique ensuring that we do not damage a person but give the individual the opportunity to go on the right path by helping them to get up and move on forward.

Everyone has the right to be confident but we must remember that others have that right too, for it is best when more people are thriving as positive competition brings out the best in people. The only point is constructive criticism can result in growth while harshness could be damaging. Not everyone would be able to join the bandwagon just because their approach to life is different.

There are many more individuals who are talented and ought to be in the main front but shy away that they may not be able to handle the pressure of being in the spotlight that brings about criticisms and positive response. Let us nourish the environment so we can provide them the platform to emerge.

Damaging is easy because that is one of the traits of destruction, while building an individual needs nurturing and years of experience. We can voice our concerns and convey our suggestions but not at the cost of the individual.

RAISING HOPES

Frontrunners emerge in race for COVID-19 vaccine

Dozens of companies, from biotech start-ups to Big Pharma, are racing to develop a safe and effective coronavirus vaccine, both to meet urgent medical need and for the potential payday. Positive results from final stage trials of several vaccine candidates have raised hopes that there is light at the end of the tunnel in the quest to curb a pandemic that has already killed nearly 1.4 million people worldwide.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 48 “candidate vaccines” at the stage of clinical trials in humans by mid-November, up from 11 in mid-June.

Eleven of them are at the most advanced “Phase 3” stage, in which a vaccine’s effectiveness is tested on a large scale, generally on tens of thousands of people across several continents.

A European project led by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca on Monday said an interim analysis of its phase 3 trials showed their vaccine had an average 70 per cent efficacy in trials involved 23,000 people.

The statement said the drug showed a 62-per cent efficacy when people were given two full doses, but this rose to 90 per cent in those given

only a half dose initially followed by a full dose.

The vaccine could be stored, transported and handled at normal refrigerated conditions for at least six months

It said the vaccine could be stored, transported and handled “at normal refrigerated conditions” for at least six months and announced plans to develop up to three billion doses in 2021, if it passes the remaining regulatory hurdles.

The announcement

comes after a US-German collaboration between Pfizer and BioNTech reported early in November that phase 3 trials for its mRNA vaccine showed 90 per cent efficacy in preventing COVID-19 symptoms and did not produce adverse side effects among thousands of volunteers.

It has since announced further trial results showing the vaccine works 95 per cent of the time.

“Efficacy was consistent across age, gender, race and ethnicity demographics,” the company said.

Pfizer is currently seeking Emergency Use Authorisation from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and expects to roll out 1.3 billion doses by the end of next year.

Also this month, US biotech firm Moderna said its vaccine also showed almost 95 per cent efficacy.

Moderna plans to submit applications for emergency approval in the US and around the world within weeks, and says it expects to have approximately 20 million doses ready to ship in the US by the end of the year. The company is on track to manufacture between 500 million to a billion doses globally in 2021, it said.

In addition, several state-run Chinese labs are also thought to have produced among the more promising candidate vaccines.

Russia, meanwhile, has already registered two COVID-19 vaccines, even before clinical trials were completed.

Some methods for making a vaccine are tried-and-tested, while others remain experimental. Inactivated traditional vaccines use a virus germ that has been killed, while others use a weakened or “attenuated” strain. These vaccines work when the body treats the deactivated pathogen as if it were a real threat, producing antibodies to kill it without endangering the patient with full infection.

— AFP

LETHAL BLOW

As Biden marches forward, Trump’s hopes likely to fade in key states

JAMES OLIPHANT

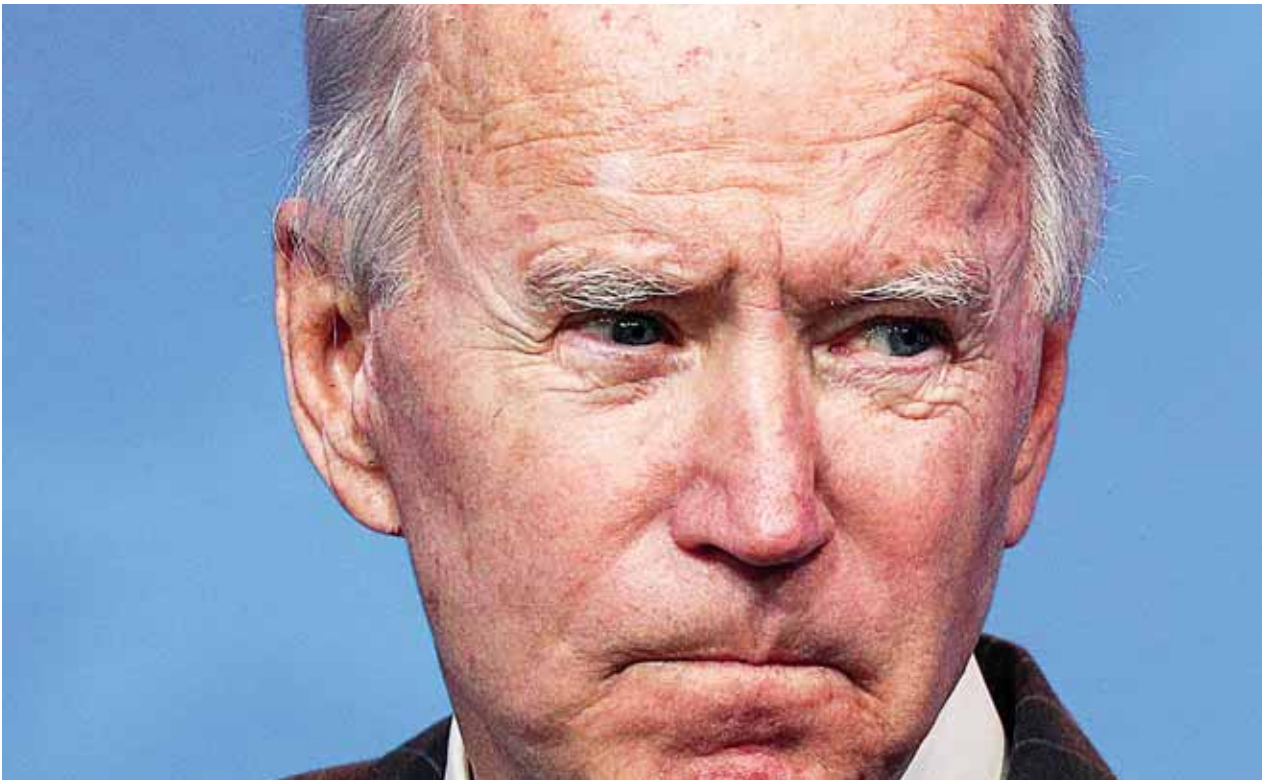
US President Donald Trump’s increasingly tenuous efforts to reverse his election loss to President-elect Joe Biden could be dealt a lethal blow on Monday, as Biden turns to the task of building his cabinet.

Michigan is set to certify its results, and Pennsylvania is likely to move a step closer to doing so. Trump, a Republican, lost both battleground states in the November 3 election, but he has refused to concede defeat and has, instead, launched a legal battle to overturn the results there and in other close races across the country.

Trump’s hopes of preventing the Democrat Biden from taking office on January 20 likely will be doomed if Michigan and Pennsylvania certify their results, confirming Biden as the winner of a combined 36 electoral votes. Biden won 306 electoral votes, 36 over the 270 threshold needed to win the White House. It remains unclear whether the process in Michigan will work as state law dictates.

Michigan’s canvassing board, which is evenly split between two Democrats and two Republicans, will meet to decide whether to certify the results. Biden defeated Trump in Michigan by more than 150,000 votes, and the board is required by law to validate the count. But a Republican member of the board, Norman Shinkle, has suggested in recent media interviews that he favours delaying certification because of technical irregularities.

Officials in one county noted irregularities that may have affected a few hundred votes, and the Trump campaign has suggested that points to widespread



US President-elect Joe Biden speaks to reporters following an online meeting with members of the National Governors Association executive committee in Wilmington, Delaware. — Reuters

fraud. A deadlock on moving ahead with certification would likely force the matter into state appeals courts, where an order would be sought to compel the board to perform its function.

If the members refused, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, has the authority to replace them. Monday is also the deadline in Pennsylvania for counties to report their certified tallies to Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, a Democrat.

Boockvar likely would then certify the results on behalf of the state in a matter of days. Biden won Pennsylvania by more than 80,000 votes. Trump’s push to delay certification in several states has met with failure, most recently on Saturday, when a federal judge in Pennsylvania dismissed

a Trump campaign lawsuit, saying it was not in the court’s power to violate the Constitution.

Biden, working in his home state of Delaware, has pushed ahead with his transition plans despite the lack of cooperation from the current administration. Ron Klain, the incoming White House chief of state, said on Sunday that Biden will announce his first Cabinet picks on Tuesday. Joe Biden will pick Antony Blinken as US secretary of state, a person close to the president-elect’s transition said on Sunday, elevating one of his most seasoned and trusted aides as he prepares to undo Trump’s “America First” foreign policy.

— Reuters

TRUMP’S HOPES OF PREVENTING BIDEN FROM TAKING OFFICE ON JANUARY 20 LIKELY WILL BE DOOMED

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ICAO beat French team in Academy League

INTERNATIONAL
CHESS ACADEMY
OF OMAN



AYOUB



SHLOK BABARIYA



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IBRAHEEM

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, NOV 23

The International Chess Academy of Oman (ICAO) put up an impressive performance to pull off a solid win against the French team of Saint-Ouen in the online match held on the chess platform lichess.org on Saturday.

The ICAO players, coached by International Master Ismail Karim, posted a comprehensive win of 158 points against 90 points by the French team.

“This win is really a confidence booster for our (ICAO) team.

We managed to beat the French team by a good margin,” Karim told *Oman Observer*.

The competition was part of the Chess Academy League played between chess academies across the world. Each team can register 16 players for the League.

“Next up, the ICAO team will take on a Spanish team. Date and time will be decided after considering the convenient time for both the teams,” ICAO non-playing captain Karim said.

“Matches against academy teams of Malaysia and Bahrain are also scheduled in the coming period,” he added.

The Oman academy team is a mixture of Omani and expatriate players.

“Among the 16 players, all are under 16 years of age except one adult player,” the international chess master said.

The competition was played on November 21 between (7.15 pm to 8.45 pm) with the participation of 36 players from both teams on the world famous chess platform lichess.org, who is hosting weekly millions of games.

OMANI TALENT
Ibraheem Rao took the first place of the competition followed by Aida Tayebipour in second and

Shlok Babariya in third position.

All the players are students of International Master Ismail Karim, who has been coaching at the International Chess Academy of Oman since the creation of the entity in 2013. Karim has also coached the national team of Oman in two Chess Olympiads — Norway 2014 and Georgia 2018.

Omani talent Ayoub al Riyami, who is only seven-years-old, managed to take the 12th place with a score of 6 out of 10.

Karim said the future of Oman in chess is bright with the likes of Ayoub al Riyami.

“This boy had a good game

“
Next up, the ICAO team will take on a Spanish team. Matches against academy teams of Malaysia and Bahrain are also scheduled in the coming period

ISMAIL KARIM
ICAO Captain

along with the other members of our team. The players have significantly increased their online rating points after the win,” he said.

World chess champion Magnus Carlsen’s (Norway) company Play Magnus invested millions of dollars in online tournaments and coaching platforms as chess has been witnessing a booming time during the pandemic.

The International Chess Academy of Oman is still continuing to function online with the classes being held on Zoom and the practice being played on lichess.org.



Klopp blasts broadcasters

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp slammed British broadcasters Sky and BT on Sunday over match scheduling that he says is leading to more player injuries.



Arsenal hold on for goalless draw

LEEDS, England: Ten-man Arsenal hung on for a 0-0 draw at Leeds United in the Premier League after their winger Nicolas Pepe was sent off in the 51st minute on Sunday.



Moukoko could claim CL record

DUSSELDORF: Borussia Dortmund striker Youssoufa Moukoko could become the youngest player in Champions League history on Tuesday after he was added to the squad list.



Liverpool beat Leicester to set new club-record home run

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool cruised to an impressive 3-0 win over Leicester City at Anfield in the Premier League on Sunday as they set a new club record of 64 straight unbeaten home league games.

An own goal from Jonny Evans and headers from Diogo Jota, continuing his streak of scoring in his first four league games at Anfield, and Roberto Firmino were enough to give Juergen Klopp a victory over his predecessor Brendan Rodgers.

The result moves defending champions Liverpool level on 20 points with leaders Tottenham Hotspur while Leicester are fourth, level on 18 points with third-placed Chelsea.

Although the Reds were without Mohamed Salah, who had tested positive for COVID-19,

and the injured Jordan Henderson and Trent Alexander-Arnold, as well as a string of other absentees, it was a strong showing from Liverpool who look ready to launch another serious title bid.

The home side grabbed the lead in the 21st minute when Evans, under pressure from Sadio Mane, headed a James Milner corner into his own net.

The result moves defending champions Liverpool level on 20 points with leaders Tottenham Hotspur while Leicester are fourth, level on 18 points with third-placed Chelsea.

Leicester responded with a smart break with Jamie Vardy finding Harvey Barnes in a promising position but the left-winger's effort was well wide of the target.

Liverpool's second was a masterfully worked goal with Andy Robertson whipping in a delicious cross from the left which Jota met at the near post with an expertly angled glancing header.

Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel pulled off a series of saves to deny the home side after the break while Firmino twice hit the post and had an effort cleared off the line. The Brazilian, who had scored just twice in his last 23 Premier League games, got his reward four minutes from the end with a fine header from another Milner corner.

Klopp was full of praise for

the way his team had won so convincingly against opponents who would have gone top with victory. "We deserved it. The boys played an incredible game against a top, top, top opponent. I don't take things like this for granted. The boys were on fire football-wise," said the German.

"I liked the overall performance — the result and clean sheet. We defended incredibly well," he added.

Rodgers was unhappy with the way his team had approached the first half. "We, first half in particular, were too passive and... gave away poor goals. We had a good opportunity on the counter with Harvey Barnes, but overall when you are passive like that your football is not quite the same, we weren't aggressive enough," he said. — **Reuters**

Maniz Azad, OHI, OCT Maabela, Al Jadidi claim victories

MUSCAT: Adnan ul Haq struck a superb 74 and then took two wickets to power Maniz Azad International to a massive 182-run victory against OCT Al Amerat in a C Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Maniz Azad posted a huge 275 for 6 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Adnan, Ali Tahir (43 off only 19) and Adnan Klair (36). Said Haider claimed 3 for 35 while Salman Haider took 2 for 55.

Devoid of any real force in its case, OCT Al Amerat crawled to 93 for 6 in 20 overs. Salim Haider topscored with 21 as Yasir Muhammed, Zaheer Abbas and Adnan all bowled well, picking up two wickets each.

Brief Scores (C Division): Maniz Azad International 275 for 6 in 20 overs (Adnan ul Haq 74 – 6x4, 4x6, Ali Tahir 43 – 9x4, Ahamad Klair Adnan 36 – 6x4, Said Haider 3-35, Sulaiman Haider 2-55) beat OCT Al Amerat 93 for 6 in 20 overs (Salim Haider 21 – 2x4, Yasir Muhammad 2-7, Zaheer Abbas 2-12, Adnan ul Haq 2-21) by 182 runs.

Waleed stars in OHI win

In another C Division game at Muscat Municipality ground 2, Waleed Rahim's vital unbeaten knock steered Douglas OHI to an exciting 4-wicket win over Al Waad Trading and Contracting.

Al Waad failed to put a big total on the board after opting to bat first, gathering a modest 146 for 8 in 20 overs. Muniyasamy Muthumurigan topscored with 34. Rajender Kumar, Mohammed Dawood and Viplav Kumar claimed two wickets each.

OHI raced to 52 without loss inside first five overs and continued to build on the flying start before surpassing the total in the 19th over, scoring 147 for 6. Waleed Rahim and Ismail Ghulam led the way with solid 39 not out and 36 respectively. Al Waad's Shine NV picked up 3 for 31.

Brief Scores (C Division): Al Waad Trading 146 for 8 in 20 overs (Muniyasamy Muthumurigan 34 – 4x4, Suseendran Siraichezhian 28 – 4x4, 1x6, Rajender Kumar 2-14, Mohammed Dawood 2-17, Viplav Kumar 2-27) lost to Douglas OHI 147 for 6 in 18.5 overs (Waleed Rahim 39 – 2x4, Ismail Ghulam 36 – 7x4, Shine NV 3-31) by 4 wickets.

Dhiyab's magic spell lifts OCT Maabela

Omani player Dhiyab Al Zadjali claimed 5 for 6 off only ten balls that he bowled, helping OCT Maabela to a dramatic 28-run victory against Al Rehwan in a D Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 4 on Friday.

Chasing 170 to win the game, Al Rehwan was happily placed at 132 for 4 in 15.3 overs, requiring 38 runs off 27 balls with six wickets in hand. However, Dhiyab started the dramatic



Dhiyab Al Zadjali



Adnan ul Haq of Maniz Azad

slide by removing well set Shiraj Abdulla. In the next 6 balls Dhiyab took four more wickets to end Al Rehwan's victory dream as it was bundled out for 141 in 17.4 overs. Arif Al Balushi took two wickets.

Earlier, Zafarullah Al Balushi and Warith Al Balushi scored impressive fifties to lead OCT Maabela to a respectable 169 for 9. Raniz Muhammed and Ayyitta Valappil claimed three wickets each.

Brief Scores (D Division): Oct Maabela 169 for 9 in 20 overs (Zafarullah Al Balushi 54 – 10x4, 1x6, Warith Al Balushi 51 – 7x4, Khalid Salim 38 – 6x4 1x6, Raniz Muhammed 3-21, Ayyitta Valappil 3-23, Aboo P C 2-28) beat Al Rehwan 141 all out in 17.4 overs (Ayyitta Valappil 33 – 6x4, Kunnumpurath Jibin 30 – 5x4, 1x6, Shiraj Abdulla 30 – 2x4, Dhiyab Al Zadjali 5-06, Arif Al Balushi 2-17) by 28 runs.

Feroz, Rizwan shine for Al Jadidi

Scintillating performances by Feroz Vazhayil and Muhammed Rizwan powered Al Jadidi Engineering to a comfortable 38 runs victory against Ideal Technology in a D Divisn match at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Invited to bat first, Al Jadidi batted with gay abandon, amassing 220 for 3 thanks to magnificent knocks by Feroz (98 off 61) and Rizwan (88 off 51).

Ideal got off to good start, reaching 68 for 1 in less than 7 overs but failed to keep up with the required run rate as the innings progressed and fell way short, ending its 20 overs at 182 for 5. Sunder Biji (60) and Latha Vijesh (47) batted well. Rizwan and Mohammed Shafeeq took two wickets each.

Brief Scores (D Division): Al Jadidi Engineering 220 for 3 in 20 overs (Feroz Vazhayil 98 – 13x4, 2x6, Muhammed Rizwan 88 – 8x4, 4x6) defeated Ideal Technology 182 for 5 in 20 overs (Sunder Biji 60 – 6x4, Latha Vijesh 47 – 5x4, Mohammed Shafeeq 2-33, Muhammed Rizwan 2-34) by 38 runs.



Russia's Daniil Medvedev poses with the winner's trophy. – AFP

Resurgent Medvedev clinches ATP Finals title beating Thiem

LONDON: Daniil Medvedev barged to the head of the queue of young pretenders as the Russian captured the biggest title of his career by storming back to beat Dominic Thiem 4-6 7-6(7-2) 6-4 in an absorbing climax to London's last ATP Finals on Sunday.

Thiem looked on course to become the first Austrian to win the title, following on from his recent US Open triumph, but the relentless Medvedev turned the tide in superb fashion to cap a stunning week for the 24-year-old.

There was no big celebration as he fired an unreturnable first serve on match point to end the two-hour-and-42-minute scrap and bring the curtain down on 12 memorable years for the event at the O2 Arena before it relocates to Turin.

Fittingly, Medvedev became the first Russian to win the title since Nikolay Davydenko, who won London's first edition in 2009.

Sadly for an event that attracted 2.8 million fans to the Thames-side arena in its first 11 editions, this year's tournament, a vintage edition, was staged in a silent arena because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It perhaps explained Medvedev's muted reaction to claiming the title and becoming only the fourth player in ATP history to beat the world's top three at the same tournament, joining David Nalbandian (Madrid 2007), Novak Djokovic (Montreal 2007) and Boris Becker (Stockholm 1994).

"First of all what a match. I mean, one of my best victories,

three sets against an amazing player," Medvedev, who avenged his US Open semifinal defeat by Thiem, said on court.

Medvedev's imaginative game, a blend of sledgehammer power, cunning angles and unreadable serving, had proved beyond Djokovic in the group phase in which he went 100 per cent and then second-ranked Rafael Nadal in Saturday's semifinal.

The 27-year-old Thiem appeared to have mastered it but ultimately was overwhelmed. Medvedev's triumph came a year after a chastening debut at the event when he lost all three group matches.

The only other player to achieve such a drastic turnaround is Djokovic in 2008.

After such a hot streak, including claiming this month's

There was no big celebration as he fired an unreturnable first serve on match point to end the two-hour-and-42-minute scrap and bring the curtain down on 12 memorable years for the event at the O2 Arena before it relocates to Turin

Paris Masters, the Moscovite was perhaps due a dip and it arrived in the first set as he threw away a 40-0 lead on serve at 2-2, gifting Thiem a break with a double-fault.

It proved enough for the Austrian to pocket the first set and he went for the quick kill in the second as Medvedev's usually rock-solid serve and forehand wavered.

The Russian hung in though, saving break points at 2-2 and 3-3, and began to look menacing as the tiebreak arrived. Thiem led 2-0 but Medvedev reeled off seven points in a row to ensure London's farewell would go the distance.

Thiem, who had also beaten Nadal and Djokovic this week, had spent two more hours on court than Medvedev to reach the final and his silky game began to fray in the third set.

Medvedev stalked him with his relentless power and accuracy and the Russian secured the break of serve he had threatened at 2-2 with a stealthy approach and volleyed winner.

Thiem dug in but world number four Medvedev never looked like letting his lead slip as he became the fifth successive first-time winner of the title.

Alexander Zverev landed it in 2018 and Stefanos Tsitsipas last year. Neither have gone on to claim a Grand Slam title yet, but Medvedev will enter 2021 as the man most likely to make that breakthrough for the much-hyped next generation.

"For tennis there are exciting times coming," Thiem said of the new vanguard. "Super important for the sport in general."

— Reuters

business

MUSCAT
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MARKET

3,627.39

CRUDE
OIL PRICE

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Light Crude \$ 43.02

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REIT: Promising investment option for Omanis, expatriates



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) could be the next big thing for investors in the Sultanate. Offering institutional and individual (Omani and expatriate) investors an unmatched platform to safely park their funds, access to a diverse portfolio of high worth commercial real estate assets and attractive steady income, REITs top the list of investment options including bonds and stocks.

Investment experts are of the view that Oman's REITs could be among the most sought-after in the MENA region on account of the prevailing growth-enabling environment for its real estate sector along with longstanding political stability, friendly international relations and highly resilient economy.

With their enhanced appeal to investors, the Sultanate's REITs could be instrumental in attracting considerable foreign direct investments to the country, industry watchers opine. Unlike in the US and Europe, REITs are underpenetrated in the Middle East including Oman, but are expected to grow gradually as the real estate market in the region matures in terms of quality of

and access to assets, financing, governance and regulations, according to a PwC report.

The Sultanate's focus on infrastructure development as envisaged in Oman Vision 2040 and the expected high growth in its tourism, hospitality and healthcare sectors will certainly have a positive impact on its real estate sector, making REIT the best-in-class financial instrument in the country, studies suggest.

What is REIT?
REIT is a high yield investment platform offering multiple benefits to investors. Operating as a closed ended company, REIT owns, manages or finances profitable real estate assets aimed at generating stable income for investors.

REIT funds are invested in a wide range of real estate properties ranging from apartment buildings, data centres, hotels, hospitals and educational facilities to offices, retail centres and warehouses. REITs manage a diversified portfolio of high-value real estate properties and mortgages and are traded on public markets. They lease properties and collect rents that are later distributed among shareholders as dividends.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Omani-Saudi joint venture to set up seven factories in Khazaen

STRONG INVESTMENT: Under the agreements, Khazaen will lease about 27,000 m2 for the establishment of plants for bottling drinking water, ice production, water bottles, confectionery tomato ketchup, baby related products, and plastics

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

Khazaen Economic City has announced the signing of three new tenancy agreements valued at nearly RO 3 million.

These agreements were signed recently with United Vision for Investment and Development and Al Maha Food Industries LLC, an Omani-Saudi joint venture to establish several manufacturing units in the economic city.

Under the three agreements, Khazaen will lease about 27,000 m2 to United Vision for Investment and Development, and to Al Maha Food Industries LLC, to build seven manufacturing units for bottling drinking water, ice production, manufacturing of water bottles, sweets factory, production of tomato ketchup, baby related products in addition to a factory for plastic related products.

The agreements were signed by



Khazaen Economic City has recently completed the first phase of its infrastructure works, laying the ground for more companies to access its modern facilities. The latest joint venture underlines the City's strengths in terms of incentives, location, convenience and value on investment.

Khalid Awadh al Balushi, CEO of Khazaen Economic City; Khalifa al Kindi, CEO of United Vision for Investment and Development, and a representative from Al Maha Food Industries LLC.

Khazaen Economic City has recently completed the first phase of its infrastructure works, laying the ground for more companies to access its modern facilities. The latest joint venture underlines the City's strengths in terms of incentives, location, convenience and value on investment.

"The signing of these agreements constitutes a strong addition to the projects already at Khazaen. It also affirms the confidence of local and foreign investors in Khazaen as an ideal and new destination for various businesses. It also reflects the efforts made by Khazaen to attract more investments, especially after the recent completion of the first phase of the infrastructure works," commented Al

Balushi, CEO of Khazaen Economic City.

"Diverse projects such as these manufacturing units are very important to bring foreign investment to the Sultanate, but also contribute towards creating more job opportunities for the local Omani youth and supporting the government's economic diversification plans," he added.

Khalifa al Kindi, CEO of United Vision for Investment and Development, said, "Khazaen Economic City is a unique destination for us as investors due to key advantages it provides such as its strategic location and proximity to the main road networks, sea ports and various land ports."

Euro zone economy plunges in 'steep decline'

BRUSSELS: Euro zone economic activity plunged in November, a key survey showed on Monday, due to a resurgence of lockdowns across Europe as the second wave of the coronavirus tightened its grip.

"The euro zone economy has plunged back into a severe decline in November amid renewed efforts to quash the rising tide of COVID-19 infections," said Chris Williamson, chief economist at IHS Markit.

The firm's closely watched PMI index plummeted

to 45.1 points from 50.0 points in October, well below the key 50-point level which indicates growth.

IHS Markit said this offered a clear indication that the economy in the 19-member single currency area would stumble back into recession in the fourth quarter, erasing any gains seen over the middle of the year.

Importantly, "the further downturn of the economy... represents a major set-back to the

region's health and extends the recovery period," Williamson said.

All was not bleak, with survey results demonstrating emerging optimism for a better recovery next year on the back of signs effective vaccines were close at hand. Still, IHS Markit said it forecast the euro zone economy would contract by a historic 7.4 per cent in 2020 and expected a recovery of just 3.7 per cent in 2021. — AFP

Oman's Mafrag field: Heavy oil field that cold flows

PROMISING POTENTIAL: 'We have great plans for developing this field':
Maha Energy MD

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

A promising heavy oil field discovered in central Oman can potentially be produced without the need for thermal heat — a typically cost-intensive method for extracting crude from heavy oil reservoirs, according to the new operator of the concession.

Swedish-based international upstream oil and gas firm Maha Energy Ab, which recently signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with the Omani government to develop the Mafrag field, described the field as "exceptional" in terms of its characteristics.

"What is exceptional about this heavy oil



Cold heavy oil production effectively means that the operator is likely to be spared much of the huge costs associated with thermal heating and other enhanced oil recovery (EOR) methods required to harness the hydrocarbon potential of such heavy oil fields, say experts.

field is that it cold flows — meaning it does not necessarily need heat to extract it," said Jonas Lindvall, Managing Director, Maha Energy.

Cold heavy oil production effectively means that the operator is likely to be spared much of the huge costs associated with thermal heating and other enhanced oil recovery (EOR) methods required to harness the hydrocarbon potential of such heavy oil fields, say experts.

Lindvall made the revelation in a letter to shareholders accompanying the company's third quarter results on Monday. Earlier in September, Stockholm-headquartered Maha Energy inked an EPSA pact with Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals covering the development of Block 70, which holds the Mafrag field.

A Royal Decree ratifying the EPSA deal was issued earlier this month. Welcoming the issuance of the Royal Decree, Lindvall said: "This signals the start of the Exploration Production Sharing Agreement signed earlier in (September). Block 70 is ideally located between multiple large and high-volume producing oil fields and contain the appraised and undeveloped Mafrag field.

The Mafrag field was discovered in 1988 and is estimated to contain between 180-280 million barrels of 13° API Oil In Place (OIP)."

Tests carried out during the appraisal of the field yielded around 15,750 barrels of

oil that were produced using conventional pumps and without the use of steam, according to the company.

The productive reservoir is shallow, at approximately 430 metres below ground level. Block 70 represents Maha Energy's maiden foray into Oman's upstream sector.

The EPSA pact for Block 70 covers an initial exploration period of three years with an optional extension period of another three years.

In the event of a commercial oil or gas discovery, the EPSA can be transformed into a 15-year production licence which can be extended for another five years.

Additionally, in case of a commercial discovery, an Omani state-owned oil company has a right to acquire up to a 30 per cent interest in Block 70 against refunding the pro rata share of past expenditure.

"We have great plans for developing this field," the Managing Director added.



Is ‘exempt’ a four-letter word in VAT?



SAICHARAN
A S



ROBERT
TSANG

The new world of Value Added Tax or VAT (coming to us in April of next year) brings a whole new vocabulary to master. “Exempt” is one of those words that generally means good things in tax – but what about in VAT? Is “exempt” a good – or bad

– four-letter word? The answer, as with many things in life, is a little complicated. Exemptions in VAT are intended to work like exemptions elsewhere in tax — generally relieving burdens for the welfare of people or the development of trade and industry. Therefore in the newly minted VAT Law, VAT exemption applies on basic necessities and facilities — education and healthcare. Exemption from VAT also applies to financial services, certain supplies of land or real property, passenger transport here in Oman: these are sectors with a track record internationally of having

exempt status conferred. So what is the complication and difficulty? As with beauty, so with VAT — in the eye of the beholder different views, meanings and consequences arise. Exempt supplies are those that will not be subject to a positive rate of VAT. So too are zero-rated supplies like most basic foods and exports; the distinction between exempt and zero-rated supplies is that input tax paid on costs related to zero-rated supplies are recoverable, but tax paid on procurements will not be deductible or recoverable in respect of exempt supplies.

Then things get more complex. The scope of VAT exemption is generally limited: definitions of what is exempt must be carefully reviewed. In the world of non-Islamic financial services, charges in the nature of provision of any credit is usually exempt; however an explicit fee or commission is usually subject to VAT at the standard rate. For Islamic financial products the lines must be drawn differently (though many countries opt to have comparable VAT treatments for competing Islamic and non-Islamic financial products). A separate point is that many businesses here will be

engaged in both VAT exempt (say a property business with a residential division) and VAT taxable (also a division involved in commercial lets) supplies. For these mixed suppliers, the impact of VAT introduction could be significant as there will typically be complicated calculations for recovery of proportionate input costs for each period the business files tax returns. Learn the new VAT vocabulary, develop deeper understanding of these new words. “Exempt” may indeed not be such a good thing. *[The authors are specialists in tax matters at Deloitte & Touche (ME) & Co LLC]*

HSBC expects Omani economy to improve from 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

HSBC’s Global Economic Outlook virtual roadshow came to Oman on Monday, with more than 100 of HSBC Bank Oman’s clients attending the online event. Simon Williams, Chief Economist for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEEMEA); Stephen King, Senior Economic Adviser; and Paul Mackel, Head of Emerging Market FX Research, gave their views on the impact of COVID-19 on the global economy and explored various factors influencing macroeconomic trends, fiscal policy, as well as oil and foreign exchange markets. They also addressed the challenges and opportunities awaiting Oman and the wider region in 2021. The event was held at a critical time for the global economy, with countries around the world heading into the end of the year with increasing COVID-19 cases and global consumer confidence, which had shown signs of strengthening, starting to wane. In the GCC, oil exporters have faced the additional challenge of low oil prices. Melika Betley, CEO, HSBC Oman, said: “Oman’s resilient spirit is serving it well in these uncertain times for the global economy. As we look to build back with even more purpose than before, I am inspired by the ideas, entrepreneurialism and partnerships that are helping foster recovery and growth in Oman.” Simon Williams, HSBC’s Chief Economist for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEEMEA), said: “Across the GCC, we are seeing signs of states taking assertive policy action to manage the impact of the energy price slump and put public finances on a more sustainable footing. In the long-term, high deficits, muted economic growth and rapid increases in the working age population mean that the well-recognised need for economic diversification is even more acute.”

MoF and CBO represent Oman at Arab Fiscal Forum

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, and Dr Qais bin Issa al Yahyae, Executive Vice-President of the Central Bank of Oman, participated in the fifth session of the Fiscal Forum in the Arab Countries, organised by the Arab Monetary Fund and the International Monetary Fund on Monday. The virtual meeting was also attended by finance ministers of various Arab countries, governors



Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi



Dr Qais bin Issa al Yahyae

of central banks and Arab monetary institutions, and other officials. The forum, in its fifth session, discussed the current developments and challenges

facing Arab countries, including the effects of low oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic on Arab economies. The first session discussed macroeconomic developments

and prospects, and the challenges of fiscal policy and their impact on the Arab states region, while the second session focused on the requirements for enhancing social protection. Al Jashmi outlined the Sultanate’s experience in strengthening the social protection system and its role in mitigating the repercussions resulting from the current crisis. In his speech, he indicated that Oman’s social welfare system is based on a variety of programmes, including investments in human capital development through

the provision of free education, healthcare, social insurance, pension funds system and social welfare disbursements targeted at vulnerable groups. He also stressed the Sultanate’s efforts to strengthen and sustain the social protection system, notably through the introduction of a new job security system and a unified umbrella for social welfare support. This initiative will enhance the governance of the Social Responsibility and Community Development programmes, he added.

REIT: Promising investment option for Omanis, expatriates

FROM PAGE 13 Mortgage REITS, on the other hand, don’t own real estate directly; they generate profit from the interest they receive by financing real estate assets. Benefits of investing in REIT funds enable participants to invest in truly diversified, high-value real estate assets and earn stable, high-yield dividend income without hassles. They also get the additional reward of capital appreciation in the long run. As REITs pool the

capital of many investors, the fund is huge, and this allows individual investors to earn dividends from real estate investments — without having to buy, manage, or finance any properties themselves. Usually individuals on their own may not have the financial resources to do so. It may be noted that no less than 90 per cent of the annual net profit is distributed among investors as dividends. The net profit however excludes capital gains. The best part is REIT funds are exempt from income tax.

Also, most REITs are publicly traded like stocks, which makes them highly liquid (unlike physical real estate investments). Another key feature of REIT is the diversified asset portfolio that spreads across sectors ranging from healthcare, tourism and education to malls and residential properties and across geographical areas. This ensures higher and stable returns, because the decline in the rental value of a property in a particular sector or region is more than offset by the rise in rental value of another asset

in another sector or area. REITs are also strongly hedged against inflation as real estate prices tend to go up when prices do. According to analysts, with so many new and old properties remaining vacant without any tenants, and rental values of some properties declining drastically, property owners suffer huge losses. In this context, REITs could be a game changer. Investors are fairly insulated from huge losses, as REITs are managed by expert investment professionals.

One of the risks that discourage people from real estate business is lack of liquidity (easy to sell and purchase assets at market value). REIT allows investors to exit and get their capital out just by selling their shares. Another notable point is that REIT allows not just mega investors but small investors as well easy access to high value properties. REIT funds also play a crucial role in promoting and strengthening local and regional markets, and they attract significant foreign direct investment to the country.

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

NBO PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR RURAL FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Marking the Sultanate’s 50th National Day, and under the theme ‘From the Nation’s Bank, to the Nation’, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has pledged its support for a series of programmes focusing on empowering women. The projects aim to provide female artisans with the tools to turn traditional handicrafts into viable businesses, thereby increasing the social and economic development for themselves and their communities. They are among a number of initiatives the bank has been involved with as it continues to champion women, while acknowledging their valuable contribution to the advancement of the nation. In Masirah, NBO is collaborating with the United Nation’s Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), on a project designed to empower a number of women in the fisheries sector. The second project, founded by Ahlam al Muqbal (pictured), and called Bayt Al Banat, provides a one-of-a-kind incubation centre for women to be taught how to turn their traditional skills, which include handicrafts, dressmaking and cooking, into fully-fledged businesses. With the bank’s help, the project will be able to continue to provide the necessary venue and tools for an increasing number of women to be able to grow their start-ups.



NISSAN OMAN ANNOUNCES 0 PER CENT INTEREST UP TO 3 YEARS ON SELECT MODELS

Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has launched a special offer and attractive rate of interest on a range of its models to deliver the best possible value with amazing offers and value propositions. As part of the scheme, it will be extending 0 per cent interest up to three years on select models. Other interest slabs include 1.99 per cent for 4 years, 2.49 per cent for 5 years or 2.99 per cent for 6 years. The scheme is applicable on select stock of Kicks, X-Trail, Altima and Pathfinder. The special promotion will be available till January 16, 2021 on applicable models purchased for personal use. As part of the special offer, Nissan Oman is also offering free fuel card, periodic maintenance service, cash gift, free registration and free insurance. A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), said, “On the special occasion of Oman’s National Day, we are dedicating this scheme to customers who aspire to own a Nissan vehicle. This scheme is designed to be flexible and customers can choose special interest rates as per their convenience. Our customers stand to benefit much from this special offer.”



BANKDHOFAR CELEBRATES NATIONAL DAY WITH VALUABLE CASH PRIZES FOR CUSTOMERS

Marking the 50th National Day, BankDhofar conducted its Savings Account draws for this occasion. The draw, which was conducted under the patronage of Sayyida Aliya bint Thuwaini al Said, picked 5 lucky customers to win RO 10,000 each. Congratulating the winners, Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, said: “This draw comes in line with the Sultanate’s celebrations of the 50th glorious National Day, as we have dedicated a special prize for our lucky customers. “I would like to congratulate the winners, and I would like to encourage our customers to continue saving as their turn to win is yet to come in the remaining draws of this year’s savings scheme.” The draw took place at Al Riadah branch in Royal Opera House. During the draw event, BankDhofar applied the preventive measures including social distance and adhering to wearing face mask for the attendees to avoid the widespread of COVID-19. National colours with festive atmosphere prevailed the branch in celebration of the 50th National Day.



Global dividends forecast to inch back from coronavirus cliff edge

LONDON: Dividend payouts by the world's biggest firms in 2020 will fall by 17.5 per cent-20 per cent, equivalent to some \$263 billion, as a result of the coronavirus crisis, a report on Monday forecast, but could rebound strongly next year.

Although the prediction by investment firm Janus Henderson represents a smaller dividend drop than some had feared at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be the biggest since at least 2009 in the wake of the global

financial crisis.

Dividends are a major source of income for both public and private pension funds, but companies trying to cope with the coronavirus cut them by \$55 billion, or 11.4 per cent, in the third quarter after a \$108 billion 22 per cent plunge between April and June when uncertainty over the course of the pandemic peaked.

"Our best case now sees a fall of -17.5 per cent to \$1.20 trillion on an underlying basis. Our worst



A man stands in front of the London Stock Exchange offices in London. — Reuters

case sees underlying dividends declining -20.2 per cent to \$1.16 trillion," Janus Henderson said.

However, some firms that axed payments have restarted them, even if at lower levels, while vaccine breakthroughs are also providing hope of a bounce back in 2021.

"This has been the worst year since the global financial crisis," Jane Shoemake, Janus Henderson's Investment Director for Global Equity Income, said.

"(But) if life starts to return

to some form of normality even some of the hardest hit companies (such as travel, leisure and retail firms) will be able to start to pay dividends again."

Next year's rebound could be as high as 12 per cent depending on the path of the pandemic and whether Europe's banks are allowed to restart dividends again, the report estimated, although in a "worst-case scenario" they might flatline. "We still have the winter to get through. It is not going to be a clear path." — Reuters

Oil prices extend gains on COVID vaccine hopes

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rose 1 per cent on Monday, extending gains as traders eyed a recovery in crude demand due to successful coronavirus vaccine trials.

Sentiment was also bolstered by hopes that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and other producers, a group known as OPEC+, will continue to restrain production.

Brent crude futures rose 63 cents, or 1.4 per cent, to \$45.59 a barrel by 07:33 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude gained 49 cents, or 1.2 per cent, to \$42.91 a barrel. Both benchmarks jumped 5 per cent last week.

"Positive sentiment continues to be driven by the recent good news about the efficacy of coronavirus vaccines in development and the expectation that the OPEC+ meeting at the end of this month could see the group extend current cuts by 3-6 months," said Stephen Innes, Chief Global Markets Strategist at axi, a financial services firm.

British drugmaker AstraZeneca said on Monday its vaccine for the novel coronavirus, developed along with the University of Oxford, could be around 90 per cent effective under one dosing regimen. — Reuters



A worker walks at a petrol station in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

In latest China jab, US drafts list of 89 firms with military ties



The Comac C919 is unveiled in Shanghai's Pudong airport, in this file photo. — Reuters

The list is included in a draft rule that identifies Chinese and Russian companies the US considers "military end users," a designation that means US suppliers must seek licenses to sell a broad swath of commercially available items to them

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration is close to declaring that 89 Chinese aerospace and other companies have military ties, restricting them from buying a range of US goods and technology, according to a draft copy of the list.

Commercial Aircraft Corp of China Ltd (COMAC), which is spearheading Chinese efforts to compete with Boeing and Airbus, is on the list, as is Aviation Industry Corporation of China

(AVIC) and 10 of its related entities.

The list is included in a draft rule that identifies Chinese and Russian companies the US considers "military end users," a designation that means US suppliers must seek licenses to sell a broad swath of commercially available items to them.

According to the rule, applications for such licenses are more likely to be denied than granted.

US President Donald Trump has stepped up his actions in recent months against China. Ten days ago, he unveiled an executive order prohibiting US investments in Chinese companies that Washington says are owned or controlled by the Chinese military.

The pending list comes after the Commerce Department expanded the definition of "military end user" in April.

The April rule includes not only armed service and national police, but any person or entity that supports or contributes to the maintenance or production of military items — even if their business is primarily non-military.

The export restriction applies to items as disparate as computer software like word processing, scientific equipment like digital oscilloscopes, and aircraft parts and components.

In terms of aircraft, the items include everything from brackets for flight control boxes to the engines themselves.

News of the list comes at a sensitive time for the US aerospace industry as Boeing seeks Chinese approval of its 737 MAX after it was cleared by US regulators last week.

In March 2019, China was the first nation to ground the jet following two fatal crashes and it

is already expected to wait months to lift the ban. A spokesman for Boeing declined to comment.

Washington trade lawyer Kevin Wolf, a former Commerce official, said Commerce had shared the draft rule with a technical advisory committee of industry representatives, and it should have been kept confidential.

Wolf said the rule and list still could be modified and that the clock was running out for it to go into effect under the Trump administration since it would need to be cleared and sent to the Federal Register, the official US publication for rules, by mid-December.

In the draft rule, the Commerce Department said being able to control the flow of US technology to the listed companies was "vital for protecting US national security interests". — Reuters

Singapore upgrades Q3 GDP

SINGAPORE: Singapore's economy contracted much less than initially estimated in the third quarter due to gradual easing of COVID-19 lockdown measures and authorities expect the city-state to bounce back to growth next year from its worst recession.

Gross domestic product (GDP) fell 5.8 per cent year-on-year in the third quarter, the ministry of trade and industry said on Monday, versus the 7 per cent drop seen in the government's advance estimate.

Analysts expected a 5.4 per cent contraction, according to the median of 10 forecasts. The government said it now expects full-year GDP to contract between 6.5 per cent and 6 per cent versus its prior forecast for a 5 per cent to 7 per cent decline.

The country is still facing the biggest downturn in its history. The economy is expected to grow 4 per cent to 6 per cent next year.

"The recovery of the Singapore economy in the year ahead is expected to be gradual, and will depend to a large extent on how the global economy performs and whether Singapore is able to continue to keep the domestic COVID-19 situation under control," the MTI said in a statement. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Germany eyes \$190bn in new debt in 2021

German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (pictured) plans to take on at least 160 billion euros (\$190 billion) in new debt in 2021 to help stave off the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, three people familiar with the matter said on Sunday.

This is at least 64 billion euros higher than the 96 billion euros initially eyed by Scholz for next year. Parliament has suspended Germany's debt brake to allow the government to take on net



new debt of up to 218 billion euros to finance rescue and stimulus measures.

But a coalition source said it was unlikely to need the full amount. — Reuters

JAKARTA

US DFC invests \$2bn in Indonesia's wealth fund

The US International Development Finance Corporation has signed a letter of intent to invest \$2 billion in Indonesia's new sovereign wealth fund, the Southeast Asian country's government said in a statement on Monday.

The signing by DFC chief executive Adam Boehler took place in Washington last week, during a visit by Indonesian delegates, according to a statement by the Coordinating Ministry of Maritime Affairs and



Investment.

The DFC would also engage with its partners in Japan, UAE and Singapore to persuade them to invest in the soon-to-be-launched fund, officially named Indonesia Investment Authority, the ministry said. — Reuters

NEW YORK

Blackstone seeks \$5bn for second Asia buyout fund

Blackstone Group Inc is seeking to raise about \$5 billion for its second private equity fund focused on Asia, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The US private equity firm could also increase the size of the fund in the coming months, depending on the level of demand for it, the person said. Blackstone plans to launch the fund in the first quarter of 2021, according to the source.

The new vehicle, like Blackstone's first Asia private



equity fund, will focus on India, Japan, Korea and Australia, the person added. The company closed its first Asian private equity fund at about \$2.3 billion in 2018. — Reuters

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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

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features

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With 27,000 nails, this artist simulates late HM Sultan Qaboos features

Ali Al-Maamari is an Omani artist who has always strived to find his own niche. As a young emerging creator, he tries out different and unique ideas. His ladies idea became his offering to the celebration of Oman’s national day, a piece that honours the late His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

ART



CHILEANS CHANNEL STREET RAGE INTO ART AT PROTEST MUSEUM

Awash with multicoloured posters, angry graffiti and other symbols of protest – metal shields, tear gas cartridges – Santiago’s Museum of Social Uprising is aiming to keep alive the memory of months of deadly demonstrations... **Story on Page P20**

LOCAL TREND



LARGEST COLLECTION OF NATIONAL FLAGS BECOMES NATIONAL DAY HIGHLIGHT

2020 is a year like no other and other than all the events that took place, 2020 also marked the Sultanate’s 50th National Day of Oman marking the anniversary of Oman’s modern Renaissance, marking the first national day since the succession of HM Sultan Haitham bin Tariq... **Story on Page 20**

READ



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BY EMMANUEL ACHO

A look at some questions and concepts needed to address systemic racism.

TRAVEL TALES



HONG KONG, WORLD’S MOST VISITED CITY, FACES TOURISM BUST

Hundreds of parked tour buses are gathering dust at a northern Hong Kong container port, having been off the road for 10 months since authorities banned non-resident arrivals into the city due to the new coronavirus... **Story on Page 19**

GASTRONOMY



TRICKING THE TASTE BUDS: FLAVOUR MAKERS RISE TO MEATY CHALLENGE

At flavour maker Givaudan’s innovation centre near Zurich, veteran chef Sam Brunschweiler serves up a lamb shawarma dish that looks and tastes appropriately meaty but is made from pea protein... **Story on Page 19**



In this day and age, modern art has been getting inspiration not only from nature but every day things that surround us. Many modern and contemporary artists are no longer confined to using brushes and paints but are using whatever their imagination allows them to explore.

Ali al Maamari is an Omani artist who has always strived to find his own niche. As a young emerging creator, he tries out different and unique ideas.

"Nails may seem useless to a normal person, but in the hands of an artist, it can become something else," he said.

One of Al Maamari's latest work of art is a piece that used around 27,000 nails which gave shape to the features of the founder of the renaissance of Oman, late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

Calling the piece "You will remain immortal in us," Al Maamari shared, "I am attracted a lot to follow the social media accounts that showcase creative ideas, as they feed my inspiration greatly. I have tried to combine more than one idea and that became visible in this piece of work."

While the nail forms the base of his creation, Al Maamari combined coloured die and nail installers to come up with his project,

"I didn't anticipate the project to be this big. When I started it, I didn't foresee that I will be utilising as many as 27,000 nails. Sometime during the process, I realised that its original bigger size would cause more. I have to reduce the size to cut on cost and the number of nails included," he explained.

While the finished project looks easy on the eye, a deeper look would actually reveal the details that Al Maamari put into the project. His friends earlier on insisted he kept the original size he planned and while their advice was valuable, he has to be realistic.

"From planning to installing to digging the nails and all the process that involved to complete the piece, it took me nearly four months," he said.

"With an ambitious project like this, an artist will definitely face a lot of challenges along the way. Time

One of Al Maamari's latest work of art is a piece that used around 27,000 nails which gave shape to the features of the founder of the renaissance of Oman, late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

is one of those challenges. In this particular piece, it was difficult to clearly define all the face features of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos with nails only. My friend Naji al Shizawi, therefore, helped me complete the work," he said.

"Despite the time crunch the level of difficulty, I felt like I have to complete the piece. Looking at it now, it clearly sends the message that I would like people to see: that the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has a great place in my heart — rather, everybody's hearts," he said.

Al Maamari has thought of every detail of the piece. He used a white background to symbolise purity and peace.

"The figure is wearing the Saidi turban, which is considered part of the protocol for the official appearance of His Majesty," he said.

The colouring step was also a difficult phase of the process.

"I used more than 15 different colours and combined them to bring out what I envisioned in my head. It took about a month to colour the painting. It was a difficult stage as there is no way for mistakes," he shared.

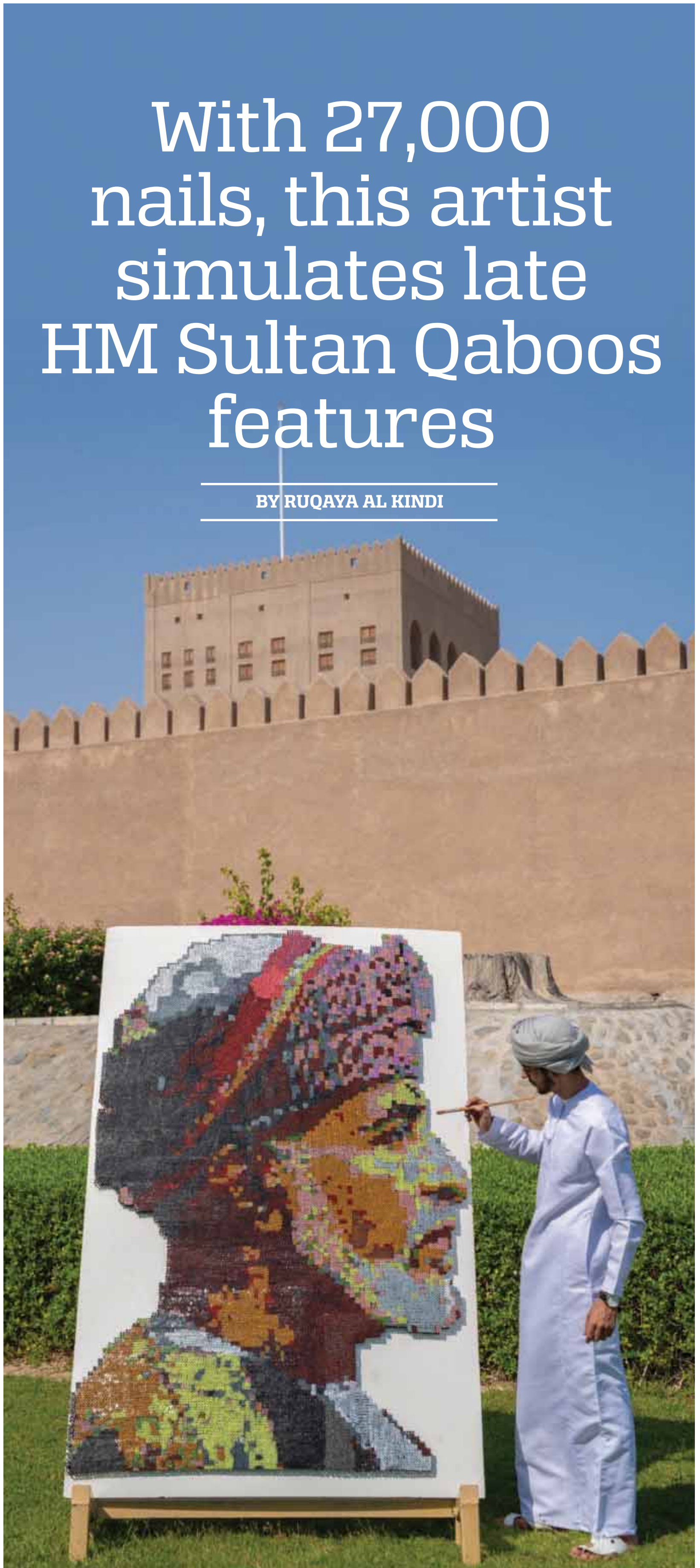
"When I began colouring the face and the features started to emerge, it was a nice feeling to see what I planned happening before my eyes," he said.

Omanis celebrate the National Day of the Renaissance on 18 November every year in various ways, most notably the parades, accompanied by traditional songs in a cheerful atmosphere. For the exceptional circumstances this year due to COVID-19, the occasion was celebrated in the most careful way to preserve the health of all.

Omanis, nevertheless, have found other ways to celebrate this day in accordance with the circumstances of the pandemic and the precautionary measures. For Ali, it was through his art that he clearly delivers his message of unity.

With 27,000 nails, this artist simulates late HM Sultan Qaboos features

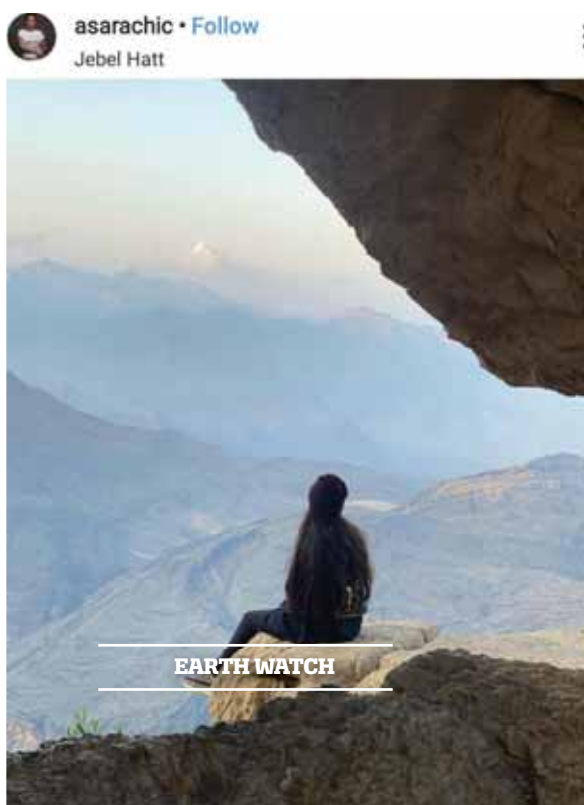
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TRAVEL TALES

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Hong Kong, world's most visited city, faces tourism bust



Hundreds of parked tour buses are gathering dust at a northern Hong Kong container port, having been off the road for 10 months since authorities banned non-resident arrivals into the city due to the new coronavirus. The area has turned into a "bus cemetery," said Freddy Yip, president of Hong Kong's Travel Agent Owners Association. He said the former British colony — which was the world's leading tourist city destination last year — faces a similar fate at the end of November, when the government ends a wide-ranging wage subsidy programme that has helped about 2 million employees in all types of industries.

The programme was introduced in June and renewed in September, but the Hong Kong government has ruled out an extension beyond the end of November citing the high cost, leaving many tourism-dependent businesses on the brink of collapse, unable to find other revenue sources and unable to pay wages. "If they cannot see any light ahead of them, they will just stop and cut their losses," said 70-year-old Yip, who has worked in the trade for nearly 50 years. A spokesperson for the Hong Kong government said it would "keep a close watch on the latest situation and respond in a timely manner," but gave no further details. About 56 million people visited Hong Kong last year.

The city was ranked number

one for arrivals globally in 2019 by research company Euromonitor International. Visitors, most of them from mainland China, are drawn to its vibrant mix of cultures, dramatic harbour views and world-class shopping. The Chinese-ruled, semi-autonomous global finance hub makes about 5 per cent of its

The city was ranked number one for arrivals globally in 2019 by research company Euromonitor International. Visitors... are drawn to Hongkong's vibrant mix of cultures, dramatic harbour views and world-class shopping.

gross domestic product, or about \$18 billion, directly from tourism, not counting money spent in local shops and restaurants. Hong Kong's tourism sector directly employs about 260,000 people, according to

the government. Mainland Chinese visitors typically spend more per day than the average resident on baby formula, cosmetics and luxury goods, driven by a perception that Hong Kong has better quality standards than at home.

That source of spending was cut off in early February, when Hong Kong sealed its borders to mainland China, with exemptions only for a small number of business travellers.

BUBBLE TROUBLE

Visitor arrivals have been down 96 per cent to 99 per cent year-on-year every month since February, according to government figures. A travel bubble with Singapore — allowing a limited number of people to move between the cities after being tested for the virus — is due to begin this week, but is not likely to halt that decline, industry executives said. The arrangement lets travellers forgo quarantine, but is initially limited to one daily flight of only 200 passengers each way. That is a drop in the ocean for Hong Kong, which set its own record in January 2019 with 6.8 million visitors, including 5.5 million from mainland China. Tour guide Mimi Cheung, 46, said she was pessimistic about the travel bubble, due to the limited number of people, strict regulations and high costs — around HK\$2,000 (\$260) for mandatory virus tests, plus around HK\$6,000 (\$774) to buy a tour in either

city. "The government should open the mainland border under safe conditions. It will bring some hope," said Cheung, who has found temporary work as a night security guard to provide for her parents and two children. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has said reopening the border with the mainland remains a priority, but Chinese officials have shown no indication they are willing to do so until virus cases fall to zero in Hong Kong. The city's government has been trying to spur local tourism by offering free tours for small groups, but operators say it has been little help. Dozens of travel agencies have told staff to take unpaid leave from December, saying they can no longer afford to pay salaries or rent, according to employees interviewed by Reuters, travel associations and local media reports. Violent anti-government street protests in the second half of last year discouraged some tourists, leaving many operators without cash buffers to weather this year's crisis. The city's meetings and conventions business is also likely to see a 90 per cent revenue drop this year, equivalent to about HK\$50 billion (\$6.45 billion), said Stuart Bailey, chairman of the Hong Kong Exhibition & Convention Industry Association. The sector, which employs around 80,000 people, has had to cancel most of this year's events, he said. "People are not optimistic we will be back to 2019 levels for at least 18 months to two years.—Reuters

GASTRONOMY



Tricking the taste buds: flavour makers rise to meaty challenge

AT FLAVOUR maker Givaudan's innovation centre near Zurich, veteran chef Sam Brunschweiler serves up a lamb shawarma dish that looks and tastes appropriately meaty but is made from pea protein.

The Swiss company and competitors such as International Flavors & Fragrances and Symrise are vying to create the tastiest plant-based meat alternatives in a market that is growing fast on the back of consumer concerns about health, sustainability and animal welfare.

es a protein programme at Wageningen University & Research, said flavour houses played a key role in creating tastier plant-based meat analogues.

Improving their nutritional profile, which typically has more salt but fewer vitamins and iron than meat, is also a challenge.

Pyett said research showed salt was easier to taste in a juicy sausage than in a dry one, an indication that enhancing juiciness in meat analogues might allow for reducing added salt.

Garofalo said Givaudan



"A pea tastes like a pea. You put it in a burger, it's not exactly what you would expect," Givaudan's head of savoury flavours, Flavio Garofalo, said.

Givaudan analyses how fat, proteins, sugars and water in meat produce different flavours when heated because "most of the flavour comes from the cooking," Garofalo said.

Mimicking the conditions in a vessel with non-animal proteins, sugar and fat — and using less water for roasted and more for boiled flavours — allows specialists to re-create a meat taste without meat, he said, just as a strawberry flavour can be created from bananas and apples.

had created flavours that allowed cutting the salt content by 35-40 per cent while keeping the taste.

The company has also developed a 'fat encapsulation' technology that preserves fat in plant-based burgers during cooking as in real meat. Normally with plant-based products, most of the fats melt and flow into the pan.

"Fat is present in meat in what we call fat cells. When the fat melts, it's inside a little capsule that only breaks at a certain temperature," Garofalo said.

The technology, which is awaiting a patent, would keep the fat inside the patty and make it juicier, allowing for a reduction in fat content of up to 75 per cent and of calories by around 35 per cent. — Reuters

TOO MUCH SALT?
Stacy Pyett, who manag-



Chileans channel street rage into art at protest museum

Awash with multicolored posters, angry graffiti and other symbols of protest — metal shields, tear gas cartridges — Santiago’s Museum of Social Uprising is aiming to keep alive the memory of months of deadly demonstrations that have left a lasting mark on Chile.

Months of demonstrations that left more than 30 people dead broke out in October 2019, initially against rising public transport fares but quickly mushrooming into wider anger at social inequality.

As a colourful backdrop to the ugly clashes, the walls of Santiago were soon screaming their own artistic protest. The messages of the murals bore the accumulated rage of years of social injustice, but also the hopes of a raft of young Chilean artists for a better future.

Now, with the tumult of the streets quietened, the rage has been preserved at the museum — located a stone’s throw from Plaza Italia, the epicentre of the uprising.

“We wanted to create this space to show what was expressed in the street during the demonstrations,” visual artist Marcel Sola said.

The museum brings together the work of some 70 street artists, asked to reproduce their protest pieces and assemble assorted objects seen as emblematic of the protests.

They include frescoes that appeared at the height of the demonstrations, one depicting Salvador Allende — the former socialist leader overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet in 1973 — wearing a jacket of coloured flowers and shaping a heart with his hands. Another shows a masked angel with the word “dignity” inscribed on its forehead.

POTS, PANS AND TEAR GAS

The largest piece is Sola’s giant sculpture of the stray dog that became a symbol of the uprising. A red bandana around its neck, the black dog



attained celebrity status during earlier student demonstrations against the police. Protesters nicknamed the animal “Negro Matapacos” — or Black Cop-Killer.

The museum opened at the beginning of November, just after the referendum in which Chileans voted overwhelmingly to replace the Pinochet-era constitution — seen as the principal obstacle to fundamental reform.

Even with restricted opening hours due to the coronavirus pandemic, the museum receives around 150 visitors a day. Many of them were participants in the events which the exhibits memorialise, moved now as they reflect quietly on the news photos and videos of the protests.

“I like the warmth I felt when I arrived. I felt at home. It gave me a lot of memories and a little bit of grief,” said Pedro, a 24-year-old musician.

“I felt like it was a collection of things in the streets, but in very artistic terms,” said Mailen, a 27-year old saleswoman.

Among the objects that stand out are the metal shields fashioned by the radical “frontline” protesters — hooded youths who, armed with sticks and stones, confronted the riot-police, the water cannon and the tear gas. For some they were heroes of the demonstrations, for others, vandals.

Other works depict the 460 victims who received serious eye injuries during the protests, mostly from the impact of birdshot or tear gas canisters fired by the riot police.

There are also the pots and pans frantically beaten by ordinary men and women, to make their anger heard in countless “cacerolazo” protests.

Those that hang in the museum bear the words: “Now that we woke up, we must be conscious.”—**AFP**

LOCAL TREND

Largest Collection of National Flags becomes National Day highlight



BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

2020 IS A YEAR like no other and other than all the events that took place. 2020 also marked the Sultanate’s 50th National Day, the first national day since the succession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Whilst celebrations had to be adjusted to fit into the current situation faced by the world, and keeping in line with the safety and welfare in mind, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa revealed the largest ever collection of flags beside the Sea of Oman.

One thousand National flags of the Sultanate were installed on 1,444 square metres on the resort’s 500-metre beach. The entire Shangri-La team worked for two consecutive days to bring this impressive tribute to life. This larger than life-sized mosaic marks another milestone in celebrating the Sultanate’s 50th National Day.

Oman celebrates renewed renaissance with further milestones planned for the years to come.

These flags set an infinity backdrop for picturesque moments; a truly immersive photo opportunity for the hotel guests.

On the day of the 50th National Day, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa revealed a mega 24-square metre cake placed in front of the vast collection of flags. This massive cake weighs 550 kilograms and it required 50 kilograms of pure chocolate, 150 kilograms of sugar to create five sumptuous flavours. This masterpiece took 5 days to assemble as it features a 20-square metre 3D backdrop for the prime landmarks of Oman.

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa has gone big on Playcation this week with their 6 swimming pools, splash pad and Oman’s only lazy river. For the first time in Muscat, dive-in movie nights have been introduced where you could now enjoy a different experience with your family from Al Waha pool, watching the movie of the night projected on an inflatable screen while you’re swimming with your kids with social distancing measures in place.

Scavenger hunt adventures debuted at Shangri-La; a complimentary experience for all inhouse guests. It is a mobile phone-based scavenger hunt where participants find QR codes around the resort, score points and complete tasks. At each QR code, there is an interesting fact about Oman and prizes for participants are based on the points scored. For more information, visit www.shangri-la.com.